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ORGANIC FARMING SUPPORT POLICY AS VIEWED BY THE FARMERS

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to present the policy for organic farming support in Poland as viewed by three groups of farmers: “committed”, “pragmatic”, and “committed pragmatic” ones. The authors determined the differences and similarities between the groups in how they view the support policy and found out whether they intend to continue or discontinue organic production in the future. The study relies on a qualitative survey administered to 154 organic farms. Most farmers were found to have a negative view of amendments to organic farming regulations. This can lead to a higher perception of risks involved in organic farming compared to conventional agriculture and may discourage them from continuing organic production in the future. When it comes to expectations about future policy, increased financial support is of key importance. This is especially true for two farmer groups: “committed” and “committed pragmatic” farmers. According to this study, the number of “pragmatic” farms is likely to change the most, because every third member of that group intends to discontinue organic farming, and every third is hesitant about it.

KEYWORDS: organic farming, agricultural policy, farmer support, institutional restrictions

Introduction

Modern agriculture exerts strong pressure on the natural environment and considerably contributes to soil pollution and to greenhouse gas emissions. This is the consequence of the agricultural development paradigm based on productivity growth, which used to prevail in the past. One of the ways to counteract these adverse impacts is by shifting the paradigm towards sustainable food systems in which organic farming might play an important role. Many researchers point to the fact that organic farming development is beneficial not only to the environment and society but also to consumers (Borsato et al., 2020; Cattell et al., 2020; Feng & Zhao, 2020; Horrillo et al., 2020; Mie et al., 2017; Hurtado-Barroso et al., 2019).

In 2022, the global organic farming area covered 96.4 million hectares and accounted for 2% of agricultural land around the world. Rapid growth was witnessed in EU countries where organic farming has been financially supported for more than thirty years under agri-environmental and rural development programs. In the EU, organic farming will continue to grow in importance because of the implementation of the European Green Deal (Prandecki et al., 2021). It requires European Union member states to use certain solutions across the economy that will contribute to reducing adverse environmental changes, especially climate issues (Wrzaszcz, 2023). The European Union is supposed to become climate-neutral by 2050, which poses new policy challenges at the national, sector and business levels (European Commission, 2020a, 2020b). In accordance with the Biodiversity Strategy and the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, organic farming is a form of production which contributes to implementing the EU transformation policy towards a sustainable economy. One of the key quantitative goals for organic farming set out in the F2F strategy is to increase the share of organic farmland in the European Union to no less than 25% (Wrzaszcz & Prandecki, 2020; Moschitz et al., 2021). Reaching such a high level will require many countries to enhance the efficiency of their institutional and financial support systems designed to stimulate the development of the organic production sector and its socioeconomic environment.

The share of organic farmland in total agricultural land differs between European Union countries and is insufficient from the perspective of quantitative goals adopted in the European Green Deal (Krajewski et al., 2024). In 2022, the area of organic farmland in the EU was 16,9 million hectares, which accounts for 10,5% of total agricultural land (Eurostat, 2024). The largest shares of land under organic crops are recorded in Austria (27,5%), Estonia (23,4%) and Sweden (19,9%) (Table 1). In Poland, the share of organic farmland was 3.9%, which is one of the lowest levels in the European Union. Only three countries reported a smaller percentage: Bulgaria (2,2%), Ireland (2,2%) and Malta (0.6%). So far, Poland has failed to seize the opportunity and tap into its potential for organic farming development, as reflected by the relatively small area of organic farmland (554,600 ha) and a small number of organic farms (21,200) (IJHARS, 2023).

