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“Development on the margin”

Characteristics of Organic Livestock Farming in Israel

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Abstract

Mario Levy, a farmer in the Kibbutz Sedé-Eliyyahu, started producing the first organic fruit and vegetables in Israel in 1974. Currently 1.5 % of the total Israeli agricultural area is managed organically. Economically, the share of organic crops and livestock products presents almost 5 % of the whole agricultural production (Cohen, 2008). In 2007 the organic sector produced a worth of NIS 1 billion (208 million €). Ninety-three percent of the exports of organic crop production were traded with the European Union (EU), the remaining 7 % with the United States of America (USA) and some Asian countries (Cohen, 2008).

According to IBOAA (Israel Bio Organic Agriculture Association), around 500 organic farms currently produce in Israel these include 34 organic livestock farms. The livestock farms are inspected and certified by Agrior Ltd., a company established by IBOAA. The organic livestock sector targets the domestic market, thus, there are no exports of organic meat and dairy products today.

The Israeli scientific research on organic livestock farming is scarce as is the public financing of studies dealing with the organic livestock sector. Some studies were dealing with organic plant production in the past, but the organic livestock sector was not investigated from a scientific point of view until now.

Even though the organic livestock sector is comparably small, it presents a wide range of farm types. Farms differ in size, technical equipment, species, breeds, and ambitions of the farm managers. The Israeli organic livestock farming sector is characterised by its geographical conditions and the socio-economic structure of the society. The Israeli government protects the food market from cheap imports, what causes comparatively high food prices. There are no federal subsidies at all for Israeli farms. The market is regulated by quotas and strict market regulations under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The data collection was completed in Israel with the support of 27 Israeli livestock farmers, certifiers and scientists. The main focus of the oral presentation will be an insight into three livestock production systems: layers, goats, and dairy cows.

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