

## **BASIC REQUIREMENTS OF ORGANIC PRODUCTION WITH REFERENCE TO MONTENEGRO**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Organic agriculture is developing rapidly, as a reaction to threats to the environment, quality and safety of food and human health. The demand for organic products is increasing at a rate of 20%, due to the growing awareness of consumers about the importance of healthy and safe food and environmental protection. The goal of organic production is to obtain healthy and high-quality food in an ecological and sustainable way. Organic agriculture has a positive impact on the environment, because it improves biodiversity, soil biological activity, long-term soil fertility, recycles waste of plant and animal origin, uses renewable energy sources, minimizes all forms of pollution that can originate from agriculture, and improves product quality. Organic agriculture uses natural resources in a sustainable way, preserves the agro-ecosystem and indigenous varieties and breeds, connects plant and livestock production, and produces better-tasting products. Favorable climatic conditions, preserved nature and the production of traditional products enable the development of organic agriculture in Montenegro. Organic agriculture in Montenegro is primarily based on the processing of fruit, cereals and spice herbs. In order to realize the full potential of the organic production sector in Montenegro, it is necessary to increase the area under organic production and improve the quality of organic products, strengthen institutions and the support system for organic production, encourage research, education and advisory services in the field of organic production.

**Keywords:** *organic production, organic agriculture, sustainable agriculture, organic farming methods, Montenegro.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most important problems today is the loss of biodiversity, which is significantly affected by intensive agricultural production (Ewert et al. 2023, Bojanić Rašović 2020a, Bojanić Rašović 2020b, Abdi et al. 2021., Dagoudo et al. 2024., Bojanić Rašović, 2025). The loss of biodiversity threatens agricultural productivity, human health and the survival of all living beings on the planet (Šeremešić et al. 2017., Ortiz et al. 2021., Diyaolu and Folarin, 2024). Organic production aims at agricultural production based on the principles of environmental conservation. It is

a significant factor in preserving nature on the planet (Kociszewski et al. 2020., Ristić et al. 2023). Organic production is based on the application of natural processes and substances, without the use of synthetic agents (Janković et al. 2022). It is based on the best ecological practices and should also be socially acceptable and economically profitable. Organic agriculture aims to maintain and improve the health of soil, plants, animals, people and the planet as a whole (Anon. 1999., Anon. 2011., Anon. 2015., Muhie, 2022). The goal of organic production is to obtain safe and high-quality food in an ecological and sustainable way. Organic agriculture improves biodiversity, soil biological activity, long-term soil fertility, recycles waste of plant and animal origin, uses renewable energy sources, minimizes all forms of pollution that may originate from agriculture, and improves product quality (Anon. 1999., Mirecki et al. 2011., Miladinović, 2012., Anon. 2015., Anon. 2018., Zejak et al. 2022., Gamage et al., 2023., Anon. 2024., Stojkov Pavlović et al. 2024). Organic agriculture uses natural resources in a sustainable way, preserves the agroecosystem, preserves indigenous varieties and breeds, connects plant and livestock production, and produces better-tasting products. In organic agriculture prohibits the use of artificial pesticides, fertilizers, genetically modified organisms and their products, ionizing radiation, growth promoters, hormones, additives, urea in food, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) packaging and other types of plastic packaging containing chlorine (Anon. 1999., Anon. 2018., Anon. 2024b). Organic farming methods return to nature what is taken from it. Organic farming is developing rapidly, as it represents a response to threats to the environment, food quality and human health. Demand for organic products is increasing at a rate of 20%, due to growing consumer awareness of the importance of healthy food and environmental protection. The leading organic products on the market are fruits, vegetables, bread, cereals, beverages, milk and meat. (Anon. 2025). The economic sustainability of organic production depends on the development of the organic market. Organic production is most economical if the largest amount of raw materials is provided from the own farm that has a well-rounded livestock and crop production. In most European countries, the total costs of organic farms are on average lower than comparable conventional farms and account for 80-100% of the total costs of conventional farms. The most difficult period for organic producers in terms of financial costs is the conversion period, i.e. the time it takes to switch from conventional to organic production (Tomaš Simin et al. 2019). During the conversion period, the land is prepared for organic production, and the products do not have a certificate during that period (Tabaković et al. 2017). Organic fruit production is increasing in area and represents the most important segment of organic agriculture (Prodanović and Babović, 2014). Organic agriculture, by introducing crop rotation, adjusting agrotechnical measures and diversifying production, promotes and contributes to the expansion of the number of cultivated species (Šeremešić et al., 2017). Organic agriculture has a positive impact on the mental well-being of farmers, and in addition, physical health, food safety and financial security are additional benefits for domestic organic farmers (Sharma and Kumar, 2023). The comparative status of animal welfare between organic and conventional agricultural systems has not been sufficiently studied, and more work