Table 1. The agricultural area under organic farming, share of UAA under organic farming in 2022

EU Country	The area under organic farming, 2022(1000 ha)	Share of UAA under organic farming, 2022 (%)	Share of UAA under organic farming, 2030* (%)
Austria	705.8	27,5	30.0
Belgium	103.4	7.6	N/A
Bulgaria	110.4	2.2	7.0
Croatia	129.3	8.9	12.1
Cyprus	7.7	6.3	10.0
Czechia	558.0	16,0	N/A
Denmark	300.1	11.4	20.0
Estonia	231.0	23.4	N/A
Finland	339.5	15,0	25.0
France	2875.5	10.6	18.0

EU Country	The area under organic farming, 2022(1000 ha)	Share of UAA under organic farming, 2022 (%)	Share of UAA under organic farming, 2030* (%)
Germany	1631.0	9.8	30.0
Greece	924.9	17.2	N/A
Hungary	320,6	6,3	10.0
Ireland	95.7	2.2	7.5
Italy	2349.5	18.1	25.0
Latvia	312.8	15.9	20.0
Lithuania	271.3	9.3	15.0
Luxembourg	8.3	6.2	N/A
Malta	0.1	0.6	5.0
Netherlands	80.1	4.4	N/A
Poland	554.6	3.9	7.0
Portugal	756.0	19.3	N/A
Romania	644.5	5,0	N/A
Slovakia	253.2	13.7	20.0
Slovenia	53.2	11.1	18.0
Spain	2675.3	10.8	20.0
Sweden	597.2	19,9	30.0

*according to the objectives included in the National CAP Strategic Plans regarding the share of UAA under organic farming.

Source: author's work based on Eurostat [20-06-2024].

In accordance with the goal defined in the European Green Deal for the share of organic farmland to be reached by 2030, Poland will have one of the lowest ratios in the EU, i.e. 7%. Organic farming development is gauged not only by the area of organic farmland and the number of organic farmers but also by the production and sales volume, market size and product range. Although the quantitative indicators of organic farming are on the rise, Poland still has a small market for organic food. It is estimated at PLN 1.36 billion, with a share of barely 0.5% in the food market (Grzybowska-Brzezińska, 2022).

The study presented in this paper assumes that organic farmers differ in what motivates them the most to opt for organic production methods. As demonstrated in previous research, motivation can be used as a criterion for identifying several organic farmer groups. This study distinguishes between three of them: “committed” ones (guided by a clearly defined environmental motivation), “pragmatic” ones (mostly motivated by economic and financial aspects), and “committed, pragmatic” ones (with mixed motivations). The results of the study are expected to answer the following questions:

1. Do the identified farmer groups differ or agree (and to what extent) in how they view the financial, institutional and legal aspects of the support policy for organic farming?
2. What are the farmers' expectations about the development policy for organic farming?
3. How much do the farmers differ in their intent to continue or discontinue organic production?

Literature review

Research on the support policy for organic farming has so far been focused on a couple of issues. It mostly investigates the conditions for and the rationale behind the support policy for organic farming in the context of providing public goods (Pařšová et al., 2014; Jespersen et al., 2017). The authors indicate the need to support organic farming due to its important role in delivering public goods, which involves certain costs and lost profits that require compensation (Michelsen, 2002; Meemken

& Qaim, 2018). This is the key argument for designing a support policy for organic farming as a component of sustainable rural development (Rigby & Caceres, 2001; Jespersen et al., 2017). The literature emphasises the importance of financial support as the main driver of organic farming development (Koesling et al., 2008; Kaufmann et al., 2011). Of the different support instruments, organic payments provide a strong incentive for the farmers to convert their holdings because they improve the farms' profitability (Tranter et al., 2007; Offermann et al., 2009; Sahm et al., 2012; Kallas et al., 2010). This, in turn, makes future development of organic farming dependent upon the level of support and envisaged policy goals. Some authors believe the interaction between agricultural policy and the food market to be the most important contributor to organic farming growth (Michelsen, 2009; Brzezina et al., 2017).

