



LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAM LEONARDO DA VINCI

TRANSFER OF INNOVATION

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IMPLEMENTATION OF A QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

FOR TRAINING IN ORGANIC FOOD RETAIL

Evaluation of the Quality Handbook at National Level

(ROMANIA)

Eco-Qualify III

WP4

Report by: May 2012
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1. Auditors

In Romania, the national authority for the accreditation of Auditors is the CNFPA (www.cnfpa.ro). Unfortunately, what the category of auditors in organic farming / food-production / retail is concerned, there is an utter lack of capacities. In fact, we have had a very hard time identifying any auditors remotely related to our specific area. We have also failed in reaching any retail specific-oriented auditors and were forced to declare ourselves content with having auditors that have expertise on general quality management answer the questionnaires Four such auditors have filled-in and resent the questionnaires out of a total of 12 to whom it has been sent.

Out of the four trainers who have answered, 3 are female and one is male. (Fig. 3.1)

What the interest that the specific topic holds, 75% of them identified it as interesting while only 25% considered it as very interesting. (Fig. 3.2)

Evaluation of the topics is as follows: 3/4 agreed that the organic retail topic is being approached by the project in a satisfactory way, 1/4 agree the Quality Handbook is adequate for the target group and that the Quality Handbook is flexible and reliable, and that the audit system of Eco-Qualify is practicable for Romania's national conditions and requirements. About the monitoring criteria regarding the relevance to educational institutions audits and the application of the Quality Handbook in the country 1/4 strongly agree, 1/4 agree and for 2/3 it's hard to say.

Fig. 3.1

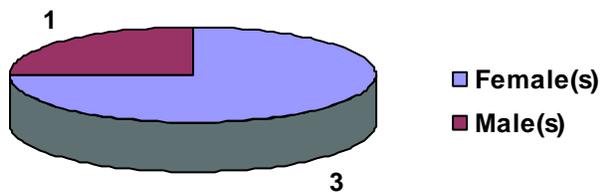
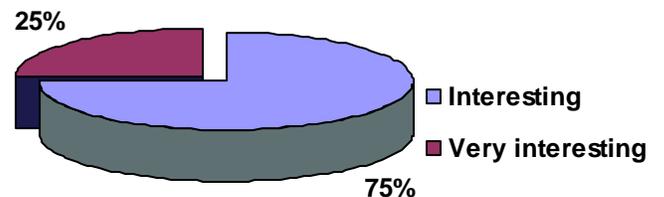
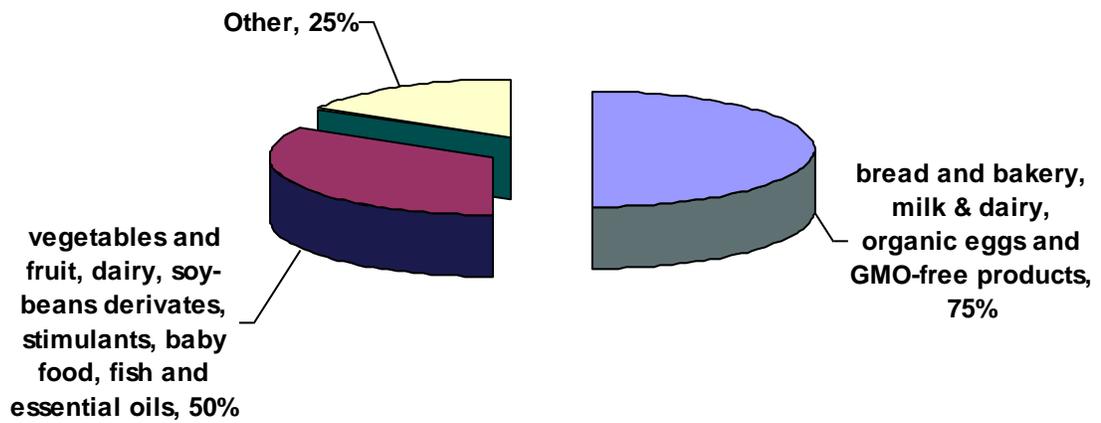


Fig. 3.2



On the Evaluation of the topics regarding to their necessity for the further development of the Quality Assurance sector – the categories considered most important are bread and bakery, milk & dairy, organic eggs and GMO-free products (75%), followed by vegetables and fruit, dairy, soy-beans derivatives, stimulants, baby food, fish and essential oils (50%) and the rest of the categories with 25% of expressed options. (Fig.3.3)

Fig. 3.3



On the questions related to the Quality Handbook: 50% strongly agree that the duration of the course is reasonable; also 50% agree that the topics covered by the Quality Handbook are best suited for the training in organic retailing, while answers range between 25 and 50% on the questions raised - if the training in organic food retailing is an actually issue demanded by the national labor market, if the Content - Qualification standards at the management level is according to the requested levels, if the proposed training methodology is comprehensive and complete, if the teachers' qualifications are well-defined and comply with national requirements, if the Content - Business competencies is relevant to the national labor market, or if the evaluation of the training service outcomes is in compliance with national standards. Also, although all interviewee answered if the structure of the Quality Handbook is according to national VET demands, 3 of the answers are neutral and one is positive.

