

Agro Eco - Annual Report 2008

About Agro Eco

Agro Eco stimulates the development of the organic, sustainable and fair trade sector through tailor made advice and training. Our main activities are project management, training, development of standards and verification methods, and measurement and evaluation. Human and social values are of prime importance in our internal management, in the implementation of our projects and in the collaboration with our partner organisations. Integrity, innovation, awareness and commitment to sustainability are key elements of all our working relationships.



Merger

In December 2008, Agro Eco and the Louis Bolk Institute merged in order to have a stronger impact on research and advice concerning sustainable and organic agriculture, both in the Netherlands and abroad. In the Netherlands, the combined organization operates under the name of Louis Bolk Institute. The foundation utilizes the name 'Agro Eco – Louis Bolk Institute' in the communication with relations abroad.

This annual report presents the most important projects and activities undertaken during 2008 by the legal entity Agro Eco. Projects and activities of the Louis Bolk Institute are presented in a separate annual report, which can be accessed at www.louisbolk.nl



Merger between Agro Eco and Louis Bolk Institute

In December 2008, the Louis Bolk Institute and Agro Eco joined forces. This merger has created a new foundation that not only provides training, advisory services and project implementation, but also conducts scientific research on sustainable and organic agriculture, nutrition and health care. The mutual interest is an optimal interaction between research and advice. Therefore, the merger should improve the translation of practice-based questions into research questions, as well as the translation of research results into practical knowledge, national and international agricultural policies. The Agro Eco – Louis Bolk Institute is one of the world's leading knowledge centres for organic and sustainable agriculture.

The Agro Eco - Louis Bolk Institute's headquarters are located in Driebergen, the Netherlands. Agro Eco's headquarters in Bennekom were closed upon the merger. There are two branch offices, in Kampala (Uganda) and Accra (Ghana). Activities in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia are increasing and realised together with our local partner organisations.



Dutch team of Agro Eco - Louis Bolk Institute



Africa

Supply Chain Projects

EPOPA-programme In Uganda, the successful EPOPA programme was completed in 2008. EPOPA was a 'development through trade' programme aiming to improve the livelihoods of rural communities through the export of organic products. The project was implemented by Agro Eco and its Swedish partner Grolink, between 2002 and the end of 2008. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) was the main financier.

The result of the EPOPA-programme is a very vibrant organic sector in Uganda and the establishment of an organic sector in Tanzania. The total cost of the EPOPA programme equals the cost of one cup of coffee for every Swedish taxpayer. EPOPA has improved food security and livelihoods for more than half a million people, and has increased farm-gate sales by fifteen million dollars per year for the participating farmers.

Grolink and Agro Eco present their experiences and lessons learned in the book '*Organic Exports, A way to a better life? Export promotion of organic products in Africa*'. This publication can be accessed at the website of Agro Eco - Louis Bolk Institute.

After the completion of EPOPA, some exporters who had participated in the programme asked Agro Eco for follow up assistance. As they recognize the added value of the organization, they are willing to finance the supporting activities.

Other projects in Eastern Africa focused on value chain development, certification and quality management.



African women in vegetable garden



Cocoa Project In 2006, Agro Eco realized the first organic cocoa project in West Africa.

Agro Eco implemented several organic and Rainforest Alliance cocoa projects in West Africa in 2008, among others in Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, Cameroon and Sierra Leone. For example, Green & Black's (Cadbury) asked Agro Eco to develop a supply chain of organic cocoa beans for their premium quality chocolate. The Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana identified a suitable area for the project. As there is no farmer organization in that area, Agro Eco is responsible for the entire project management, including the employment of field staff, certification, and provision of inputs. Over time these responsibilities will be transferred to an emerging farmer organization. Secondly, Agro Eco and the Ghana Organic Agriculture Network (GOAN) have also made a biodiversity assessment and analyzed what the costs are for better biodiversity management. This has been financed by IUCN.

Africa Pavilion Agro Eco and Grolink organized the Africa Pavilion for the first time at BioFach

2008. It was a big success and one of the highlights of the organic fair. The Africa Pavilion was initiated to give Africa a more powerful image and position as organic supplier. In addition, it served to assist companies in their sales as well as to introduce starting exporters to the global markets.