European Union countries have the longest tradition and different experiences in implementing support policies for organic farming and in reaching different outcomes (Nieberg & Kuhnert, 2007; Casolani et al., 2021; Lampkin & Sanders, 2022; Rees et al., 2023). According to research, organic farms deprived of payments would earn much smaller incomes than conventional ones (Nieberg & Offermann, 2006). Although the support policy has played a key role in stimulating the development of organic farming in a number of countries, some negative aspects could not be averted (Spiegel et al., 2022). These include a recurrent process in which a large group of farmers shift away from organic farming (Kimer et al., 2006; Madelrieux & Alavoine-Mornas, 2013). The reasons behind this include the effects of the support policy in situations where the eligibility criteria for payments become more stringent. Indeed, in periods of growing requirements and amendments to legal regulations, some farmers move away from organic farming. However, as proven in some studies, the reasons why farmers discontinue organic practices are more related to the situation in the organic food market than to the support policy (Flaten et al., 2010). In many farms, market factors play a key role in decision-making processes, which are decisive for whether or not production is profitable. These include farm-gate prices, trade margins, and sales revenue. In the context of a deteriorating market situation, they lead to a decline in the number of organic farms. Another negative phenomenon accompanying the support policy is that the level of organic payments is relatively high, whereas the farmers' willingness to increase the production and supply of organic food is small (Argyropoulos et al., 2013; Nachtman, 2021).

In Poland, the introduction of financial support under the Common Agricultural Policy in 2004 has prompted many conventional farmers to shift to organic production (Adamska & Golinowska, 2014; Kucińska et al., 2017). According to a study by Brodzińska (2018), economic reasons and the relatively high level of financial support provided a strong incentive for a certain group of farmers to go organic. Referred to as "subsidy consumers" by the author, they did not guarantee that organic farming would consistently develop in the long run. Indeed, there was a risk that in the case of amendments to the support policy or a tightening of eligibility criteria for the subsidy, they could be the first to discontinue organic farming. The above was corroborated in a study which found that a large group of these farmers decided to shift away from organic farming in 2014 as a consequence of additional eligibility criteria being imposed under the Rural Development Program (including the requirement to market the products) (Łuczka et al., 2021; Krajewski et al., 2024). In view of the small production scale and small volumes of marketable production delivered by the farms, one of the objectives of the new requirements was to trigger a supply effect in the Polish market for organic food (Kociszewski, 2017; Sobocińska et al., 2021; Ziętara & Mirkowska, 2021). The farmers' reaction resulted in slowing down the development trend which emerged in the Polish organic farming sector after 2013 (Miecznikowska-Jerzak, 2022; Zieliński et al., 2022). Although the shift away from organic farming became a large-scale process in Poland, only a few scientific centres undertook research to identify the reasons behind it (Kołoszko-Chomentowska & Stalgiene, 2019; Łuczka & Kalinowski, 2020; Łuczka & Kalinowski, 2023). It established that socioeconomic aspects of the agricultural policy, especially including its instability, high levels of regulation and bureaucracy, were important exogenous factors contributing to the farmers' decision to exit organic production. Also, no one in Poland has investigated how the organic farming development policy is viewed by its beneficiaries in an effort to tell whether and how much it addresses the farmers' needs and expectations, in which areas it proves to be efficient, and in which ones it should be amended. Hence, a study was carried out to bridge that gap and to explore the way the policy is viewed by three farmer groups, which differ in their main motivation for going organic.

Research methods

This study was carried out with farms engaged in certified organic production activities. In the initial stage of the research process, interviews were conducted with a non-random group of 24 organic farmers selected from the contact list kept by the General Inspectorate of Agri-Food Trade Quality. The purpose was to preliminarily identify the motivations behind the farmers' decision to go organic, as well as their views of the organic farming support policy. The second stage used a diagnostic survey with an original questionnaire administered as hardcopy to organic farmers. The survey was carried out from February to July 2023, with 570 questionnaires being mailed during the first stage. In the second stage, a total of 1,560 questionnaires were mailed and e-mailed. As a result, 154 questionnaires were received back.