In conclusion, what the results prove beyond any doubt is that the auditors in Romania share very little familiarity with the specific contents of the Quality Handbook. A need for specialization is definitely identifiable and there also seems to be a manifest interest therefore. While analyzing this target group, perhaps more than with the other two, it has become clear that there is a huge gap between Romania and the donor countries and that the analyzed categories are inter-connected. With the development of the training needs and the increase in numbers of trainers, auditors in the specific field of organic farming and/or organic retail should be spurred as well.

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2. Retailers

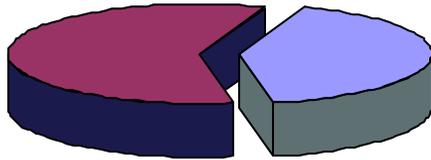
The category of retailers that was targeted by EcoR Partner in the assessment was a number of organic shops characterized by a large number of products and a high diversity of organic and natural products.

Most of the shops are situated in Bucharest but we have asked also online shops which actually are developed within last 3 years.

EcoR Partener was sending out a large number of questionnaires by email and also by web statistics tools (www.chestionareonline.ro)

Out of 80 shops invited to answer we have received just 12 replies maybe also due to the difficult economic situation. We have learned that a large number of shops were closing down because of the continuous decreasing buying capacity of the Romanians/.

Male(s), 7



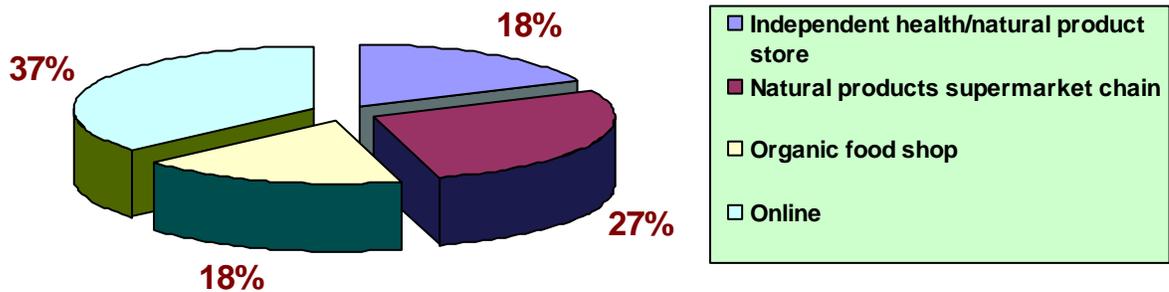
Female(s), 5

During the interviews a number of 7 persons were males and females 5 persons which is quite balanced situation.

Out of 12 interviews a number of 5 persons (41.67%) are shop owners and the rest are managers and administrators.

Having in mind that the organic sector and especially the organized marketing of organic products in Romania has started after the year 2005, 100% of the respondents are having an experience of less than 5 years in organic retailing.

Concerning the type of shops which has participated in our assessment the big ration of the respondents 37% are the online shops and the physical shops (natural products shops) are summing up 27%. The other categories of shops which are selling also organic products were asked to answer but it was lack of willingness to get involved.



What the educational level is concerning the owners and managers of the organic shops are 50% having university studies and 25% got specialized studies.