The African Pavilion at BioFach attracted many visitors

Seventy-five companies and farmer groups from twelve countries participated, altogether about 175 entrepreneurs.. The Pavilion enabled them to meet more than 3000 professionals in organic trade.

During the fair, Agro Eco and Grolink organized a policy workshop on promoting organic export from Africa in order to influence agricultural policy-making within African countries.



Other Projects

Next to the above mentioned projects, which focus on enhancing organic value chains, Agro Eco has also worked on various other activities, such as assisting farmers and schoolchildren to produce organic vegetables. In addition, Agro Eco has evaluated a programme focusing on trade promotion of organic agricultural projects.

Organic School Garden Project Ghana

In 2008, the Agro Eco - Louis Bolk Institute has launched the Organic School Garden Project in Ghana, in partnership with the Ghana Organic Agriculture Network (GOAN).

The project started in January with ten schools in seven different districts. Each school has a one-acre organic garden. Within three years, the project will develop organic gardens in 24 primary schools in Ghana. The gardens are intended to produce organic vegetables and fruits for the meals of schoolchildren. Organic fruits and vegetables are healthy and safe for the children (because of the absence of pesticides residues) and they are environment-friendly. Crops that are grown in the organic school gardens include leafy vegetables, cabbage, tomato, pepper, onion, garden eggs, okra, carrots, water melon, citrus and pineapple. With one exception, all school gardens started in 2008 were very successful and produced rich harvests.



The organic gardens are also used as demonstration farms for local Farmer Field Schools. As the farmers and their children become familiar with the advantages of organic farming and organic farming methods, they are increasingly producing organic vegetables themselves.

Evaluation of organic programme for SECO

In October 2008, the Swiss Economic Development Cooperation (SECO) asked Agro Eco, in consortium with Wageningen International and Outdoor Organic, to evaluate SECO's programme in the field of trade promotion of organic agriculture products from 2002 to 2008. This SECO programme is implemented in India, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Burkina Faso and Central America. Three Swiss-based companies were involved in the implementation of the programme: FiBL, Helvetas and Inter-Cooperation. The evaluation objectives were to assess the project activities and the programme strategic achievements, and to make recommendations for a future SECO strategy. An evaluation matrix was developed around the five core evaluation questions: effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, impact and relevance. The project included a thorough document review, discussions with SECO and implementing partners in Switzerland, three country visits to India, Romania and Ukraine, and a learning workshop with stakeholders in Switzerland.



Europe

Poultry: designing the outdoor run The outdoor run is an important aspect of organic and free range poultry. The aim of this project, which was implemented in the Netherlands, was to develop an outdoor run that promotes animal health and welfare but does not harm the environment or promote the spreading of diseases. Four demonstration farms were selected on the basis of their innovative outdoor run systems. Organic and free range poultry farmers improved their runs based on group discussions, excursions and visits to demonstration farms. During the project, research was done on the effect of outdoor runs on nutrient leaching and the relation between outdoor runs and animal health. The results of this research were discussed in the farmers groups. Project experiences have been included in a practical guide for farmers to improve the design and operation of their outdoor runs.



A poultry outdoor run in the Netherlands

Ekoland 2008 In 2008, Agro Eco played a crucial role in the editing and publishing of Ekoland, the monthly magazine for the Dutch organic sector. Both the chief editor and a member of the editorial staff were from Agro Eco. Their thorough knowledge of the organic sector and their extended network enabled them to produce eleven editorials and seven articles. Ekoland's readership is about 8000 people, including organic and conventional farmers, policy makers, teachers, researchers, organic retailers and agriculture students. The activities will continue at the Louis Bolk Institute.

Russia Together with partners, Agro Eco did a feasibility study for large scale organic farming in the region of Moscow for the Russian oligarch Tvevov. The study was commissioned by the Dutch Agency for International Business and Cooperation (EVD). The project area comprised approximately 1,500 ha which had been fallow since the early 1990s. Only some dairy farming survived during the last twenty years, but on a very poor level. Although the soil is rather poor, the conditions to start organic production for nearby Moscow – a city of 15 million inhabitants – were quite good in the beginning of 2008. The idea was to start a chain of organic shops and restaurants that would cater to city residents who are concerned about food quality. The project involved three mixed farms. One of the farms was intended to become a demonstration farm for organic production, with vegetable production, dairy and poultry. However, as the economic situation changed dramatically in 2008, the project has been cancelled until economic prospects improve.