The survey questionnaire was composed of three sections and included 26 questions. The first section included questions about the farms' socio-demographic features: age, gender, education, farm size, and the year they started organic production. The second section referred to the farms' economic and production situation: the way they purchased land, crop production and cropping patterns, livestock numbers and types, distribution channels, and relationships with the market. The third section of the survey was composed of questions on what the farmers identify as the key problems affecting the development of organic farming and the support policy. Also, they were asked to assess the policy in financial, institutional and regulatory terms and to specify their expectations for improving it and their future intent to continue or discontinue organic production. A five-point Likert scale was used to assess the different areas of the agricultural policy, ranging from unsatisfactory (1) to very good (5). The survey questionnaire identified three groups of organic farmers based on the criterion of the prevailing motivations for and goals of going organic. The procedure for extracting the groups of organic farmers was partly based on a distribution used by other researchers (Fairweather, 1999; Darnhofer et al., 2005).

Results of research

As shown by its socio-demographic characteristics, the group of farmers surveyed was mostly composed of men (73.8%). Men aged 50 or more accounted for more than half of the sample (Table 2). The largest percentage of men in this age bracket belonged to the "committed" and "pragmatic committed" groups. In turn, the largest percentage of young respondents (aged 30-39) were members of the "pragmatic" group. Nearly half (46.8%) of the respondents had a tertiary education, which is a relatively large percentage compared to that of the whole farmer population of Poland (ca. 16%). The farmers surveyed owned relatively large holdings compared to the countrywide average farm area. In the group covered by this study, the average farm size was at a high level of 85.3 ha (vs. 26.2 ha as the average farm area in Poland in 2022). As regards the distribution of farm sizes, large holdings with an area of 50 ha or more had the greatest share (32%). Note also that they represented more than 50% of the group referred to as "pragmatic." Hence, the opinion expressed by these farmers should be seen in the context of farms with considerable development potential. A positive feature of the farms surveyed is their long track record in organic farming (16 years or more for 64.1% of them). Such experienced farmers were mostly members of the "committed" and "pragmatic committed" groups.

Of the farmers surveyed, 48.7% inherited their farm from their parents, whereas 36.4% purchased their farm. Most of them (73.4%) were engaged in organic production only; it was mostly plant production with a prevailing share of rye, oat and grain legumes. Over 63% of the farms surveyed did not practice organic livestock farming (vs. 93% on a countrywide basis). In those who did, bovine animals were used for fattening, and dairy cows and sheep represented the largest percentages of animal numbers. A vast majority of the farms covered by the survey (87%) marketed their production.

Table 2. Selected characteristics of farms covered by the study

Specification	Characteristics	Total share	The “committed” group	The “pragmatic” group	The “pragmatic committed” group
Gender	Women	26.2	37.1	13.3	23.3
	Men	73.8	62.9	86.7	76.7
Age	< 29	3.9	9.3	5.9	1.1
	30–39	14.3	11.6	29.4	13.3
	40–49	22.7	11.6	23.5	28.9
	50–59	29.2	39.5	11.8	26.7
	≥ 60	29.9	27.9	29.4	30.0
Education	Primary / junior secondary	2.6	2.3	5.9	2.2
	Basic vocational	14.3	9.3	35.3	11.1
	Secondary	36.4	27.9	23.5	42.2
	Tertiary	46.7	60.5	35.3	44.5
Area of the farm (ha)	< 5	10.4	16.3	0	10.0
	5–10	9.7	14.0	5.9	6.7
	10–20	22.1	27.9	17.6	20.0
	20–50	26.0	20.9	23.5	30.0
	50 or more	31.8	20.9	52.9	33.3
Years of activity in organic farming	5 years or less	5.9	2.6	13.4	6.4
	6–10 years	11.1	20.5	20.0	5.0
	11–15 years	18.5	12.8	33.3	19.0
	16 years or more	64.5	64.1	33.3	69.6

According to the study, the farmer’s impression of the agricultural policy is that it plays a small role in stimulating organic farming, which may adversely affect their future decisions on whether or not to continue production activities (Table 3). The largest group (43%) of farmers view the agricultural policy as “satisfactory,” whereas 34.5% consider it to be “unsatisfactory”. Combined together, those two groups account for nearly 80% of the sample. The high percentage of negative views of the policy can give rise to concern and point to an urgent need for measures to be taken to improve its image. The worst opinions could be found in the “committed” group, where the largest percentage of farmers viewed it as “satisfactory” (48.7%) or “unsatisfactory” (41%), making a total of almost 90% of the farms surveyed. The opinion of that group is particularly important because it is generally composed of highly experienced farmers who are in a position to compare the agricultural policy between different evaluation periods. A high percentage of “unsatisfactory” ratings was also recorded in the “pragmatic committed” group in which every third farmer (32.9%) expressed such an opinion.