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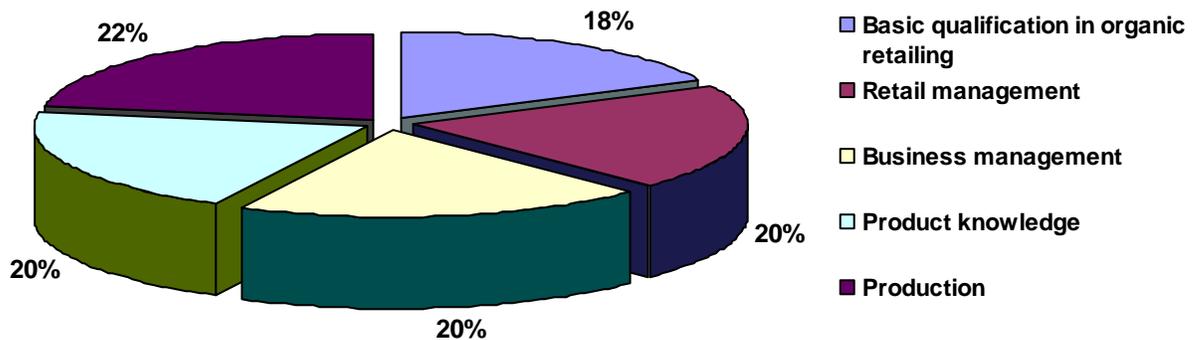
Regarding a specialized training in the organic retailing a number of 7 respondents (58,33%) are not having any training specialized in organic marketing. One respondent (Sonnentor Romania) has attended specialized training offered in Austria where the company headquarter is located.

At the question: “Do you consider it important for your business development, marketing and retailing to receive additional training courses?” 91,67 % of the answers were “yes” which is a good sign that the project will find the final targets and the products from the project can be applied in real situation.

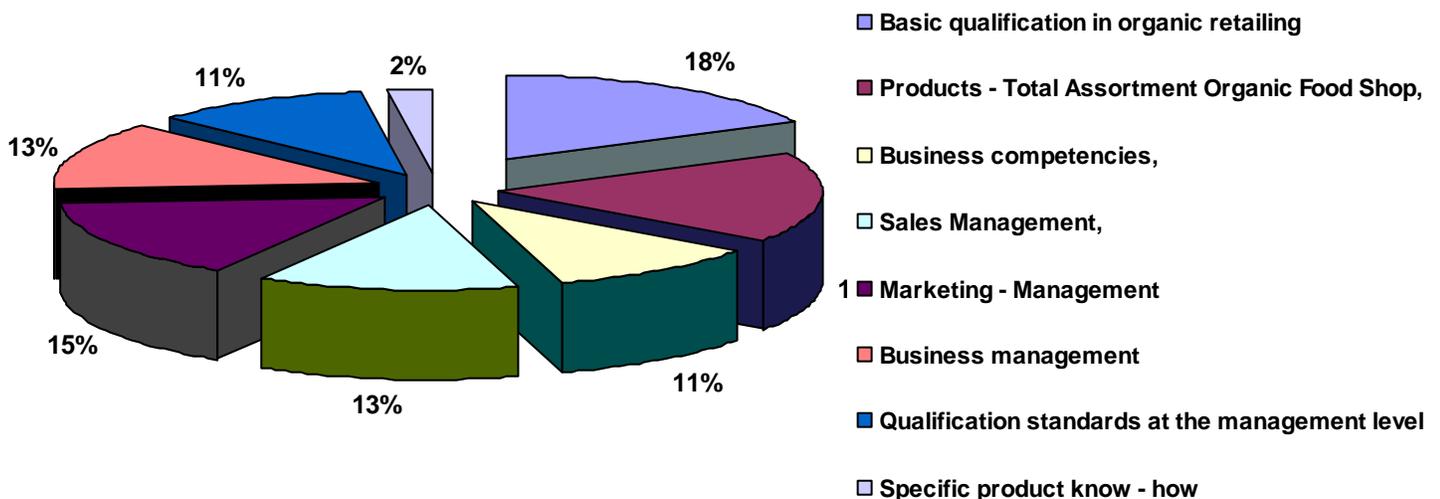
Regarding the level of training required the answers were equal 41.67% for the top management as well as for the mid level management. This means that the owners of the shops are requiring and demanding good and specialized training in organic retailing.

Demanded topics of training are difficult to arrange in priority. All of the interviewees are convinced that ‘basic qualification in organic retailing, retail management, business management, product knowledge and production’ should be included.

As it can be observed from the pie bellow the percentage of answers for the “strongly agree” are significant equal so there is a lack of information and training for all the areas.

