

Workshop “ELBARN”

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Chances for Marketing in the Organic Sector and Tourism in Montenegro

Introduction

Montenegro is the youngest and one of the smallest countries in Europe, aiming at the membership in the EU, as all other Balkan neighbours. Similar to them, stock breeding still plays an important role in the mountains. Historical methods of production remain common and effective. But the markets are lost, and import of all goods is much better organised than the distribution of local products. The intensively aspired membership to the WTO is limiting the possibilities of support to the farmers as much as the Agreement for Stabilisation and Association with the EU. The motto “free markets” changes deeply the role of governments, organisations and individuals.

Nothing new, and relevant for Europe and the rest of the world. But there are big differences between well organised developed countries and the so called transition countries regarding their scope of influence and action! In addition, Montenegro like all neighbours has to define its role after the breakdown of Yugoslavia.

Montenegro sees its economic future mainly in tourism. 18% of the territory is protected either under national law (4 national parks, one more planned) or UNESCO World Heritage and Man and Biosphere.

The National Masterplan for Tourism, with a strong focus on the development of environmentally friendly mountain tourism will be adopted in 2008. Before the decision of the government, the plan will be on the agenda of the National Council for Sustainable Development, organised by its Office.

ELBARN: project objectives

The scientific and other objectives of the project are obvious. Without question there is a general human interest in saving the genetic resources. ...

But in a world where almost everything must prove its right to exist economically, it is not easy to establish a niche market connected to the rescue idea.

Creating a market?!

Psychological factors

Bound to the past:

People in Montenegro are very traditionally bound in their thinking and feeling. They are strongly attached to their broader family, help each other in the harvest and building of houses, and carefully maintain old marriage and funerary rituals. Together with this

general orientation, they appreciate the way of producing and consuming of their ancestors: e.g. renowned cheeses, wines, hams and sausages from many regions, buckwheat from the north, Mediterranean fruits and olives from the Montenegrin coast.

But: A lot of knowledge got lost, e.g. about the healing substances in medical herbs.

But: The attention given to the environment is very low. This has to do with low awareness, but also with poverty. The enormous deforestation is partly due to this widely spread phenomenon.

But: The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management subsidised the introduction of breeds with high outcome. In spite of this many farmers slaughtered their cows because they were not paid by the dairies.

Monthly budget of “normal” people

The distribution of one's income on needs and wishes depends for a big part on the social security in a society. How much money is left – if at all – for recreation, healthy food, culture etc.? In Montenegro, for many people, electricity has become a luxury good. Holidays are not affordable. The discussion about the increase of the bread price of 10 cent is a political problem. Hunger in Europe?

So for many little is left for something extra.

Concrete opportunities:

Chance 1: Organic production and consumption

Montenegro is probably the last country in Europe to start with organic production and marketing. Since five years, a small group of enthusiasts is trying to convince farmers to convert, and the Ministry of Agriculture to support such initiatives. As most farms are small scaled (3-4 ha) family businesses, having cows and a low grade of mechanisation, the way to organic production is not far.

Unfortunately, the Ministry did never show interest to support organic with any measures except for a law to be passed together with the relevant regulations. They are still waiting for an FAO technical project to start.

Nevertheless the first little organic shop in Montenegro, in the capital Podgorica with 160.000 inhabitants, has been opened on 10. January 2008. This place may become a focal point for further development of the organic “community”. Farmers are already motivated to convert, having a relative secure place to sell their products. And many consumers waited for this opportunity.

Chance 2: Planned Arc and Rescue Station

Svetozar Radonjić, the owner of the bakery AGROVITA, is a courageous agronomist with large experience. He is known and esteemed as someone who for many years is indefatigably promoting traditional Montenegrin agricultural products and traditional manners of production (like stone mills). This enthusiast gathered experts (veterinarian, agricultural livestock engineer, economist, ethnologist, and historian), bought land in a fertile region with Mediterranean climate in order to breed a number of endangered species: Busha cattle, Pramenka sheep, swine, goat, monkey, horse and hen. In summer, he will take the animals to the mountain summer pastures.

Mr. Radonjić claims that he can place all products from the Busha in a supermarket. Some traditional products are branded; to continue with others is one of the most important goals of the initiative.

Chance 3: Mountain Tourism

Montenegro is rich with most beautiful mountains. The tradition to take sheep and cattle to the summer pastures for half of the year is, although diminishing, still alive. The Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Protection, national and international agencies started to specialise on the big target groups of hikers and bikers with the promotion of “Montenegro – Wild Beauty”. To them farms with rare breeds as well as their products can be offered, as they belong in general to the people with high awareness and upper income.

Cross border cooperation in this regard has a high potential. The IPA program of the European Union offers to all interested parties financing possibilities, e.g. at the border between Montenegro and Albania. The high mountains of Prokletije/Albanian Alps shall get the status of National Park on the Montenegrin side and some kind of protected area on the other.

With the support of international organizations (Austrian-Montenegrin Partnership, Lux-Development, GTZ and others) and the engagement of the National/Local Tourist Organisations the marketing of souvenirs started recently. The first products are wild fruits and herbs, bath salt with herbs, honey, nuts, spirits, woolen socks. This offer can be extended.

Conclusions

Role of the Government and the Office for Sustainable Development

The government committed itself with a National Program for the Protection and Sustainable Use of Genetic Resources. The Ministry of Agriculture is principally ready to finance small projects. The Office for Sustainable Development will certainly support initiatives in this direction. The cooperative production and marketing – strong in communist times and after that discredited – is the best way to organise small farmers. The best way to do this is to support the National Cooperative Association.

In the National Action Plan for Education in Sustainable Development the promotion of biodiversity is foreseen with many activities, above all for young people.

Organic shop as focal point

Those consumers are in general open to traditional products of their region. And they recognise the value of preserving old breeds. Also non food products like woolen clothes may find their place here. But a lot of promotion via education and media is needed to motivate the people who can afford it, to buy these products. Let us remember the beginnings of the organic movement in our countries!

Tourism as driving force

Montenegro is already a highly appreciated destination for hikers and bikers. The prospects for the future are very well. Attractions as farms with old breeds, together with their products will certainly find interest.

Many restaurants and hotels take part in the promotion and marketing instrument “National Cuisine”. This can be extended to the products of rare breeds. Manifestations and events of AGROVITA in hotels and at trade fairs already enjoy high attention.

Farms with only autochthon breeds will certainly be promoted for special target groups by tourism organisations and agencies. Activities on the farm, especially for children, can be worked out.