Table 3. Role of the agricultural policy in stimulating the development of organic farming, as viewed by the respondents (% of replies)

Specification	Total	The “committed” group	The “pragmatic” group	The “pragmatic committed” group
Very good	0.7	0.0	0.0	1.2
Good	21.8	10.3	29.4	23.2
Satisfactory	43.0	48.7	41.2	42.7
Unsatisfactory	34.5	41.0	29.4	32.9

The results of this study present the agricultural policy as being poorly rated by its main beneficiaries. Therefore, the question arises whether or not the same is true for all key authorities of agriculture's institutional environment. On a 5-point scale (1: very low, 5: very high), the farmers gave the highest ratings to the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture (3.51) and to agricultural consultancy centres (3.48). Usually, the farmers rely on both of them for support related to training, information, knowledge transfer and advisory when submitting applications and settling payments. When it comes to other surrounding institutions, the farmers said they had little contact with them. Also, they made only small use of services offered by industry organisations or associations, the agricultural chamber and local government. According to information gathered during the study, the farmers do not establish—and do not plan to establish in the near future—any collaborative networks between farms, scientific and research institutions, NGOs, and public administration with a view to transfer state-of-the-art knowledge and agri-environmental innovations. The interviewees had a poor opinion of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2,37), likely due to their dissatisfaction with legal regulations for organic farming and the policy for promoting organic food. These are the two areas where the farmers see the greatest shortage of good practices and efficient action from the Ministry.

Table 4. Opinions on how selected institutions support the development of organic farming

Specification	Total	The "committed" group	The "pragmatic" group	The "pragmatic committed" group
Agricultural consultancy centers	3.48	3.75	3.03	3.67
Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture	3.51	3.57	3.45	3.49
Local government institutions	3.18	3.14	3.16	3.21
Scientific and research institutions	2.62	2.69	2.54	2.63
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	2.37	2.31	2.42	2.35
Industry organizations	2.35	2.30	2.39	2.33

As regards their views of legal regulations for organic farming, all three groups of farmers surveyed saw the growing difficulties in aligning with the new regulations as the top-ranked problem (a score of 4.16 on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 as negligible importance and 5 as extreme importance). Ranked second (3.81) were the additional regulatory costs involved in aligning with the new regulations (Table 5). "Pragmatic" farmers attached greater importance than the two other groups to the following four aspects of amendments to organic farming regulations: 1) it is increasingly difficult to align with the new regulations; 2) new regulations require new knowledge; 3) regulations are subject to frequent amendments; 4) not enough information on new regulations is provided in order for the farmers to build an adaptive capacity.

Table 5. Opinions on amendments to organic farming regulations

Specification	Total	The "committed" group	The "pragmatic" group	The "pragmatic committed" group
It is increasingly difficult to align with the new regulations	4.16	4.02	4.50	4.20
Aligning with the new regulations increases regulatory costs	3.81	3.71	3.56	3.95
New regulations require new agricultural knowledge	2.99	2.87	4.13	2.86
Not enough information on new regulations is provided	2.90	2.46	3.88	2.93
Amendments to regulations are excessively frequent	2.81	2.49	4.06	2.72
Regulations become increasingly complex	2.80	2.49	3.50	2.83

Due to its structural characteristics—such as low profitability, labour intensity, and the delivery of public goods—the development of organic farming largely depends on instruments provided by the institutional environment. Thus, institutional support should be aligned with the specific needs of organic farming, which are not identical to those of conventional agriculture. The relationships with the institutional environment are not easy because of the farmers’ traditional distrust of institutions. Exploring the farmers’ expectations about the development policy for organic farming could be helpful in making it better aligned with the most urgent needs. As shown by this study, what the farmers expect the most is increased financial support (4.06), increased promotion of organic food, as necessary to stimulate demand for it (4.01), and simplification of the certification and control system for organic farming (3.95) (Table 6). These expectations were ranked similarly by the “committed” and “pragmatic committed” groups. In the “pragmatic” group, market-related problems were ranked second and third, next to simplifying the certification and control system. These expectations are about increasing the promotion of organic food and supporting the creation of local outlets and markets and were given high ratings (4.50 and 4.33, respectively, on a scale from 1 – very small to 5 – very large).