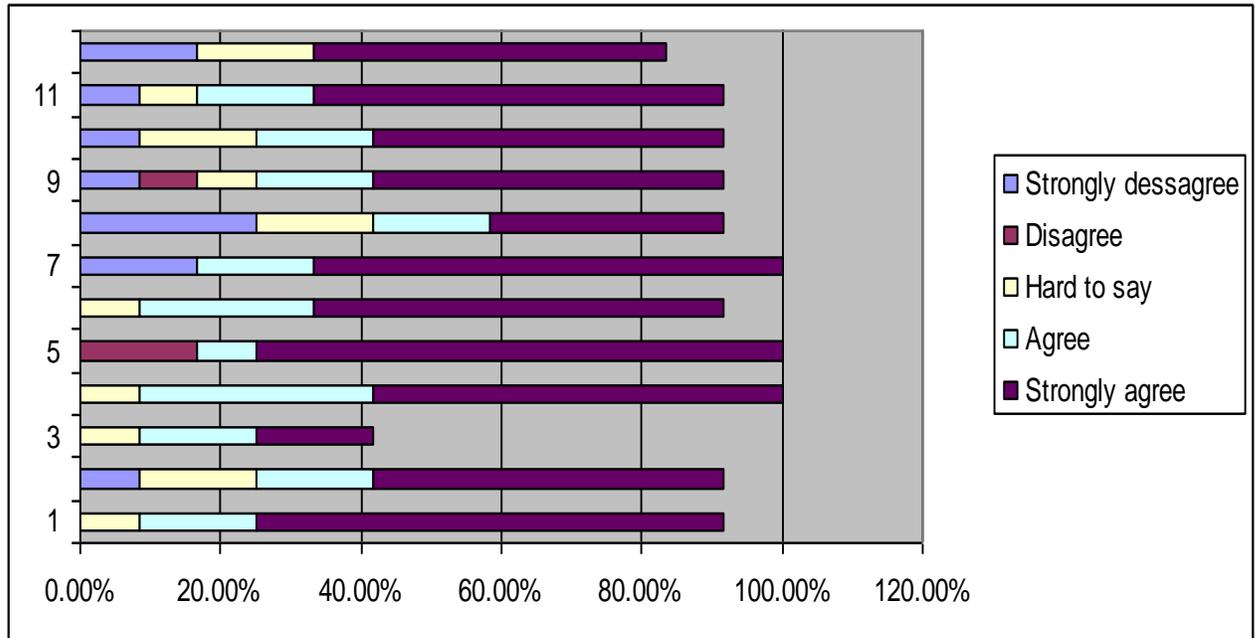


Almost the same is the situation with the most essential topics for business and staff’s competence (figure bellow). The percentage are almost equal are reflecting the need for training and specialized information.

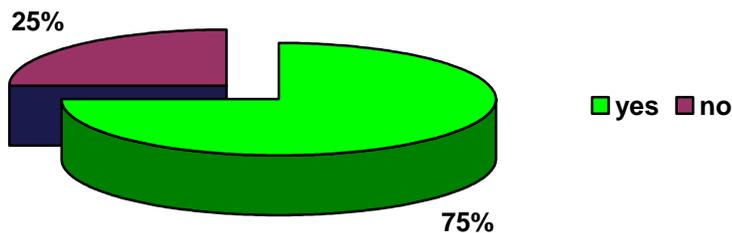


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Considering the evaluation of the topics included in the Quality Handbook the interviewers were evaluating by “strongly agree” care of goods is the most present 75%, followed shortly by many other topics like: basic knowledge for organic trade, communication skills, etc. Just 50% strongly agreed that organic agriculture topic in general is to be provided to the retailers, and the lowest “agree” grade is provided to fair trade (suppose due to the lack of information) and demand from the customers.



