



PROJECT REPORT 2006

Assistance for Organic Agriculture Addressing the Conservation of the Environment and Human Health Mutual exchange of Ideas and Experiences, Training for Best Practices and a Survey of Development Models Related to Alternative Agriculture

Days of Organic Agriculture in Romanian and Armenia

In June 2006 Green Lane Agricultural Assistance NGO in cooperation with “Bioterra” Organic Farming Association of Romania received financial support (grant) from the Open Society Institute East-East Program for implementation of the cooperative Armenian-Romanian project for development of organic agriculture.

The project aimed to encourage and support study of best practice and exchange of experience in using alternative organic agriculture systems and new models of their development between Armenian, Romanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Moldavian specialists.

Development of organic agriculture, including production and marketing of organic agriculture products and food, is one of the strategic directions in Green Lane activities. In the field of organic agriculture we focus on the following primary activities:

- Propagation of organic agriculture as a potentially profitable business for Armenian farmers, especially for poor-resource and small-scale farms and rural households.
- Training for farmers and agricultural specialists involved in organic agriculture one way or another.
- Experience and knowledge sharing between farmers, agricultural specialists and students, in-service trainings.
- Support in marketing of organic production.

As organic agriculture is a new concept and a novel farming system in Armenia, and in this domain we are behind of other countries in our region, Armenia has to make continuous and strong efforts to provide sustainable development of this agricultural sector and to become competitive in the regional organic market.

The main objective of the project was to support ten members of Green Lane NGO (trainer-farmers from different regions (marz) of Armenia, agricultural specialists, representatives of the local governing bodies) to expand knowledge in theory and practice of developing organic agriculture and introducing and managing organic farming systems. The project provided participants from Armenia with possibility to study the organic agriculture management models used in Eastern and Central European countries (Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Moldova) with aim to develop effective mechanisms of putting those models into practice in Armenia.

The project has been implemented in three stages.

1st stage (12-21 July 2006):

Exchange Program in Romania: in this stage ten specialists from Armenia participated in training program organized by “Bioterra” Organic Farming Association of Romania. The training program included seminars, field trips, and on-farm workshops.

Host organization: “Bioterra” Organic Farming Association of Romania.

Prof Dr Cornel Man, President of “Bioterra” Association of Organic Farmers of Romania

Ing. Albert Imre, Executive Director of “Bioterra” Association of Organic Farmers of Romania

Camelia Botar, Project Assistant

Zsuzsa Balough, Project support

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SCHEDULE:

13 July 2006, Cluj Napoca

Introduction of the participants, the organizations they are representing and the scope of professional interest.

On the first day of the program participants visited the University of Agrarian Science and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj Napoca. They made a tour of the university campus, saw the pieces of agriculture machinery, and visited

the university greenhouse where students guided by the instructor professors cultivate different crops – tomato, cucumber, pepper, squash, beans, cabbage etc. Armenian and Romanian specialists had a discussion on methods and techniques (irrigation, manual pest control etc) being used for conservatory cultivation of crops.

After that the participants made an official visit to the office of the Dean of the University, Dl. Ioan Rotaru. Following the meeting the group along with the Romanian specialists working in the agriculture domain – university professors and lecturers, representatives from the County agriculture consultancy office and National organic certification bodies (Ecoinspect) participated in seminar held at the University Blue Auditorium. The participants presented their organizations and projects and discussed the trends of the development of organic agriculture in Romania and Armenia. They share experience and ideas regarding the most effective ways to develop this sector in both countries, to increase the number of organic farmers as well as the profitability of the sector in Romania and Armenia.

Mrs. Piroska Lorincz, Executive director of ECOINSPECT National Organic Certification Body, made a presentation on the organic certification and inspection process in Romania. She explained how the national certification bodies of Romania manage to compete with the well-known and experienced international and western European certification companies.

Prof Cornel Man, President of Bioterra Association and Professor of the University of Agrarian Science and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj Napoca, made a presentation on the history, current situation and development trends of the organic agriculture in Romania and told about the activities and achievements of Bioterra Organic Farming Association.

Mrs. Nara Yaralyan, Information & Communication Specialist, presented activities of Green Lane NGO in the field of organic farming.