needs to be done in the future (Sanders et al. 2025). Education of agricultural producers is the most important step for the development and expansion of organic production (Tabaković et al. 2017).

## **ORGANIC PRODUCTION METHODS**

### *Methods in organic plant production*

Activities carried out in organic plant production relate to the appropriate selection of plant species and varieties, crop rotation, appropriate soil cultivation, fertilization, control of plant diseases, pests and weeds, collection of wild fruits and medicinal herbs (Anon. 1999, Anon. 2014, Anon. 2018, Anon. 2024b). Seeds and seedlings should be certified. Sowing of crops susceptible to diseases should be avoided. Crop rotation significantly reduces the occurrence of pests, plant diseases and weeds (Anon. 1999, Anon. 2018, Anon. 2024b). Organic plant protection is mainly based on preventive measures such as: burning of plant residues, crop rotation, plot selection, sowing time, fertilization, irrigation. It is very important to balance the relationship between plant and livestock production. This means that organic production should provide enough food for domestic animals, and animal husbandry should provide enough organic fertilizer (Anon. 1999, Anon. 2018, Anon. 2024b).

### *Methods of organic livestock production*

Organic livestock production activities relate to the selection of animal species and breeds, the method of breeding, nutrition and health protection of animals, and the treatment of animals purchased from other farms. Organic livestock production is based on the application of natural breeding methods, stress prevention, disease prevention, prohibition of the use of veterinary drugs (antibiotics, etc.), prevention of the use of animal products in animal nutrition, preservation of animal health and welfare, selection of livestock species and breeds and their adaptation to local conditions and resistance to diseases (Anon. 1999., Anon. 2018., Anon. 2014., Anon. 2024b). In organic production, animals are kept freely. Buildings for keeping animals in organic agriculture should have an air opening, provide fresh air, natural light and sufficient space for movement, rest, feeding, watering. The interior of the building, equipment and utensils should be clean and disinfected. The floor should be smooth, but not slippery. At least half of the floor surface should be solid flooring, without bars. No toxic materials may be used for the construction of the facility. Dry straw and other similar natural materials may be used for bedding, which can later be used as fertilizer. The diet of young mammals is based on mother's milk or organic milk of the same species (Anon. 1999, Anon. 2014, Anon. 2018). Antibiotics, coccidiostats, medicinal preparations, growth stimulants, GMO organisms, appetite stimulants, artificial colors, urea may not be used in the diet. Slaughterhouse waste, animal feces may not be given from natural products. Animal reproduction is carried out naturally or by artificial insemination. Other methods (embryo transfer, hormonal induction of sexual desire, etc.) are not permitted. Pastures must be provided for herbivores, and all animals must have a place to run. In organic livestock production, strains and breeds of animals that are adapted to local breeding