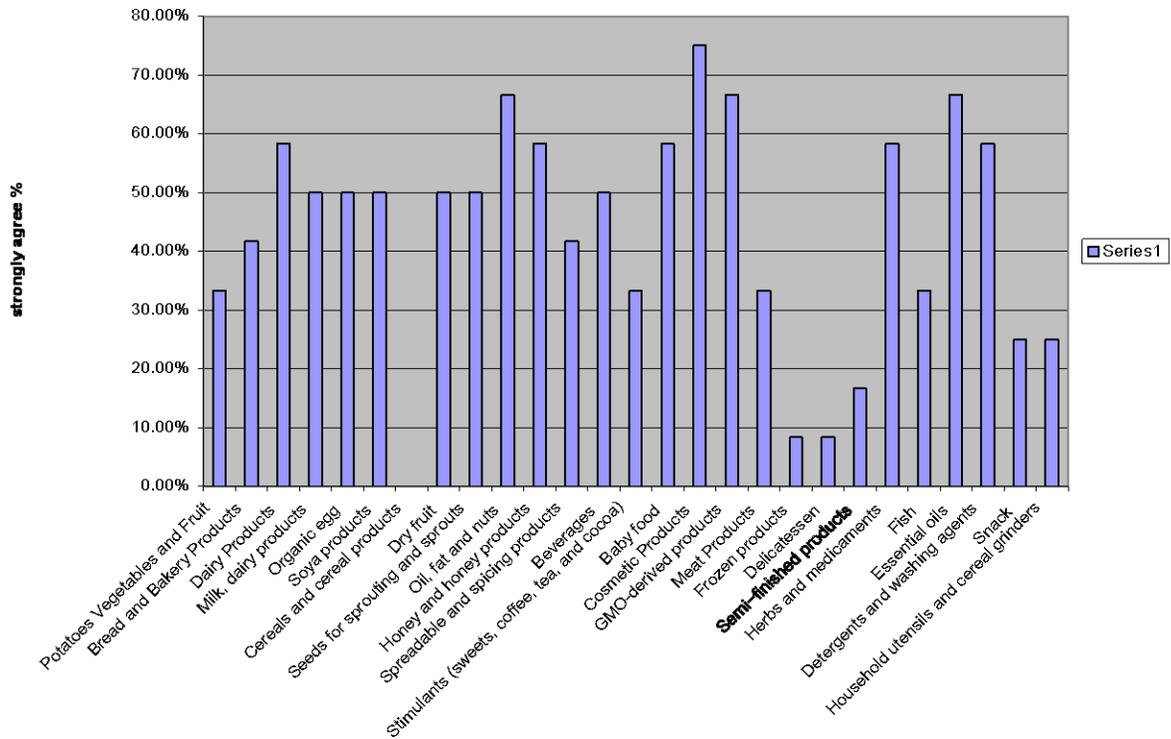
Seventy-five percent of responders answered positively about the possibility for the staff to attend training in topics related to the shop and the assortment.



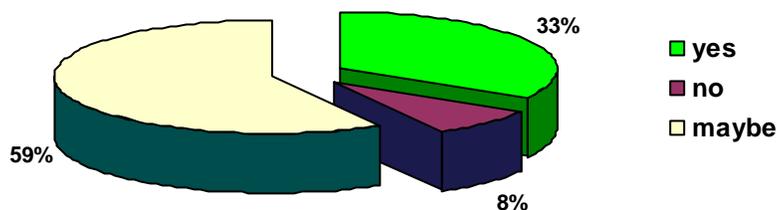
The Elearning tools are preferred by a number of 7 persons out of 12 which represents 58.33%.

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About topics regarding the necessity for business development, the greatest number of the interviewees strongly agrees that for most of them are needed. Only about GMO-derived products a percentage of 66,67% were answering that they need more information and this topic should be included strongly. The number of answers and the diversity of the priorities is given by the diversity of shops types as well as the large number and the variety of products they are selling.



To the question of becoming a trainer in organic retailing, 4 out of 12 answered positively and a number of 7 answers indicate that they have not enough information to decide.