14 July 2006

Ten Armenian specialists and four specialists from Bioterra, along with the representative from the Open Society Foundation, began a tour of Romanian organic farms. The tour began with the farm of **Dragan Zoltan** (Salonta, Bihor County), where participants viewed modern equipment obtained by Mr. Dragan under the SAPARD program. Mr. Dragan told about the EU SAPARD project he is involved in. The farm, which is owned by Dragan for 32 years, is of approximately 260 hectares (the main crops are wheat, corn, sunflower, canepa, alfalfa, rye and pasture). In near future Mr. Dragan is planning to open an organic store in the town of Salonta, which will offer the production from his own farm and other organic farms in the area. Participants visited also an animal farm owned by Dragan, which had 20 Holstein milk cows, 50 pigs, laying hens and horses.

After that the group had a tour of the family farm of **Ioan Ratiu** (Cega). The farm has over 85 ha; the main crops cultivated are corn, wheat, potatoes, sunflowers, tritacale, peas, alfalfa and pasture. Mr. Ratiu told about his own experience of managing an organic farm and cultivating crops using organic techniques (crop rotation, organic fertilization – compost, diluted urine and manure).

Telling about the practice of managing the farm Mr. Ratiu emphasized that he had a contract with Curtisoara organic egg farm and cultivated corn, wheat and tritacale under that contract. The cultivation of sunflower is subsidized. The rest crops are grown on small area and consumed directly on the farm. Ratiu has also a dairy farm but unfortunately he is not able to sell the milk at the price of certified organic milk because of the fact that now there is no an organic processor in the area. That's why Ratiu along with other organic farmers sell organic milk to a conventional processor at a price significantly lower than its true market value.

15 July 2006

The group participated in celebration of Salard Day (village of Salard). During the opening ceremony of the Salard Day Festival, Mr. Gagik Manucharyan, representative of the Ministry of Agriculture of Armenia, addressed the residents of Salard telling them about the reasons for the visit of the Armenian group to Romania and the cooperative project being implemented jointly by Bioterra and Green Lane and wished them success.

After taking part in the festival Armenian specialists along with the hosts had a tour of the farm of **Nagy Miklos**, the mayor of Salard. The group viewed a demonstration plot for the utilization of dilute urine on the sunflower cultivation. Participants discussed using of green manure in organic cultivation. They examined a field cultivated with facelia, a plant using as green manure. When incorporated in the soil it can raise the productivity of the next

crop by at least 10 %. The organic area of **Nagy Miklos's** farm is over 100 ha (the main crops are wheat, canepa, and corn). The farmer has also 10 head of cattle for milk and meat.

Visit to the farm of **Mircea Burde of Lapusel**

The group also had a tour of the greenhouses of Mircea Burde of Lapusel (Maramures County). This was a very good opportunity for the Armenian guests to become acquainted with the novel methods used by the organic vegetable farmer. The greenhouses of Mr. Burde serve as a very impressive illustration of organic farming as a model of sound and sustainable ecosystem. The greenhouses are surrounded by nettles, wormwood and other plants being utilized for both making compost and combating pests (the wormwood). Mr. Burde uses organic methods of pest control very effectively. In greenhouses there are bird nests, which help to combat insects. For the control of soil pests Burde uses bonemeal (for softening the soil).

The farmer cultivates vegetables - tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, and cucumber. It should be stressed that Mircea Burde cultivates his own varieties of pepper and cucumber, which are recognized by the National Federation for Organic Agriculture. One of the members of the Armenian group, Ms. Laura Tadevosyan, is a scientist working with the Research Centre for Vegetable and Melon Crops, she shown great interest in the varieties achieved by the farmer himself and in the vegetable cultivation techniques being used in the greenhouses. In particular, in Burde's greenhouses soil mulch is used which helps to prevent the germination of weeds and maintain the humidity. In the area of the greenhouses compost is obtained from weeds, nettles and radishes.

The participants had an interesting discussion on up-to-date organic cultivation techniques and methods; they discussed use of crop rotation, vegetable production, mulch and fertilization, pest control in organic systems as well as some issues of sustaining and increasing economic profitability of organic farms. In particular, the members of the Armenian group were interested in the methods of disease control used by the organic farmer as well as in the Mircea Burde's experience of farm management. It should be stressed that Mircea Burde is a well-educated and professional person; he participated in a number international training programs (one of those in the Netherlands, at the International Agriculture Centre) and has large knowledge and experience of running an organic farm.

