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Biological agriculture in the District of Aizkraukle and opportunities of development.

In the recent fifteen years agriculture in Latvia has drastically changed. There are losses and, certainly, benefits. In the present state of development, the primal aim of the State agricultural policy is to create it as a branch which could fully satisfy demand of the internal market and integrate into the European Common Market and manufacture commodity products in compliance with the demands of the world market competing with products of other countries in the sphere of quality and production costs. The internal consumption of the State in the year 2003 was fully provided by cereals and legumes including eggs, but consumption of beef- only by 81 %, pork-62%, poultry- by 54 %. The demand in the year 2003 was exceeded by the amount of the produced milk (107 %). The number of livestock has essentially decreased (on about one third). The technical equipment has comparatively become out-of-date- in the year 2003 from 57 thousand tractors in every type of farms only 5 % were produced in the recent 6 years. There are also positive moments.

The District of Aizkraukle was founded in 1967. It consists of 3 towns (Aizkraukle, Jaunjelgava, Plavinas) and 19 villages. The number of population in the start of 2002 was 41546 inhabitants, 37 % living in towns and 63 %- in the countryside. The territory of the district occupies 2566.8 km², 53.9 %- covered by forests, 32 % - by land used in agriculture, 2.9 %- by water, density of population- 16 inhabitants / km².

The District of Aizkraukle lies in the south-eastern part of Latvia, borders with Lithuania and the Districts of Bauska, Ogre, Madona and Jekabpils. The territory is crossed by the largest river in Latvia- the Daugava River and by the railway main line Riga- Moscow.

The potential of the natural resources has favored development of:

- forestry and wood processing;
- power industry;
- building material industry;
- peat processing;
- food product and food processing industries.

In the District of Aizkraukle the primal branches are cultivation of grain, milk and meat animal production, as well as vegetable growing. Several farms have turned to development of rural tourism and non- traditional agricultural branches such as food supplements and teas, the biological products- live milk, herbal bathhouses, etc.. In total, in the region sowing areas of technical crops have increased more than 2 times. Vegetables are also grown more.

During the recent eleven years, radical changes have happened. It can be demonstrated by data for the year 1990 in comparison with the year 2001 in the district:

Chart 1.

Changes in agriculture in the District of Aizkraukle.

Data	Year1990.	Year 2001	% Year 2001 against Year1990	Year 2001 agricultural census
Area of sowings (ha) including:	52002	23432	45.1	25599
Cereals	21558	10637	49.3	10530
Technical crops	177	406	229.4	365
Potatoes	2814	1782	63.3	1743
Vegetables	286	316	110.5	384
Forage crops	27167	10096	37.2	12385
Cattle (number)	47180	12250	26.0	12656
Pigs(number)	28540	7251	25.4	6520

During the period of eleven years, the area of sowings has essentially decreased and in livestock breeding- only the third part from the before reared cattle and pigs is left. Only sowings of the technical crops (predominantly canola) have increased more than two times. A little more vegetables are also grown.

Averagely, the inspected farms in the District of Aizkraukle consist of 13 ha of land used in agriculture. Only in 129 economically active farms of the district or in 2.8 % from 4646 farms, the area of the land used in agriculture exceeds 50 ha (see Chart 1).

In the District of Aizkraukle, from 116.6 thousand ha of land (without forests), 81.1 thousand ha or 70 % is land used in agriculture. In the LR Commercial Register 1411 farms or 36.4% of all the peasant farms are registered.