Table 6. Farmers’ expectations about the development policy for organic farming

Specification	Total	The “committed” group	The “pragmatic” group	The “pragmatic committed” group
Increased financial support for organic farms	4.06	4.00	4.00	4.15
Increased promotion of organic food, both nationally and internationally	4.01	3.66	4.50	4.14
Simplifying the certification and control system	3.95	3.70	4.73	3.99
Supporting the collaborative network between producers and actors of the organic food market	3.87	3.80	3.80	3.98
Informing in advance of amendments to regulations	3.65	3.64	3.73	3.69
Supporting the creation of local outlets and direct sales channels	3.59	3.46	4.33	3.60
Greater stability of organic farming regulations	3.37	3.59	3.24	3.38

The marketing of organic products and the farmers’ poor relationships with the market continue to be major problems that affect the development of organic farming in Poland. Small volumes of marketable organic production and the low amount of sales revenue are what adversely affect the profitability of production. This study corroborates the above opinion. However, as a positive aspect, note that over 80% of farmers surveyed sold 41% or more of their produce (Table 7).

Table 7. Percentage of marketed production

Specification	Total	The “committed” group	The “pragmatic” group	The “pragmatic committed” group
0–20%	5.4	8.3	7.1	3.7
21–40%	13.7	13.9	28.6	11.1
41–60%	13.0	11.1	14.3	13.6
61–80%	22.1	25.0	7.1	23.5
81–100%	45.8	41.7	42.9	48.1

The largest share of farmers, with a sales rate of 41% to 80%, was found in the “pragmatic committed” group. Every second member of that group managed to market a relatively large part of their production volume. The distribution of replies in that group suggests the farmers’ decisions are largely driven by economic aspects. On the one hand, they are interested in accessing organic pay-

ments and strengthening their links with the market. On the other, they are committed to their environmental motivations. Their great advantage is that they are strongly guided by economic and environmental aspects and, therefore, may contribute to the sustainable development of organic farming in the future.

When asked about their intent to continue organic farming in the future, the interviewees differed in their replies (Table 8). More than half of all farms (58.9%) intend to maintain or increase their current production volumes. A relatively large share plan to discontinue organic farming (19.9%, i.e. every fifth respondent). Hesitant farmers accounted for nearly the same percentage (21.2%). The largest share of farms that declared the intent to continue organic production was recorded in the “pragmatic committed” (63.8%) and “committed” (58.9%) groups. In turn, the smallest percentage (35.3%) was found in the “pragmatic” community. The latter is likely to change the most, because every third member of that group intends to discontinue organic farming, and every third is hesitant about it.

Table 8. Future plans for organic farming

Specification	Total	The “committed” group	The “pragmatic” group	The “pragmatic committed” group
Maintain organic production at the current level	43.7	44.2	23.5	47.7
Increase organic production	15.2	14.0	11.8	16.1
Discontinue organic farming upon completion of the current Rural Development Program	6.0	2.3	29.4	3.5
Discontinue organic farming within the next 5 years	13.9	11.6	5.9	17.2
Difficult to say	21.2	27.9	29.4	16.1

Discussion and conclusions

The Polish agricultural policy adopted in the past has been inefficient in ensuring stable development conditions for organic farming. This is reflected in a number of ways, including frequent amendments to legal regulations and eligibility criteria for organic payments, which farmers believe to be one of the major components of the policy. Also, the above is corroborated by the farmers having an unfavourable view of it; the vast majority (77.5%) believe the policy to be “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory”. Probably, this is related to previous failures of the organic farming policy, as a consequence of which Poland experienced a 185,000 ha drop in the area of organic farmland and a reduction in the number of organic farms by over 8,000 between 2014 and 2018 (IJHARS, 2023). The results of some studies point to the failures of the agricultural policy related to organic payments in other countries, too (Argyropoulos et al., 2013; Spiegel et al., 2022).