16 July 2006

In the morning, on their way to the region of Moldova, the group visited the „Merry Cemetary” in Sapanta.

After that the participants visited the dairy farm of **Iulian Bedrule** (Sadova). It was very interesting to learn that Iulian and his family along with many other farmers of this area are involved in a cooperative project of producing organic milk for **La Dorna Dairy** (Vatra Dornei). This dairy is an organic processor, which produces organic production being sold through the largest supermarket networks of Romania. The project, that allows organic farmers to sell their production at the acceptable price and maintain profitability of their businesses, is supported by the European Union. Under this project (through the support from the European Union) Bedrule's farm has constructed a stable and secured 20 head of young milk cows from Austria. A bull was purchased in Austria for natural breeding and to maintain gestation of the herd organically. Reproduction is currently done with sperm brought from Austria. The farmer showed two basins for collecting liquid fertilizer, which he spreads on the pasture two times a year.

During the visit to Iulian Bedrule's farm the group had an interesting discussion on organic animal husbandry and marketing of organic animal production. In particular Armenian specialists were interested in getting more information about the system of subsidizing organic animal husbandry in Romania, the legal environment, the methods of preventing and curing disease, the breeds of the animals, the methods of milking, storing and chilling the milk and sustaining the price. The farmer told that his cattle produced high quality milk (the daily production is about 17-18 l and the annual milk production - 5,400 l, the fat content - 3.5-4 %). The milk produced on this farm is purchased for a price of .73 – .82 ron. This is supplemented by the government - .19 ron in summer and .23 ron in winter. With the supplement the average price per liter of high quality organic milk is 1.0 ron (about ½ us dollar). This price is paid by the milk processor only for milk of high quality. Conventional milk of equal quality is sold for half the price. The farm has a vet that inspects the cows at least once a week, but if necessary can come daily to administer medications. The farm is inspected by the German firm, BCS.

17 July 2006

Visit to the dairy farm of **Victor Poienar:**

Poienar's farm is also involved in the La Dorna project and gets support from the European Union. The farm has 19 cows and 8 calves; the group observed the herd and had a discussion on the breeds and farming techniques and methods. Mr. Poienar told about his cooperation with La Dorna Dairy which is beneficial to the farmer in terms of marketing the organic milk produced on the farm. He said that the milk was collected daily and transported to the collection center located in Fundul Moldovei. The group viewed the milking machine and the chilling tank for storage of milk. Poienar's farm also has a contract with a vet who visits the farm regularly to vaccinate and examine the cattle.

Visit to **La Dorna Milk Collection Centre**, Fundul Moldovei:

At the La Dorna milk collection center participants were told about the system of collecting milk from about 180 farmers of the area and transporting it to the collection centre. The visitors observed the methods of analyzing the quality of the milk. The organic milk, on average, contains 3.42 % fat, 8.66 % dry matter, a density of 28.75 %, 3.5 % protein, 4.5 % milk sugar & 0 % Water. The milk collection and cooling tank with a capacity of 5,000 liters was displayed. The amount collected at any time is usually around 2,000 liters.

Present in the group of Armenian specialists was a representative of one of the largest Armenian milk processing companies, Ashtarak Kat Ltd, Mr. Rafik Muradyan. He stressed that his company was planning to start organic production and the experience of La Dorna could be of great use to his colleagues in Armenia.

Visit to the farm of **Morece Ghiorghita** (Botos):

The organic farm of Morece Ghiorghita has 20 head of milk cows and is also involved with the La Dorna project. The participants viewed the automatic milking machines and cooling tanks.

Visit to the farm of **Dorina Dravniuc** (Breaza):

In Breaza a fourth dairy farm was visited. This was the farm of Dorina Dravniuc. Here there were two breeds of cattle that are very well adapted to the mountain zones of Moldova with rich production and high quality: Pinzgau and Bruna both from Austria. For most of the year the cattle are allowed free stabling on the mountain pasture and are brought in only during times of cold weather. There is a practice of rotating the pasture between hay and grazing, but there is only a portion of the land that is used for haying. Additional hay is from private farmers in the area or is bought from other producers. In the area of the farm there is a large hay storage area. The cattle are fed a mixture of hay, cereal and concentrate. Construction of the stable area here is different in that there is a large area of ground and excellent airflow. There is a separate room for milk collection and chilling.