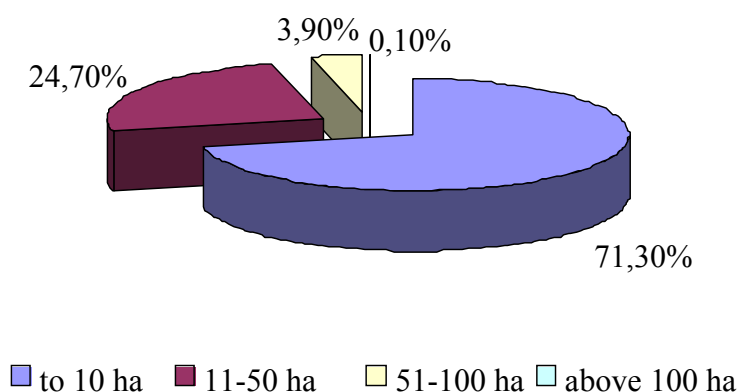
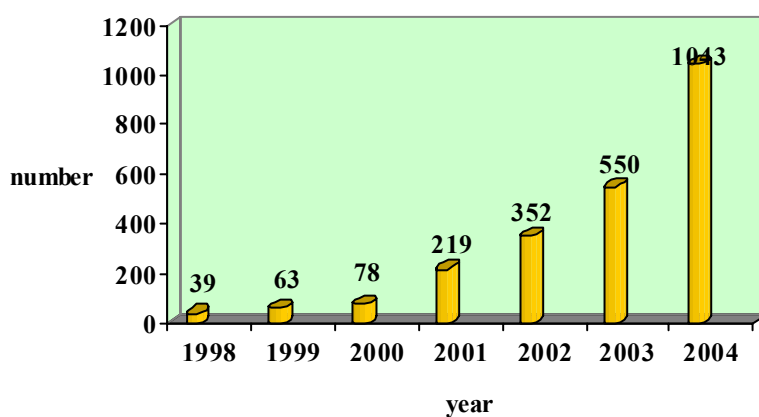


Chart 1. Division of farms according to size.

A perspective branch is fish farming- carps, pikes, tenches and soon crayfish will be grown at “Purvini” of Sece Village. Breams and pike perches are grown in the fish farm at Serene.

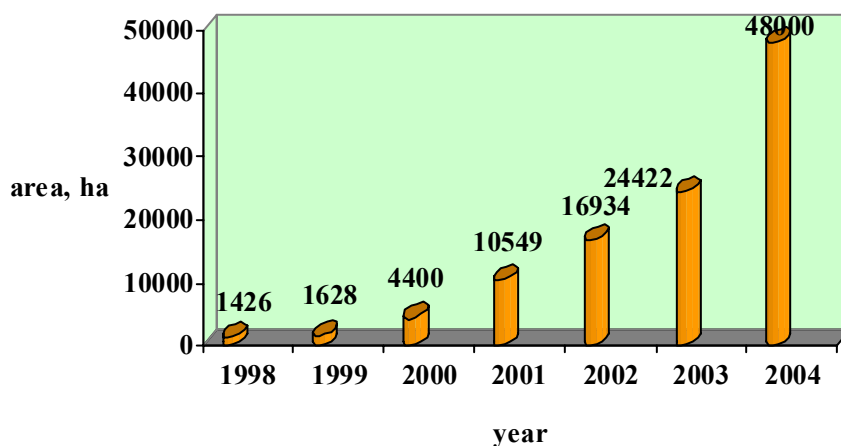
Proportion of private enterprises in the diatrict totals to 82 %, municipal enterprises total to 2.7 % and the State enterprises- 2.4 %. Approximately 3500 peasants are employed in agricultural production and approximately 4200- in small holding farms. The average total area of peasant farms comprises 25 ha of land, but almost in every village there is a big farm.

Recently in Latvia, interest about the biological agriculture has drastically increased. It is explained by increase of support from the national subsidies in recent years, but since the year 2004, the EU payments are granted within the framework of the rural development plan. Since the year 2001, the number of farms has increased five times (Picture 2).



Picture 2. Number of biological farms in Latvia

Significance of the biological agriculture as a type of production for the environmental protection is great. Leakage of nutrients in the environment from the farms is insignificant. This type of management is particularly important in natural territories under protection which in Latvia total to approximately 1 million ha, including the District of Aizkraukle. In the year 2004, from the total area of land used in agriculture -2 % were managed (Picture 3). In comparison with Austria, Sweden and other EU countries, it is not too much, but from this land a large number of natural and wholesome products are obtained.