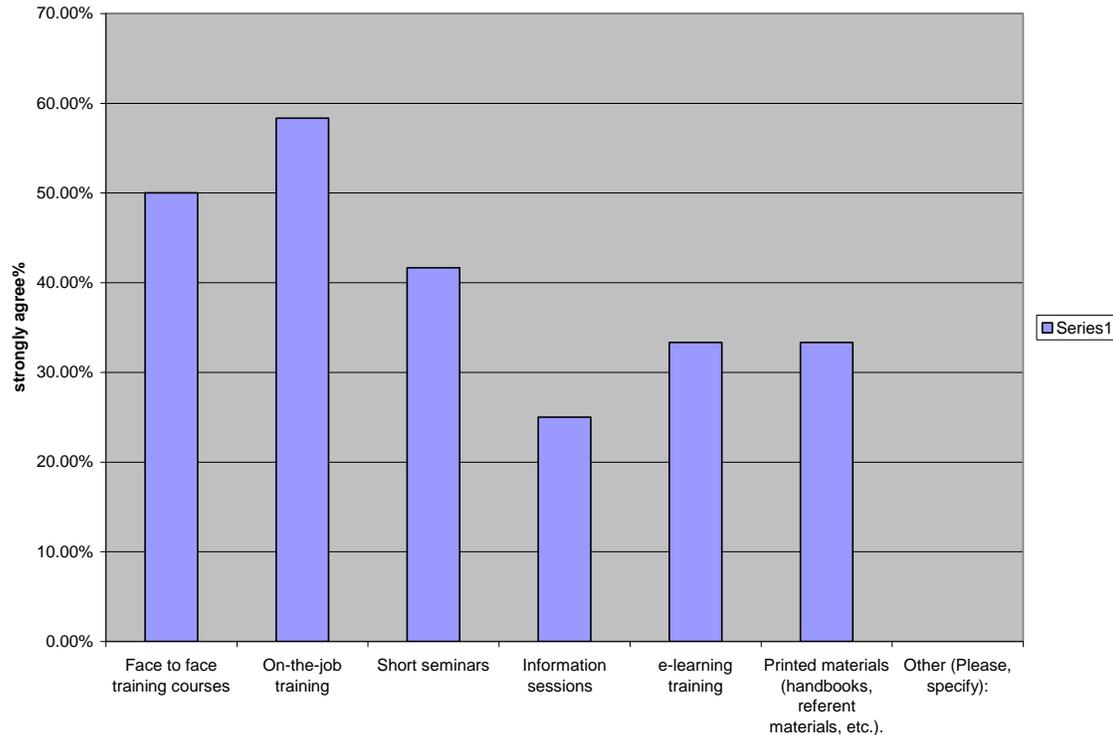


Most of them strongly agree that all topics proposed should be offered for training. For a small part of responders (1 or 2 out of 12) it was hard to say if topics such as 'Good Storage, Computing, Technology Knowledge, Environmental Protection, standardization, processing, packaging and transportation, nutrition science and individual product

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knowledge' should be offered for training. The highest demanded topics are: communication skills (75%) and organic food production 66,67%.

About the types of training tools preferred in organic retailing training most of the interviewees strongly agree on on-job training and face to face courses. Also short seminars are advisable to be performed for the retailers



Other comments:

Generally, the retailers interviewed did like the Quality Handbook as a whole and the idea of introducing the Quality Assurance System (QAS) in organic retail training was welcomed.

Other remarks – following our open questions some remarks were added. The synthesis of those is bellow:

- they need specific legislation (eg. requirement that state consume organic products a percentage of consumption)
- Benefits of organic products - compared to other classes of similar products (traditional, natural, etc.);
- Products traceability (how it is done, what guarantees there etc).
- store promotion
- ECO products business opportunities in fields.
- Extension of communication between University; Producer: Consumer: Authority
- audit methods in organic

Methods for training

- Parent company and

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- Literature, participation in specialized international events (fairs, conferences)
- Partner in Germany offers regular training
- Specialized courses, Internet, Internal, books, literature.
- Question manufacturer on the products they receive from it.

I am looking for a management course in ecological agriculture in Romania or in another country, preferably conducted largely online, you can help me? important is knowledge of specific legislation both European and national

Thank you.

- self-education
- Flexible annual training programs identified by me based on the Strategy and long term and company policy decided and communicated by the management.

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3. Trainers

The category of trainers in organic farming / food-production / business that was targeted by the EcoR Partener team comprises teachers and researchers from the academic and vocational milieu in Romania and vocational trainers from the private sector. Six such trainers have filled-in and resent the questionnaires out of a total of 25 to whom it has been sent.

At academic level, in Romania, new subjects such organic farming are being accredited at BA level by the national authority ARACIS (www.aracis.ro) after a period of at least 8 years and relevant field data concerning the importance of establishing such trades. Therefore, in the case of organic farming and/or food production, there is only one course at M.Sc level available with the University of Iasi (North-East Romania) and some elements of organic farming are included at the same M.Sc level within training curricula for sustainable farming.

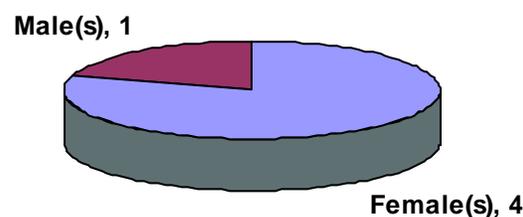
What secondary public vocational education is concerned, organic farming is not to be found as a teaching curricula.

What private vocational training is concerned, there is no specific offer concerning organic farming and/or food production. Instead, sporadic seminars and information sessions are offered by several associations or foundations concerned with environment protection and organic food.

Teachers, researchers and trainers are therefore in need of training themselves in order to be able to offer professional services. Organic retail is still regarded as an obscure subject and therefore our work is of an essential importance in order for them to include it as an optional topic in various courses and training offers.

The questionnaires have been sent to 25 persons falling into this category, wherefrom only 5 have returned the filled-in questionnaire. Some teachers have declined filling in the questionnaires because of lack of competence, others have declined because of not being familiar with the subject at all or in a very low degree.