conditions and are resistant to diseases are used (Anon. 2014, Anon. 2018, Anon. 2024b). In organic production, poultry are not kept in cages. Waterfowl should be provided with access to a stream, pond, lake, in order to meet animal welfare requirements. In buildings for laying hens, natural light can be supplemented with artificial light, to provide 16 hours of light per day, with a mandatory night period without artificial lighting of at least 8 hours. The minimum age of chickens for slaughter is 81 days. Animals from organic production must not be tied and should be fed organically produced food. Disease prevention is based on keeping animals in an optimal location with the application of good animal husbandry practices (regular cleaning and disinfection of facilities, quality nutrition, appropriate animal density and selection of species and strains). Care for the health of bees in organic beekeeping should be based on preventive measures, such as adequate selection of bee breeds, favorable surrounding environment, balanced nutrition and good beekeeping practices (Bojanić Rašović, 2022a., 2022b., 2022c). It is necessary to determine zones in which hives should not be placed due to the presence of sources of contamination with hazardous substances, genetically modified organisms, etc. (Anon. 1999., Anon. 2014). In Montenegro, only the indigenous *Apis mellifera carnica* breed is used for beekeeping (Anon. 2024a).

#### *Methods of processing, packaging and labelling of organic products*

The producer is obliged to keep records of the methods used in the production of organic products and keep all documentation. In the processing of organic products, procedures are allowed that preserve the natural structure and biological and nutritional values of the product. The processing of organic food must be separated in time or space from the processing of non-organic food. For the production of organic yeast, only organic substrates are used (Anon. 2016b., Anon. 2018). In the fight against pests in facilities and warehouses for organic processing, preventive methods are applied, such as destroying the habitat of pests and preventing their entry into the facility. If preventive methods are not sufficient, mechanical, physical and biological methods are used (Anon. 1999, Anon. 2018, Anon. 2024b). Organic agricultural products must be packed in biodegradable packaging. Organic agricultural products, if not properly packaged and labeled, cannot be transported together with products from conventional agriculture. The vehicle must be clean. An organic agricultural product must be declared. The declaration should contain the following information: the name of the producer, the producer's identification number, the name and year of production of the product, the number of the operating permit, etc. The terms "organic", "ecological", "biological" or their abbreviations "bio" or "eko" may be used to label and advertise products that meet the requirements for organically produced food. Repackaging organic agricultural products from another producer is prohibited, as is placing a declaration from another producer on the packaging. Organic agricultural products are stored in special warehouses, and if they are properly packaged and labeled, they may be stored in a special and labeled part of the warehouse for conventional agricultural products. The use of refrigerated warehouses and containers with a controlled atmosphere is permitted for the storage

of easily perishable organic agricultural products (Anon. 1999., Anon. 2016b., Anon. 2018).

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF ORGANIC PRODUCTION IN MONTENEGRO**

Organic agriculture is one of the strategic priorities of the development of Montenegrin agriculture. Montenegro has exceptional natural resources and a tradition of agricultural production that is in accordance with the principles of organic agriculture. Favorable climatic conditions, preserved nature and the production of traditional products enable the development of organic agriculture in Montenegro (Melović et al. 2020., Anon. 2025). A significant potential for the organic food market is traditional products, because the traditional method of production is easier to adapt to the standards of organic production. The tradition of production in harmony with nature has deep roots in Montenegro. Organic agriculture in Montenegro is primarily based on the processing of fruits, grains and herbs (Anon. 2025). Although organic production in Montenegro records continuous growth, it is still insufficiently developed. As in other countries of Southeast Europe, the development of the organic products market in Montenegro is very slow (Anon. 2011., Anon. 2015). The share of organic production in the total utilized land in Montenegro is only 1.6%, similar to other Balkan countries (Anon. 2025). There are numerous challenges facing this production, the most important of which are: small production volumes, insufficient knowledge of producers about the principles of organic production and certification procedures, an underdeveloped market, and insufficient promotion of organic products. In order to realize the potential of the organic production sector, it is necessary to increase the area under organic production and improve the quality of organic products, strengthen the institutions and support system for organic production, encourage research, education and advisory services in the field of organic production (Anon. 2025). Despite this, significant results have been achieved in the development of organic agriculture in Montenegro in the last ten years. Recognizing the advantages of organic production and its potential on the market, but also due to state support, an increasing number of farmers are opting for this type of production. The Strategic Plan for the Development of Organic Production in Montenegro is a key instrument that enables organic production to develop in a planned and sustainable manner. This plan represents a set of concrete measures that should lead to an increase in the area under organic production, improvement of the quality of organic products, more intensive development of organic product processing, strengthening the market for organic products, increasing awareness of organic production, strengthening the institutional framework and support system for organic production (Anon. 2025). The structure of organic production in Montenegro is dominated by meadows and pastures, which are mainly used for mowing and grazing livestock. After them, perennial crops and arable crops follow. Mixed fruit crops have the largest share in the area under perennial crops in 2023. The most widely grown fruit species is plum, followed by apple, chokeberry and walnut. Of the field crops, barley and buckwheat are the most widely grown. In recent years, a tendency has been observed for the area under