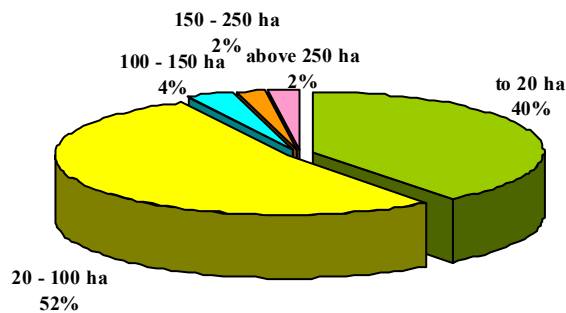


Picture 3. The biologically managed territory, in ha.

In the period when inhabitants of Latvia are attacked by different diseases, it is significant to use in diet a natural, poison-free food. The amount of the produced biological products in 2003 is insufficient and does not meet the demands of the market. The manufactured biological products in 2003:

- grain: 6682,1 t
- beans: 336.2 t
- fruits, berries 235,9 t
- meat 2401,4 t
- milk 30953,1 t
- eggs 226 710
- vegetables 1431,5 t
- bees products 54,3 t
- Canola seeds: 213.4 t
- Potatoes 3891,7 t

Purchase of these products in shops is restricted because in Latvia processing of biological products is not developed. Fragmentation of farms also affects success of the development of the biological agriculture to a great extent. Approximately 90% of farms are tiny, part of them do not manufacture products for the market.



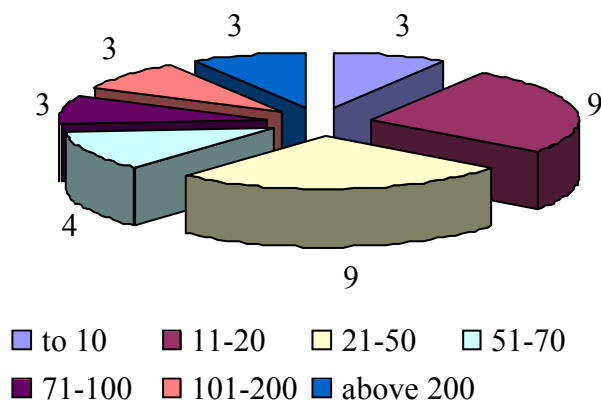
Picture 4. Structure of biological farms in Latvia, 2003

In the District of Aizkraukle in the Food and Veterinary Service 33 farms are registered which are engaged in the biological agriculture. Since 2003, the Development Agency of Zemgale carries out the project under the title “Environmentally friendly management in the region of MidBaltia”.

The above mentioned project has met approval with EU PHARE 2001 Cooperation Program in the Region of the Baltic Sea at the competition organized by the Small Project Fund, but as partners the Rural Development Association of the Region of Tampere in Finland and the Regional Administration of Iauliai in Lithuania, the Office of the District of Jelgava of the Latvian Agricultural Consulting and Education Support Center and the Union of the Latvian Biological Agriculture have also joined it

In three languages, a booklet is prepared where wide information is collected about farms where the biological agriculture is practiced in the Zemgale Region of Planning.

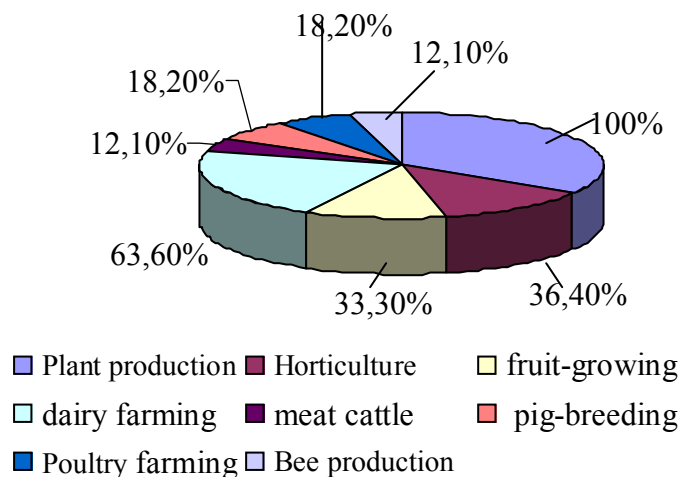
In the District of Aizkraukle, farms with 11-50 ha of land are engaged in biological agriculture, but there are 3 farms with land over 200 ha. The joint-stock company “Bormani” comprises 813 ha of land (Picture 5).



