Western Balkans cooperation in certification of organic production

Regional Consultancy Fund for Quality Infrastructure (QI) in South East Europe (SEE)

Main result: A network of organic certification and accreditation bodies leads to better communication and uniform interpretation of organic production in the Western Balkans.

Duration: 2015-2018

Since 2015 PTB supports certification and accreditation bodies active in the area of organic production in South East Europe (SEE). The Western Balkan countries (WB6) are building up their own capacities to ensure the quality of organic production for consumers. The proper certification of organic production increases its export opportunities, a trade potential not yet fully exploited by WB6. The aim of the PTB project is to develop a functional regional network that can ensure a safe and reliable organic production for consumers.

The project supports WB6 certification and accreditation bodies with theoretical and practical workshops on various topics of organic production. Technical input is provided by experts from the German certification body GfRS (Resource Protection Ltd).

The outcomes of these workshops are jointly developed SEE organic production guidelines to help WB6 countries to interpret and implement in a similar way the requirements for specific technical topics. Three sets of guidelines have been developed so far: for organic vegetable production, wild collection and bee-keeping.
A unique strength of the project is that certification and accreditation bodies can discuss general requirements of organic farming and their interpretation jointly. This inter-institutional partnership leads to a common understanding of the standards as well as of each other's capacities.

Participants have the chance to consult directly with German technical experts via an email helpline. Main questions currently raised relate to complex import questions, interpretation of laboratory results and the requirements of the new EU Regulation on organic production and labelling of organic products. In the context of an evaluation, the participants agreed that in addition to the technical knowledge gained through the project, the cross-border communication among members of the network was also improved.

In addition to networking on regional level, the participants became members of the European Organic Certifiers Council (EOCC) and can thereby advocate for WB6 interests on international level.

The cooperation is to be continued with a focus on supporting the WB6 organic production stakeholders in adapting to the new EU Regulation 2018/848, which will be in force from 01.01.2021 onwards.

The following WB6 Partners participated:
Albania: Albinspect, Directorate of Accreditation (DPA)
Bosnia and Herzegovina: Organska Kontrola, Institute for Accreditation of BiH (BATA)
Macedonia: Balkan Biocert Skopje, Institute for Accreditation of the Republic of Macedonia (IARM)
Montenegro: Monteorganica, Accreditation body of Montenegro (ATGC)
Serbia: Organic Control System (OCS), Accreditation body of Serbia (ATS)