

Ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to express my pleasure that the hometown of our very own *Alma Mater*, Tartu, has the opportunity to host an international conference dedicated to organic agriculture.

I will begin with a personal comment. I do live in the countryside, on a farm of approximately 80 hectares, including arable land and pastures. However, I'm not a farmer. My relationship with agriculture could be described as 'indirect'. I get my relevant information from my neighbours and meetings with rural Estonians but, above all, from those who put the produce, grown in this soil, on their tables.

Therefore, I can say the following: the market for ecologically clean or organic produce is a growing phenomenon in Estonia. Consumers are becoming increasingly demanding; they are paying more and more attention to the quality of food. The number of shops and restaurants offering organic goods has been increasing in larger towns. One could even say that it is trendy.

Demand increases supply – this is only logical.

Agricultural statistics on Estonia shows that organic produce today contributes 10% of total production volumes. Only 0.2% of the total output, however, is marketed under the organic produce label. There is a fifty-fold gap between production and marketing valutes.

The reason for this is, actually, simple: organic production consists of a uniform chain and here, in Estonia, such a chain currently does not exist. We do know what organic production is and we want to use the methods for production, but the chain is broken either during processing or at some other link.

There are many reasons for this: beginning with organisational aspects and ending with economic causes. The small size of the Estonian market and the consequent lack of economies of sale hinders the emergence of alternatives aside from the traditional production chains. All the more so now, when even producers using conventional methods complain about economic problems.

Co-operation between producers in the sphere of processing and marketing is clearly one of the keys to the successful development of organic production. In this regard, I would like to invite all small enterprises from farmers to processors and distributors to contribute to co-operation. I am also pleased that Estonia is planning to channel some funds to the development of co-operative activities, under the Rural Development Plan, this year. This will give organic producers an excellent opportunity for more effective co-operation, which should be developed sensibly and with the future in mind.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Organic production, more precisely the processing and marketing of organic products, remains

a luxury good. During an economic crisis, as we know, the first thing to cut from the budget are luxuries.

The shared goal of, policy-makers and you, scientists and researchers, is therefore to ensure a situation in which organic produce, as the most beneficial for health, would no longer be considered a “luxury good”. How can not consuming preservatives, agricultural chemicals, pesticides etc be a luxury? What could be more expensive, at the end of the day, than the health of ourselves and our children?

Being healthy cannot be a luxury in the developed 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

The development and implementation of specific measures in organic farming should remain the task of the specialists. You, the scientists, know probably the best how the yields of organic agricultural production can be increased.

I hope that over the next couple of days you will look for the answers to these and the many other key issues of organic agriculture. I have faith that you will do this, knowing that the future of hundreds of small-scale producers and millions of consumers, interested in maintaining their health, may depend on you.

Thank you!