

The New Tendencies in the Scientific Research of the Organic Food System in Finland

J.Nuutila

The Finnish Organic Research Institute and the Agrifood Research Finland MTT, 31600 Jokioinen, Finland,
Jaakko.nuutila@mtt.fi

Overall implications of organic research in Finland

The European Union as well as the Finnish authorities are guiding us towards a more sustainable world and the organic food system has an important role in it (Commission of European Communities 2004, MMM 2012). It is obvious that to develop the system more sustainable, we need food chain stakeholder-based research to give us better solutions as well as new innovations. The scientific research of organic food-related subjects in Finland has, for couple of decades already, been targeted mostly to the agricultural sector for the farm level operations. For being a complicated system, the research of the organic system needs more multidisciplinary, even holistic approach in the future. Also a better commitment from both, the Government as well as from the food system stake holders is needed.

Background for the situation in the Organic Food System

The Finnish organic food system is developing, but still slower than in many other European countries. In 2012 the share of organic cultivated land was 9 % (Heinonen 2012) and the share of markets was 1,6 % equal to 200 million Euros (23 % increase from 2011) (Pro Luomu 2013). The organic food has been among the Finnish Government official programs since 1999 (VN 1999). The Finnish Government has set a goal of 20 % for the share of organic agricultural land for the year 2020 and made a Government program to support that decision.

There have been two research programs for organic food and farming, financed by the government and ran by MTT in 1992 – 2002 and in 2003 -2006, but nothing official ever since, mainly because of the lack of funds. The scientific research on that field has been mainly targeted to the farm level operations such as soil management and environment and also for the economy of the organic food system. The multidisciplinary scientific research is developing now and other faculties such as behavioral, social, political and medical are getting interested on this global “phenomenon”, the Organic Food.

The Finnish Organic Research Institute

The high level delegation set for creating the country brand in Finland gave one of its tasks for the Agrifood Research Finland MTT and the University of Helsinki to found a specific organic research institute for coordinating food chain operators and the research scientists to do the research needed for developing the national organic food system from the scientific point of view. (Foreign Ministry 2008). The Finnish Organic Research Institute started in January 2013. The Institute is building a network among the Finnish research scientists as well as getting “signals” from the food chain stakeholders for the most needed research subjects. The Institute is not doing the research

itself, but coordinating research scientists from the founding parts, food system stakeholders and the financing instruments.

The biggest challenge is to motivate the scientists to join the network and to get the finances for the Institute. The Finnish government and the parliament show no interest for financing the Institute, but only separate research projects. Public and private money are though needed for the implementation of a national organic food research program and to secure the continuity of the new institute. A national organic research agenda will give guidelines for prioritized agricultural, environmental, food related and communal research for years 2013-2017. Connections have been made already to FiBl, ICROFS and Bioforsk. Especially the co-operation between the Nordic Institutes would be fruitful, because of the closeness of the cultures and agriculture on same geographical level.

Dissemination of the knowledge

The dissemination of the results from the scientific research will be done for different target groups. The Institute organizes seminars for the scientists and will use the network built also for dissemination. The food chain stakeholders will get targeted information for their special field as well as possibilities to attend for scientific seminars. Consumers will get more popularized information through the media as well as from the Internet pages (www.luomu.fi). There is a lot of false information in media about the possible benefits of organic food. It is out most important to have a trusted source for information based on scientific research and that is one of the reasons to have the Finnish Organic Research Institute.

References

Commission of European Communities 2004, *European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming*, European Union, Brussels.

Foreign Ministry 2008, 16.9.2008-last update, *Jorma Ollila to create a country brand for Finland* [Homepage of Foreign Ministry of Finland], [Online]. Available: <http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=136528&nodeid=15146&contentlan=2&culture=en-US> [2013, 03/27].

Heinonen, S. 2012, *Selvitys luonnonmukaisen tuotannon valvonnasta ja toteuttamisvaihtoehdoista - Selvitysmiehen raportti*, Evira, Helsinki.

Pro Luomu 2013, 5.3.2013-last update, *Sale of organic food exceeds 200 M€ in Finland* [Homepage of Pro Luomu ry], [Online]. Available: <http://www.proluomu.fi/sale-of-organic-food-exceeds-200-million-euros-in-finland/> [2013, 03/27].

VN 1999, "Pääministeri Paavo Lipposen II hallitusohjelma 13.4.1999 - 17.4.2003"