Visit to the farm of **Lucina Herghelia** (Cheile Lucavitei):

The next visit was to Lucina Herghelia of Cheile Lucavitei. In this area there are many plants listed for special protection including bear grapes, little carnations and corner flowers. All can be found here by a spring with sulfur water. Herghelia was started about 150 years ago by Queen Maria Teresa with an impressive collection of pleasure horses. Currently with the support of the SAPARD project there are 400 different breeds of horses both for work and pleasure. The breeds include hutupan, Romanian ponies, English ponies, Bucovina horses and many other local breeds. Herghelia has a large number of caretakers that live on the site. There is about 1,700 ha of pasture and 40 ha in woodlands.

Visit to the dairy producer **Campulung** (Botus):

In the town of Botus a visit was made to the dairy producer Campulung. Here the group was shown the method of processing milk into soft cheese, hard cheese and yogurt.

Seminar in Fundul Moldovei: "Organic Agriculture: techniques and methods of raising animals in the organic system"

Seminar has been held in the town hall of Fundul Moldovei. There were about 30 people in attendance – agricultural specialists and consultants, farmers, representatives of the municipality.

Prof Cornel Man, the President of Bioterra Association, made a presentation. He presented the current situation and the development trends of the organic agriculture in Romania, spoke about some legal issues and organic standards. He drawn the attention of the audience to the organic standards of animal raising and animal welfare, told about the process of converting the farming system from conventional to the organic one, about the inspection and certification process, management of organic farms and marketing of organic production.

There was a lively discussion with questions and answers on the above topics, Romanian specialists shared ideas and opinions with their Armenian colleagues.

17 July 2006

Meeting at the County Office for Agriculture Consultancy of Bistrita-Nasaud:

The group had a meeting with the Director of Agriculture, ing. Mihai Visan, the Director of OJCA Ionica Paun and a large number of agricultural specialists. In the course of the round table discussion directors told about the current activities in Bistrita County Office for Agriculture Consultancy. Armenian participants asked the Romanian colleagues many questions concerning the applications of the regulations of the Ministry and the structure and activities of the Office of Agriculture Consultancy and its relationship with farmers.

The round table had as a participant the single organic farmer in Bistrita county who cultivates medicinal plants, but there was noted a genuine interest in the organic sector as a base for agriculture in relationship to the European Union and the market for Romanian agricultural products.

Visit to the farm of Ioan Andras:

After completing the visit with the Ministry and County officials the group departed for the farm of Ioan Andras in the village of Uriu. This farm specializes in raising dairy cattle with 35 head of which 19 are for milk. In the summer the cattle have free stable in the mountains. The milking is done mechanically and the milk is collected in a chilling tank after which it is taken to a processor. The percentage of fat is 3.5%. A farmer from Armenia mentioned that the Andras farm is very similar to the farms in Armenia.

18 July, 2006

Travel day to return to Cluj

19 July 2006

On the 18th the group spent a day visiting the city of Gherla, established by and formerly the home of the largest Armenian settlement in Transylvania. The tour was led by a member of Bioterra and university professor Mihai Gheorghe (whose ancestors originally were Armenian) and they met with local representatives of the Armenian community of Gherla. There was a short presentation of the history of the Armenians in Romania after which the group returned to Cluj to visit the offices of Bioterra located in nearby Luna de Sus and to view the plantings of the famous Cluj Botanical Gardens. In the afternoon the tour concluded with a festival dinner at the Cantina of the Agricultural University. The events of the last few days were recounted and the visit results were analyzed. All of the participants spoke of their impressions and all that they had seen and the places they had visited.