Out of the five trainers who have answered, 4 are female and one is male. (Fig. 3.1)



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On the topic of educational and/or vocational background, all of them (100%) have an academic degree (which is a requirement, considering their field of work). (Fig. 3.2)
 Only 2 of them (40%) have an academic degree in a field relevant to organic farming, 2 of them (40%) have acquired relevant experience through research experience, while all of them (100%) have undergone a practical training related to organic farming. (Fig. 3.3-3.4)

Fig. 3.2

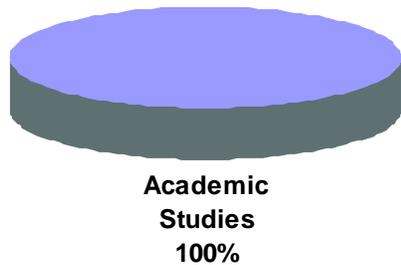


Fig. 3.3

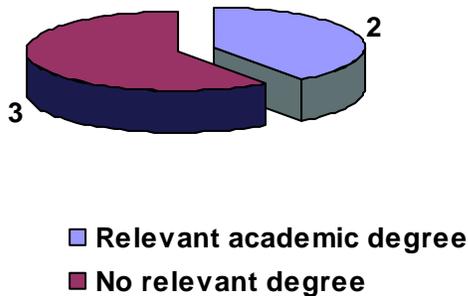
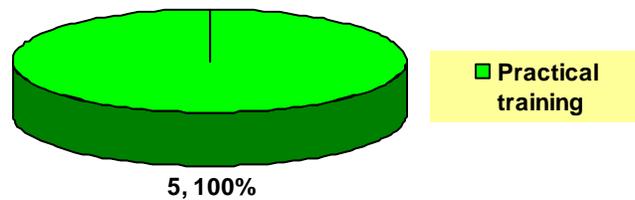
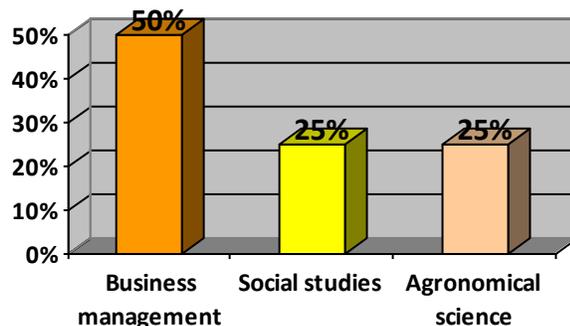


Fig. 3.4



Two of those who answered the questionnaire have more than 10 years of experience to show for (both of them being actually past respectively almost at the 20 years landmark) while the other 3 have less than 10 years of professional experience.
 All of them offer regular courses with one of them also offering irregular courses.
 None of them provides training to other institutions than those they are working with.
 All of them perform training activities at University level (academic).
 About subjects provided in the trainers' institutions: 50% - business management, 25% - social studies, foreign language, business management and retail management. 25% of them specified agronomical science.

