

Managing growth in values-based organic food chains: challenges, business strategies and instruments

Workshop at Biofach Conference 2014

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Outline

Value chains of organic food products tend to converge either towards higher value niche products or towards conventionalisation when they start growing more significantly. If they expand, organic businesses and initiatives face specific challenges that, if not managed well, can lead to failure.

The workshop will focus on two particular aspects. Firstly, the business strategies of growing organic businesses and initiatives, and secondly, the specific instruments used in organisation and management that help to meet the diverging objectives related to growth in turnover on the one hand, and organic values, quality, integrity and trust on the other. In the workshop we will look at these challenges and management options from the perspective of practitioners in the agri-food industry.

We will invite six speakers. Each of them will give a short presentation and contribute to the panel discussion which will be the core element of the workshop. The speakers will represent a variety of organic food businesses and initiatives which are part of values-based food chains:

- 1) Short value chain with a close connection between primary producer and consumer (consumer-producer-cooperative).
- 2) Longer chain with a variety of intermediaries in processing and marketing and in transforming the food product along the way.
- 3) Smaller partner in a food chain.
- 4) Medium-sized or larger food business that managed successfully significant growth in the values-based food chain.

The four entrepreneurs will be joined by 1-2 researchers who will give a short introduction into business strategies and instruments that are commonly applied by organic businesses and initiatives. The introduction will be based on the results of comparative analysis of a set of value chains across Europe.

A core element of the workshop will be the panel discussion. Each entrepreneur will be asked to present the own experiences and lessons learned. The presentations will help to better understand different development pathways with their particular challenges and the most helpful management strategies and instruments.

Focus will be on typical problems and risks of growing food chains, businesses and initiatives and the ways these challenges and risks can be managed.

Agenda of the session (90min)

- 1) Welcome and setting the scene (5 min)
- 2) Introductory presentation with selected findings from the comparative international level analysis (10 min)
- 3) Four entrepreneurs briefly (5 min) their particular value chain and discuss the management of their growth process (20 min)
- 4) Panel discussion (30 min)
- 5) Open floor for discussion with panel participants and the audience (20 min)
- 6) Resume and outlook by the facilitator (5 min)

The workshop will be held in English.

Speakers

- Björn Rasmus, Bioalpine Gen, Austria
- Klaus Lorenzen, Erzeuger-Verbraucher-Gemeinschaft Landwege e.G., Deutschland
- N.N., small business or initiative with expansion strategy (eastern/southern Europe)
- N.N., medium-size processor, grown significantly (NL, France, Scandinavia?)
- N.N., international scientific expert on organic business management
- Prof. Dr. Anna Häring, comparative analysis of business strategies and instruments
- Dr. Susanne v. Münchhausen, organization and facilitation of the panel discussion

We were able to find two managing directors from cooperatives in Austria and Germany who will contribute to the workshop. Moreover, we would like to approach two additional speakers from exhibiting enterprises in consultation with the organizing team of the Biofach conference. Furthermore, we will invite an international expert on business management with particular interest in the organic food industry. We will be able to nominate this person within the coming weeks.

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