The interviewees had an unfavourable view of some of the institutions that surround organic farming, especially the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. This can be explained by the unstable support policy which has been implemented over the recent years, and by the quality of institutions defined as “human-designed restrictions intended to arrange interactions between people” (North, 1991). Institutions provide stimuli which affect economic decisions and the way the potential for growth is seized. They are supposed to ensure a certain level of stability and sustainability for the development process. The fact that some surrounding institutions are being viewed as inefficient by the farmers covered by this study is consistent with other studies which identify the regulatory barriers to the development of organic farming (Łuczka, 2020). The two surrounding institutions top-ranked by the interviewees are the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture and agricultural consultancy centres, i.e. those which the farmers contact directly in the process of transferring knowledge, information and financial support. These results are corroborated by other findings (Siedlecka, 2014), which indicate that the positive opinions of organic farmers are mostly associated with two surrounding institutions, namely the agricultural consultancy centres and the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture.

One of the key elements of the development policy for organic farming is legal regulations which affect the farmers' adaptive behaviour, especially in the long run. Generally, in all three interviewee groups, most farmers believed that it is increasingly difficult to align themselves with the new regulations (an average score of 4.16). Note that the above poses a greater problem to "pragmatic" (4.50) farmers than to the "pragmatic committed" (4.20) and the "committed" (4.02) groups. This is especially true with respect to the growing complexity of the applicable law, which makes the farmers face another area of uncertainty in their decision-making. This can lead to a higher perception of risks involved in organic farming compared to conventional agriculture and thus may discourage them from continuing organic production in the future (Serra et al., 2007). According to the farmers, the amendments to organic farming regulations drive greater uncertainty, higher regulatory costs, and increased demand for additional information and new knowledge.

When it comes to the farmers' expectations about future policy, increased financial support is a matter of key importance (an average score of 4.06). The above might suggest that farmers view the current payments as insufficient to fully compensate for profits lost due to the implementation of the organic farming system. This is especially true for two farmer groups: the "committed" and "committed pragmatic" farmers, i.e. those who can be reasonably supposed to drive the future development of organic farming. In addition to having great expectations from support schemes, the farmers also expect much (nearly the same) from organic food promotion (4.01). This is corroborated by the findings from another study (Kucińska, 2017). As regards measures taken to enable continued development for organic farming, the farmers viewed promotion and advertising as top-ranked activities. Food-selling opportunities are likely to be driven by the promotion of organic food targeted at geographically diverse markets with a view to triggering greater consumer demand (Zamkowa et al., 2022).

Local outlets continue to be an untapped point of sale for organic farming products due to a number of reasons, including a lack of sufficient interest from local authorities in creating and developing the relevant infrastructure and a lack of producer groups involved in that process. Meanwhile, local outlets could be an efficient way of selling the product range offered by small farmers at relatively low costs and might, therefore, drive an increase in organic farming's value-added (including through lower transport costs and the absence of trade margin). However, they do not show any major interest in improving their relationships with some of these institutions to deal with these matters at the local level. This study, similar to what was established by (Kociszewski et al., 2024), reveals the need for stimulating self-organisation processes and creating local farmer networks in order to increase their share in the supply chain as a way to earn greater income. Collaborative behaviours and improvements in human capital management are important drivers of competitiveness in the organic food sector (Łuczka, 2020). So far, related consultancy and training services have not been effective enough (Siedlecka, 2014). This is confirmed by the research of Kołoszko-Chomentowska and Stalgiene (2019), which indicates the importance of the training and advisory system in building the organisation of the network (farmers, processors and intermediaries) to strengthen the supply chain.