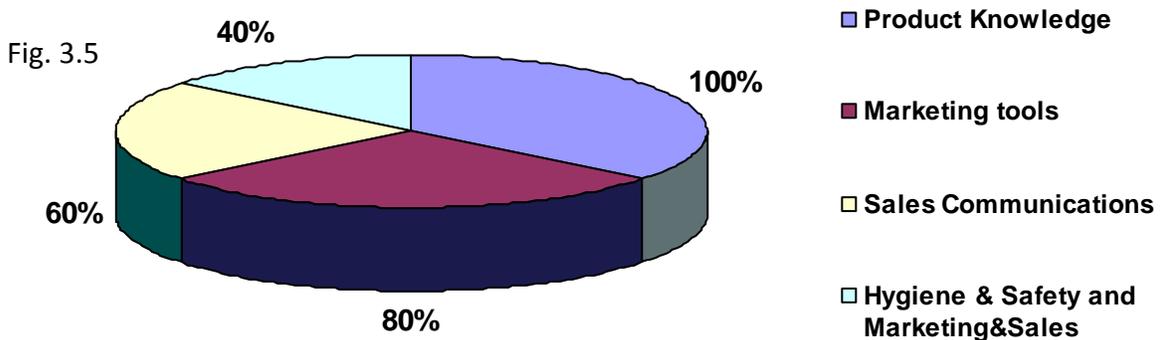


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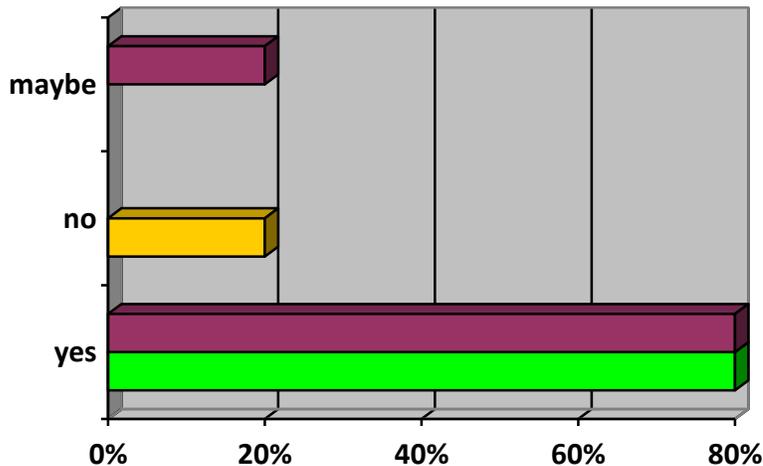
The QAS which we attempt to implement seems therefore to hold significant importance for the further development of training subjects.

Concerning the five most important topics, the following have been mentioned: market research, the management and marketing of organic products, alternative crops in organic farming, the growing of organic medicinal plants in Romania and the cultivation of organic cereals.

About the training subjects provided in the interviewee institutions: product knowledge (100%), marketing tools (80%), advisory and sales communications (60%) and hygiene & safety at the workplace, marketing and sales and accounting each with 40%.



To the question “Are you familiar with the approach of Organic Agriculture, its methods, products and all special features connected?” 80% answered positively.



About the interest in providing training in organic food stuff issues and special requirements for organic retailing 4 out of 5 (80%) answered “yes” and only 1 – “may be”.

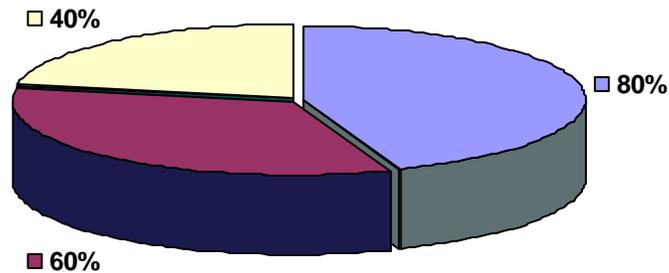
Regarding the interest that the topics offered by the Handbook present to the trainers to provide, here is the ranking of the proposed subjects: Organic Agriculture, Product

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Know-How, Tech Knowledge and Organic Food Production have ranked all highest with 80% of the expressed options. This indicates a lack of a solid basic level at trainers' level as well as a pronounced interest in computer and tech science, apart technical interest of trainers. Good storage, environmental protection and standardization, processing, packaging and transportation have all ranked next with 60% of all expressed options – this highlights a concern regarding the lack of standardization in these areas of organic farming and food-production which has confirmed our own insight and also coincide with the concerns of farmers and processors that have been addressed to EcoR Partener over the last 2 years. Basic knowledge, fair trade, hygiene and safety, communication skills and care of goods rank all the lowest with 40% of the options.

Fig. 3.6

- Organic Agriculture, Product Know-How, Tech Knowledge and Organic Food Production
- Good storage, environmental protection and standardization, processing, packaging and transportation
- Basic knowledge, fair trade, hygiene and safety, communication skills and care of goods



To the question “Can you imagine and are you able to go for training and/or internship to advanced countries in the EU to receive this special training-competence?”, 80% of the answers were positive and only 1 (20%) was negative. The same ratio is conserved by the answers to the next question “Do you speak foreign languages?” – Which actually accounts for the one exception to the former.

To the last 4 questions of the set, all answers are unanimous as follows (100%):

Do you think the content of Eco-Qualify is relevant and eligible for possible educational activities? Yes

Would you consider any additional content regarding the special conditions and requirements in your country? If yes, please name them. No

Are the criteria for educational institutions are applicable and relevant for your country and situation? Yes.

Are the required qualifications for teacher/trainer applicable and relevant for your country and situation? Yes.

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Overall evaluation of the three target groups over the Quality Handbooks shows that the products of the Eco Qualify project are the basic step that should be made for the improvement and standardization of the Romanian organic retail market.

It is a high need of training and information in the specific topics and too many topics are unknown by the shop owners.

This is due to the fact that the organic retailing in Romania has no long history and the organic production sold in the shops is mostly produced outside Romania.

Also at the evaluation time the economic situation of the Romanian buyers is not one of the best and that is why the purchase power is low and the organic retail business are suffering also.