II Stage – Reciprocal visit of ten organic agriculture specialists from four Eastern European countries – Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Moldova, to Armenia

From 9th to 16th of August 2006, ten specialists from Romania (Bioterra Organic Farming Association), Hungary, Bulgaria and Moldova, were in Armenia with reciprocal visit under the Project for Assistance to Organic Agriculture Addressing the Conservation of the Environment and Human Health. All of them are experts of high qualification and have large experience and knowledge of organic farming systems. The main reason for their visit to Armenia was to examine jointly the current situation in organic farming in Armenia and to outline the most effective ways for developing this sector in future.

During the visit to Armenia the group of foreign experts along with the colleagues from Green Lane participated in a number of workshops, seminars, meetings, visits to farms and round tables.

8 August 2006

Arrival of the participant from Moldova

9 August 2006

Arrival of the participants from Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary

10 August 2006

- Meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Armenia
Round table: "The Role of the Ministry of Agriculture in the Development of Organic Agriculture". The experience of Hungarian, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Moldovan specialists
- Trip to Lusakn village, Aragatsotn region; visit to organic apricot orchards

At ten o'clock the participants had a meeting in the office of Green Lane NGO. Nune Sarukhanyan, the president of Green Lane NGO, welcomed the guests and wished them fruitful and interesting work in Armenia. They met the staff and got acquainted with activities and projects of the organization. Special importance has been attached to the organic projects carried out by Green Lane. The Green Lane staff members presented not only their projects but also all partner organizations, both national and local, which cooperate with Green Lane NGO in carrying out different projects.

On the same day, at 10:30, the group participated in a round table discussion at the Ministry of agriculture of the Republic of Armenia. The guests had a meeting with Mr. David Loqyan, the Minister of Agriculture. Other specialists working with the Ministry of agriculture as well the representatives of mass media (7 TV channels and information agencies) were present at the meeting and actively participated in the round table discussion.

The national policies in development of organic agriculture have been presented and discussed by the participants.

- We expect the year of 2007 to be a starting point in developing organic agriculture in Armenia, - David Lokyan said. He stressed, that organic agriculture is being seen as one of the all-important strategic directions of the Armenia's agrarian sector. The Minister pointed out the importance of introducing organic farming systems for Armenia's farmers because of their mainly small and split parcels of land. According to him, organic farming can provide some of the Armenian farmers with an opportunity to be competitive not only in the domestic but also in the export market.

David Lokyan stressed that organic agriculture will allow Armenia's farmers to add value to their production and receive additional profits from their small land-plots." The Minister believes that among other things it is time for Armenia to consume "wholesome food." Minister Lokyan thanked guests for their willingness to share knowledge and experience and for their contribution to the promotion of organic agriculture in Armenia.

The guests introduced themselves and the organizations they represented. They spoke about the experience of developing organic agriculture in their own countries and expressed their opinions about the strength and threats of developing this sector of agriculture in Armenia. Amongst the strengths many of the foreign experts pointed out the support provided to the organic farming by the government of Armenia. They noted that in many European countries development of organic agriculture in the early stage turned into "struggle against the national authorities that shown very little interest in promoting this sector of economy".

Currently The Law on Organic Agriculture is under discussion in Armenia. ECOGLOB National Organic Certification Body has already started working towards inspection and certification of the farms in conversion.

Nune Sarukhanyan, the President of Green Lane NGO, noted that this was the first international project implemented by the organization. She emphasized that the experience and knowledge gained by the Armenian specialists in Romania are very important and useful for the future activities of the organization. She stressed that it was very important to the Armenian participants of the Romanian stage of the project to have field trips and visit the farms and that there will be visits to farms in Armenia because the importance of establishing a base for this agriculture can be shown in the accelerated conversion to organic agriculture.

In the course of the discussion Rafayel Sarukhanyan spoke of the experiences gained in Romanian during their study trip made in July and Dr. Cornel Man, Gyurasits Elemér, Ivan Ginev and Iurie Senic presented the current situation of organic farming in their countries.

In the afternoon foreign experts along with the representatives from Green Lane NGO visited an organic orchard established by Shen NGO in Aragatsotn region, near the village of Lusakn. The orchard is at the altitude of 1,200 m., on land with very unfavorable conditions (stony soil). But Shen managed to provide irrigation and all the necessary agriculture techniques to establish a 38-hectare orchard with 6,000 apricot, 1,000 peach, and a 1,000 plum trees there.