Middle East and Asia

Iraq In 2007 and 2008, Agro Eco has conducted a feasibility study in Northern Iraq (Kurdistan) to investigate the possibilities to establish an organic agricultural sector in the region. The results of the study indicate that the agricultural sector has deteriorated in several respects. The study describes measures needed for rehabilitation, for example the introduction of new technologies, improved education of farmers and higher investments by government and private parties in agriculture. The introduction of organic production methods can also lead to better sales, since the demand for organic produce of crops, like pomegranate, apples and grapes is rising. The study proposes five pilot projects to improve agriculture and to enhance the establishment of an organic sector.

Afghanistan In 2006, Agro Eco started a project to re-introduce the production of saffron in Afghanistan, together with the Dutch company GSE. The project is situated in Herat, not far from the Iranian centre of saffron production, Mashad. Agro Eco developed a training manual on saffron production and trained several groups of smallholders. The project was successful and copied in Uruzgan, another province of Afghanistan. With a consortium of Dutch and Afghan partners, Agro Eco started a follow-up project regarding the development of fruit tree nurseries in Herat and Kabul. The reason to start this project was that during the last thirty years most of the orchards have disappeared: many fruit trees were cut for fuel or were destroyed during the war, and irrigation systems did not work anymore. While fruit growers are now interested to plant again, they lack good planting material. The nursery in Kabul is considered a showcase of professional horticulture.

Kazakhstan In December 2008, Agro Eco started a two-year project in Kazakhstan. The overall goal of this project is to contribute to the sustainable development of organic farming in Kazakhstan.

The main activities of the project are:

1. To set up a resource centre, where stakeholders can get information about organic agriculture;
2. To inform several groups of farmers through training in organic farming;
3. To assist a selected number of farmer groups to convert to organic production;
4. To communicate with the national government on legislation for organic production.



Discussing training sessions in organic farming

The project is implemented in close cooperation with the *Foundation for Integration of Ecological Culture (FIEC)* from Kazakhstan and is financed by EuropeAid.

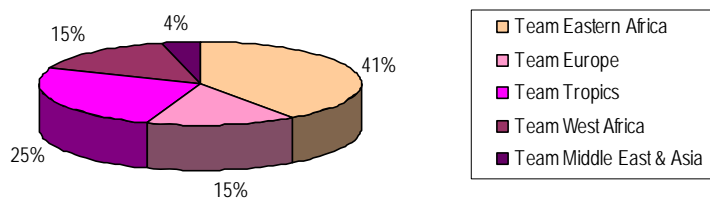


Agro Eco – The Organization

In 2008, Agro Eco worked on more than a hundred projects in twenty different countries. Turnover was €2,043,389.50, which is comparable to the turnover in 2007. Agro Eco's main commissioners were the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV), the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), EuropeAid, the Dutch Agency of International Business and Cooperation (EVD), Oxfam Novib, the Dutch foundation Stichting Doen, and German GTZ.

In 2008 Agro Eco consisted of five teams: one for projects in the Netherlands, one for Eastern-Europe, the Middle East and Asia, and three for Africa: Team Eastern Africa based in Uganda, Team West Africa based in Ghana and Team Tropics based at the Agro Eco 's headquarters in the Netherlands. The pie chart below shows the relative turnover per team.

turnover per team



Agro Eco Offices



Our Staff

The merged entity Agro Eco - Louis Bolk Institute currently employs around 70 people, active in the Netherlands, Ghana and Uganda. The CEO is Vincent Blok, and the Managing Directors are Bo van Elzaker (Department Tropics), Miek Jong (Department Health Care and Nutrition), Chris Koopmans (Department Agriculture Europa), and Nel Blok (Finance). The Country Managers are Alastair Taylor (Uganda) and Willem-Albert Toose (Ghana).