cereals to grow. Grass-clover mixtures and alfalfa are the most common fodder crops on arable land. Vegetable production according to the principles of organic production is less common. Only potatoes, beans, zucchini and garlic are grown on slightly larger areas (Zejak et al. 2022., Anon. 2025). Although Montenegro has very favorable conditions for collecting and growing a large number of medicinal plant species, the market for medicinal plants in Montenegro is underdeveloped. Organic livestock production in Montenegro is also underdeveloped. In the period 2016-2023 an increase in the number of cattle, bee hives and laying hens was recorded, while a constant decline was recorded in other species. In the aforementioned period, goat farming on the principles of organic production completely ceased. Organic production in aquaculture in Montenegro is not represented, although there are very favorable natural conditions for it. The main products of processing in plant production are flour (from common wheat, spelt, barley, oats, buckwheat and rye) and fruit juices (from apples, pears, aronia, etc.). The main products of organic livestock production are cheese, skorup and meat. Organic production in Montenegro is extensive and based on the production of small quantities, primarily for the local market. Due to high costs and traditional technology, organic production in Montenegro is uncompetitive, both on the domestic and foreign markets. The lack of education and public awareness about the advantages of organic production and consumption and the underdeveloped processing industry sector are the main barriers to the faster development of the organic products market in Montenegro. In order to achieve the maximum potential of the organic sector, it is necessary to increase the area under organic production and improve the quality of organic products, strengthen the institutions and support system for organic production, encourage research, education and advisory services in the field of organic production (Anon. 2025). The processing of organic products is carried out in accordance with applicable legislation and good agricultural and good manufacturing practices (Anon. 2009., Anon. 2014, Anon 2016a., Anon. 2024b., Anon. 2025). The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (MAFWM) is the competent state administration body responsible for creating and implementing policies in the field of organic production, adopting laws and by-laws regulating organic production. The new Law on Organic Production (2024) provides the basis for the sustainable development of organic production, while ensuring the efficient functioning of the organic market and fair competition. Institutions supporting the organic sector play a key role in the development and promotion of Montenegrin organic production. They provide important services to participants in the organic sector, from education and advice to producers, to product certification and market promotion. In addition, they contribute to connecting producers, processors, traders and other participants in the value chain. The implementation of this strategic plan requires coordinated action by all participants in the value chain, including state-level institutions, local governments, agricultural producers, processors, retail chains, non-governmental organizations, international donors, etc. (Anon. 2025).

## CONCLUSION

The goal of organic production is to obtain healthy, safe and high-quality food in an ecological and sustainable way. Organic agriculture preserves the agro-ecosystem, maintains and increases soil fertility, preserves indigenous varieties and breeds, connects plant and livestock production, and produces better-tasting products. Favorable climatic conditions, preserved nature and the production of traditional products enable the development of organic agriculture in Montenegro. Organic agriculture in Montenegro is primarily based on the processing of fruits, cereals and herbs. However, this production in Montenegro is still quite underdeveloped. In order to realize the full potential of the organic production sector in Montenegro, it is necessary to increase the area under organic production and improve the quality of organic products, strengthen institutions and the support system for organic production, encourage research, education and advisory services in the field of organic production. The lack of education and public awareness about the benefits of organic production and consumption and the underdeveloped processing industry sector are the main barriers to the faster development of the organic products market in Montenegro.

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