Foreign experts took part in a seminar in the course of which the representatives of Shen NGO presented their projects and told about their own experience of shifting the farming system from conventional to organic. The orchard is under conversion just now and is inspected by ECOGLOB National Organic Certification Body.

The foreign experts shared ideas with the Armenian colleagues and told about the situation in the organic sector of agriculture of their own countries.

11 August, 2006

- Trip to Gandzaqar village, Tavush region. Farmer Field School on Organic Agriculture and farms in transitions.
- Visit to the Agricultural support center of Tavush marz

The group made a visit to the village of Gandzaqar (Tavush region) where there is a Farmer Field School on Organic Agriculture supported by Green Lane NGO as well as a farm in conversion run by the family of the leader of FFS, Mrs. Emma Hakobyan.

A seminar has been held in Gandzaqar to provide the foreign experts with opportunity to meet the members of the FFS and the farmers and learn about the experience of organic farmers of Gandzqar and the activities of FFS.

The FFS has been established three years ago through support from the USDA Marketing Assistance Project, after that, for the last two years, it is supported by Green Lane NGO that provides consultancy and technical assistance to the farmers to produce and market organic production.

At the seminar Nune Sarukhanyan stressed that Green Lane NGO pays great attention to the provision of farmers with the necessary knowledge and to the development of their professional skills, which is crucial to assure sustainability of their businesses. She emphasized that this particular project also aims to create an opportunity to farmers to benefit from the knowledge and experience of foreign experts.

Armenian and foreign experts along with the farmers of Gandzaqar discussed a number of problems faced by small-scale farmers that have to start and maintain their businesses without sufficient money and on small plots. The farmers noted that under these conditions it is really difficult to sustain business individually. That's why they establish cooperatives and associations to buy agricultural inputs and to market the production collectively.

The experts had a meeting with the leader of the FFS on Organic Agriculture Mrs. Emma Hakobyan. She is a farmer trainer and helps other members of the FFS with advice and consultancy. Emma is a founding member of Green Lane NGO and participated in a study visit to Romania sponsored by the Open Society Institute and conducted by Bioterra Association.

The seven members of FFS on Organic Agriculture are cultivating mainly vegetables (cucumber, green beans, onions, tomatoes etc). The land under conversion is inspected by ECOGLOB National Organic Certification Body. They are cooperating with Shen NGO that pays for the inspection to ECOGLOB and helps farmers to sell their produce through Shen organic store. Besides there is a project of selling organic wild berried and fruits some of the FFS members are involved with. They have already started the process of inspection and certification of the particular forest area where the fruits and berries are gathered. In future the members of FFS will start the production of organic wheat.

Emma Hakobyan spoke of her plan to produce a unique Armenian yogurt (matsoun) with milk from her cows.

12 August 2006

- Visit to "Ashtarak Kat" Milk Production Plant in Aragatsotn Region
- Trip to Lori region, meeting with the Women Research and Advisory Group of Gargar village,
- Tour to the Dendropark (Botanic Garden) of Gyulagarak
- Visit to RRR Milk Marketing Cooperative, Agarak village

The group visited the factory (situated in Aragatsotn region) of one of the largest milk processing companies in Armenia – Ashtarak Kat Ltd. They learnt about the history of the company, which was privatized in 1995. The factory (which had been producing only cheese) was bought by seven former employees.

A round table discussion has been held at Ashtarak Kat with participation of the foreign experts, representatives of Green Lane, the managers and the specialists of the factory. There was an interesting discussion on the possible ways of developing organic processing industry in Armenia and marketing organic dairy products on internal and external markets. Ashtarak Kat managers spoke of their plans to create a system for supporting the dairy farms in conversion to be able to buy organic milk for processing.

Ashtarak Kat is not currently producing organic products but the conditions exist for a change – there was much interest in speaking with the Romanian and Hungarian experts on this subject including the basic material, dairy preparation and farmer interest in obtaining bio certification. It was indicated that there is farmer interest but there is a lack of money for the necessary inspections. Nune Sarukhanyan said that Green Lane was hoping to find a solution to this problem.

The group had a tour of Ashtarak Kat plant, observed the equipment of the technologies of milk processing.

