



Agroecology: Pioneering Organic

Background

In the 1970s, the thought of not using pesticides and chemicals in agriculture was unheard of. The focus at the time was centered around building profits and yields with the use of chemicals. The aim in switching to organic was to help protect the environment, and to improve the health of people in collaboration with nature. In 1978, Agroecology, a Ukrainian based company, refused using herbicides, pesticides and other agrochemicals. At the time, there were no other such companies in the Ukraine, making Agroecology the only organic farm in the region preserving and increasing soil fertility as part of its production process.

Today Agroecology is a family run company certified by Organic Standard according to the EU regulation and Bio Suisse standards. They operate out of over 7'000 hectares of organic arable land in the Central Ukraine region of Poltava. The company produces a wide array of produce, including millet, wheat, buckwheat, sunflower, fine ground barley, oat flaks, and rye flower, to name a few. Along with crop produce, Agroecology has 6'000 dairy cattle, which are key for the company's success in improving soil fertility.

Challenges

Within the past decade the company struggled to find buyers who offered fair prices for their products, however they made their first international partnership in 2015. With the help of events such as Biofach in 2016 the company found a few more potential buyers. The main export market for the company is Switzerland, due to its Bio Suisse certified status. Agroecology is focused on establishing long-term cooperation with its partners, based on good relations and mutual trust.

The company also maintains a good relationship with local and regional authorities and administrations. The authorities paid special attention to the company during initial visits due to the unique value that the company adds to the people and environment of the community. In 2016, the Poltava regional council signaled their devotion to organic farmers by developing and approving a support program for new organic production farms, providing them with a 100 per cent refund on their organic certification.

The way ahead

Agroecology's plans for the future differ from the average organic farm – they focus on quality over quantity. They do not wish to expand in terms of acreage, but instead plan to add more value to their products. The company's first step towards this goal involves establishing a processing unit for oil production for all of their processed products (including Bio Suisse certificate products), such as sunflower oil. With this, the company is eager to establish more strategic business partnerships in order to enter new markets.

Plans for the future of the company also include the abolishment of marketing for non-value added products within the next five years. Agroecology is already adding value to their grain and sunflower, and they are working on adding value to their milk products. The company is also looking to add value to other aspects of animal husbandry, like meat products. Apart from

the company's organic certificates, Agroecology's land is also certified for production of organic baby food products. They hope that by expanding into the organic baby food market they can gain a monopoly of the industry within the Ukraine, solidifying their position as a profitable multipurpose, sustainable agribusiness.