According to this study, the number of "pragmatic" farms is likely to change the most, because every third member of that group intends to discontinue organic farming, and every third is hesitant about it. It is highly plausible that in the case of a general economic downturn, farmers who now declare themselves as hesitant might decide to discontinue organic production. A study by Flaten et al. (2010) confirms that in the group of farmers who are not certain about their future intentions, a significant percentage ultimately decides to quit the organic business.

This paper contributes to research on limitations to the development of organic farming in Poland. It does not exhaust the list of problems related to assessing the agricultural policy for organic farming. In the future, the need will arise to examine the following: the relationship between the several years of stagnation in the development of organic farming after 2013 and the agricultural policy and the reasons behind the small increase in the area of organic farmland and in the number of organic farms in a situation where an enormous number of farms cannot see any future in conventional farming. In the years to come, the potential for organic farming development in Poland may be driven by a number of factors, including the changes in conventional farming, which holds large resources of human capital, farms and low-grade land which could be deployed to boost organic farming and contribute to increasing its production volumes. Releasing those resources requires

political decisions which, in the long run, could have positive impacts on the development of both conventional farming (by triggering a restructuring and accelerating modernisation processes) and organic farming while also providing benefits to organic food consumers (by strengthening the market's sustainability and boosting the supply effect). However, this requires the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (and many surrounding institutions) to adopt a new approach to farming support in the financial, information, consultancy, educational and scientific dimensions and to engage in a difficult yet necessary dialogue with the farmers to discuss the future model of Polish agriculture.

The study reveals the need for improvements in the development policy for Polish organic farming. Also, the policy must be assessed at a macro level in order to identify its restrictions and potential threats to the implementation of the future goal, i.e. having 7% of agricultural land under organic crops by 2030 (Kociszewski, 2022). This study could be helpful in building a promotion strategy for organic farming and for the organic food market, as well as in indicating the set of dedicated implementation instruments. The strategy should focus on a comprehensive inclusion of all actors in the food system (farmers, processors, distributors and consumers) in an effort to accelerate growth in the number of organic farms. Without reaching a critical mass of organic farms, it will be impossible to solve the problems related to the market and the agricultural producers' poor market position and insufficient incomes and to offer favourable outlooks for sustainable development of organic farming.

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Władysława ŁUCZKA

OCENA POLITYKI WSPARCIA ROLNICTWA EKOLOGICZNEGO PRZEZ ROLNIKÓW

STRESZCZENIE: Celem artykułu jest ocena polityki wsparcia rolnictwa ekologicznego przez trzy grupy rolników: „zaangażowanych”, „pragmatycznych” i „pragmatycznych-zaangażowanych”. Ustalono różnice i podobieństwa tych grup w ocenie polityki wsparcia oraz określono ich przyszłe zamierzenia w kontekście zaniechania lub kontynuowania produkcji ekologicznej. W opracowaniu wykorzystano jakościowe metody badania ankietowego przeprowadzonego wśród 154 gospodarstw ekologicznych. Stwierdzono, że wśród rolników dominowała negatywna opinia o zmianach w przepisach rolnictwa ekologicznego. Może to prowadzić do postrzegania wyższego ryzyka związanego z rolnictwem ekologicznym w porównaniu z konwencjonalną formą rolnictwa i zniechęcać do kontynuowania produkcji w przyszłości. W oczekiwaniach pod adresem przyszłej polityki kluczowe znaczenie ma wzrost wsparcia finansowego. Ma to szczególne znaczenie w przypadku dwóch grup rolników: „zaangażowanych” i „pragmatycznych zaangażowanych”. Z przeprowadzonych badań wynika, że w przyszłości największe zmiany w liczbie gospodarstw mogą nastąpić w grupie rolników „pragmatycznych”, ponieważ co trzeci rolnik z tej grupy zamierza zrezygnować z rolnictwa ekologicznego, i również co trzeci jest niezdecydowany.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: rolnictwo ekologiczne, polityka rolna, wsparcie rolników, ograniczenia instytucjonalne