Picture 5. Division of biological farms according to size (ha)

The dominating branches in biological farms are cultivation of grain, canola, buckwheat and clover including growing of potatoes, vegetables, fruits, honey, forage plants, herbal plants, sprouts (Picture 6).

The number of dairy cows in biological farms totals to approximately 500, but the average milk yield fluctuates from 3400 – 4500 kg. Proportion of other agricultural animals is insignificant.



Picture 6. Proportion of branches in the biological farms of the District of Aizkraukle.

The further described farms are the active farms which manufacture products and where also exchange with experience is practiced, but the Agricultural Research Institute is the intellectual center of development of the biological agriculture in the district.

The joint-stock company
„Bormaņi”,
Chairperson **Jānis Miežītis**

The largest manufacturer of agricultural produce in the Area of Aizkraukle, which is located in the Village of Koknese. The total area -813.16 ha. The biologically certified area comprises 400.25 ha, but 247.5 ha are in their first transition year, 165.41 ha - in the second phase of transition.

The company specializes in cultivation of plants and dairy farming. The largest part of the grown products is envisaged for animal feeding.

Pasture area – 52.8 ha, cereals- 138.1 ha, other forage crops - 29 ha.

In total, the company has 260 cattle, dairy cows– 150, breeding heifers– 45, calves to 1 year of age – 65. Milk yield from a cow is above 4000 kg.

Canola is grown for the purpose of producing biofuel in the future which will be used as a source of energy for driving tractors and cars. This fuel would be considerably cheaper, thus, could decrease costs of production.

The peasant farm **„Vecapēni”,**
Chairwoman **Māra Kaugare**

This farm is located in the Village of Aiviekste and is on the banks of the River Aiviekste which flows into the Daugava River.

The farm has 15.8 ha of land. It has been engaged in biological agriculture for four years and all its area is certified.

The farm offers to the supermarkets amazing products such as sprouted seeds of garden radish, cereals, alfalfa, onions, lentils, etc., which have high biological activity, are good source of vitamins and mineral matter to enrich food. Herbs, exotic greens are also grown. For this purpose the farm has 460 m² of covered area. From herbs we have to mention basil, majoram, tarragon. Legumes are also grown on 1 ha of land such as broad beans, shelling beans, peas. Lettuce is also grown—approximately 20 varieties.

Oils radish is grown to use seeds for sprouting purposes.

The peasant farm **”Ragāres”,**
owners **Māra un Jānis Vaivari**

This farm has 7.6 ha of land. 3.5 ha of land are under biocultivation. They have been engaged in biological agriculture for 10 years. The herbal plants are grown on 0.8 ha of land, but 50 m² - under cover.

On the farm, there is created VESELĪBAS DĀRZS (THE HEALTH PARK), but the manufactured products are sold with the trademark "Ecoproduct of Latvia".

The farm offers fruits:apples, plums, pears, actinidias and seedlings of actinidias, bergamot, sea buckthorns, big fruit hazel-trees, ornamental and edible honeysuckle, dark elder, lad's love, climbing cotoneaster, box ivy and other seedlings. Herbal teas are also sold there.

Every year 50 – 100 plants are planted anew (apple-trees, pear-trees, plum-trees, cherry-trees).

In the automated greenhouses, the golden currants, viburnums are also partly grown.

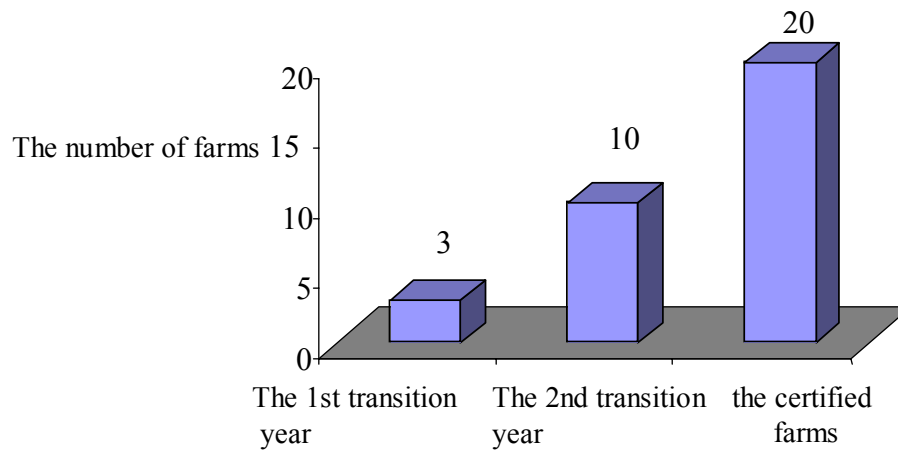
On the farm lupin as the green dressing is grown.

**The Agricultural Research
Institute,**
Director Dr.agr **Aldis Jansons,**
Scientific advisor Dr. agr. **Jānis
Vigovskis.**

The Institute is located at Skrīveri and the largest certified Research and Seed Growing Center of Biological Agriculture in Latvia is located there. The total area for biological farming covers 43 ha of land, 30 ha –have already been certified, but 13 ha – are under certification of the first year. Crop rotation of 7 fields with the area of one field being 4.5 ha is created for: winter rye, red clover for seeds, potatoes, barley , oats, pasture ryegrass for seeds, winter canola.

At the Institute it is possible to obtain a certified seed material for rye, barley, oats, pasture ryegrass, red clover. Workshops and rural days for peasants from Aizkraukle and other districts are organized on regular basis covering issues related to the biological agriculture and other ones as well.

In the District of Aizkraukle, the number of biological farms is increasing. The increase is not very rapid, but gradual, and wish to manage environmentally friendly is pronounced. Great significance bears the fact that the Consulting Office of the District has predisposed attitude and it actively carries out activities to favour educational and supportive work. In 2004, 3 farms have started the transitional period (Picture 7).



Picture 7. Biological farms in the District of Aizkraukle in 2004.

From the discussion with peasants held at the Council of the District of Aizkraukle, several conclusions and visions can be drawn for further development of biological agriculture.

1. The district is crossed by the Daugava River, therefore, it is necessary to eliminate use of agricultural chemicals in order to save the Baltic Sea from water pollution. Favouring of the biological type of management in the district is a necessary undertaking to protect the environment. There is opportunity for development, because the Council of the District of Aizkraukle is interested in developing this branch. The District Council is engaged in planning the environment in the region, attracting EU funds Leader and funds of other similar programs. It is envisaged to place signs in the territory of the district, workshops are held.
2. At Skrīveri, the Agricultural Research Institute is located where researchers carry out research in the biological cultivation of plants. At the Institute, rural days and trainings for peasants are organized. It could develop as a serious educational and scientific center in the sphere of biological agriculture in the district.
3. There is a pronounced lack of processing enterprises. The peasant farms sell the yielded milk to processing enterprises and it is mixed together with conventionally yielded milk. The same can be also said about other kinds of production. The situation can be changed if "Daugava" Ltd. turns to manufacturing biological dairy products.
4. Opportunity to strengthen the market capacity is in developing cooperation. The territorial evaluation of farms is adequate. Cooperation might be started in the spheres of perennials and growing cereal seeds, canola growing for forage purposes and producing biofuel, in providing services as well, etc..