In the afternoon the group visited the Women and Research Advisory Group, in the village of Gargar, region of Lori. Nine women established the research group. The foreign experts stressed that it was very interesting to find that in Armenia the pioneers of ecological agriculture are women.

The Research Group started working in 2003 when a research farm for medicinal plants was established in Yerevan. The members of the group managed to attract the attention of sponsors and donors. Up to the present time their activity has earned ten projects and they are only just beginning to establish the bio organic pool. From this group of ten members (the nine women and one man) six persons already start the conversion, and four are interested about it.

13 August, 2006

- Visit to the Farmer Field School, village of Aghavnadzor, Vayots Dzor region (Tour of Noravanq Church)
- Trip to Syunik region: Milk Collection Center in Gorhayk village; the first Milk Consumer Cooperative established by Green Lane NGO in Shaghat village

The group visited vineyards in the village of Aghavnadzor, Vayots Dzor region of Armenia. Here (in Aghavnadzor and neighboring six villages) a unique grape variety called Areni is cultivated.

A workshop has been held during which the participants had a discussion with the members of the Farmer Field School of Aghavnadzor. Hrayir Asaturyan, a founding member of Green Lane presented the activities of FFS member farmers and told that he started the FFS in 2003, prior to organic agriculture becoming a major topic of discussion. He stressed that in this area about 90% of the farmers are involved in grape growing as the Areni variety is very famous in Armenia and sold at a very good price.

The FFS program was started by ten farmers. Hrayr Asaturyan spoke of the unique experience of using opportunities offered by IT by the farmers of FFS. As a result of cooperation with Project Harmony School Connectivity Program the FFS farmers can get the necessary information from the Internet (there is an internet class at the Aghavnadzor school). This allows the farmers to keep updated on market information and all the necessary data.

The cooperation with Green Lane has led to the idea of introducing organic agriculture to this area. The group met Hazarapet Nazaryan, the producer of medicinal tea of this area. There was a discussion on some problems related to the organic conversion of the production system and marketing of organic products. The farmer told that he had begun organic conversion in 2006. The production has a bi-lingual label – Armenian and English – and is packaged to meet the highest international standards. The work is seasonal with a period of 30 days in a year to package the production. In 8 hours it is possible to package between 1,000 and 1,500 individual packets with a value for each packet of 1 U.S. Dollar. However the farmer emphasized that he experienced some difficulties with marketing the produce. In his opinion the main problem is that currently he offers only a single product. That's why he is working towards broadening the assortment.

In the afternoon the group visited a milk-collecting centre in the village of Gor Hahq and made a visit to a farm in conversion (since 2004). The participants examined the inspection documentation and discussed some issues regarding the transition to organic production system with the farmer. The farm is inspected by an organization from the staff of FVO. It was stressed that about 150 farmers that live in the village about 25 participate in the ecological program.

Later that same day the group toured another milk-collecting centre in the town of Saghat. This center is established through the assistance of Green Lane. The equipment (milk cooling tank) is new and is scheduled to enter production in the middle of August. This unit, which corresponds completely with the highest health standards, was installed in one of the oldest buildings of the agricultural cooperative. Here milk will be collected from four villages of the region for the equivalent payment of a quantity equal to two hours of production per month. A reserve of 2,000 U.S. Dollars was set-aside for those farmers that did not have the necessary cash.

14 August, 2006

- Meeting with "Action Against Hunger" international organization, Round table: "Experience of developing organic agriculture in Romania, Hungary, Moldova, and Bulgaria"
- Visit to the milk marketing cooperative in Tolors village
- Visit to Selim, LLC, (Sari Goat Cheese) Vayots Dzor Marz

The group had a meeting with the representatives of the Action Against Hunger (ACH) International Foundation that is carrying out a rural project in Sisian region (southern Armenia). The leaders of the Foundation spoke of the mission and activities of ACH in Armenia and the cooperation with Green Lane NGO in the field of agriculture and rural development.

The ACH program was started in the poorest village of the Sisian region and aimed to fight poverty and sustain livelihoods of the poorest part of the villagers. Managers, consultants, technicians and Spanish and Mexican economic coordinators partake in the project. The group visited the fields of the farmers, involved in the ACH projects, to discuss the possibilities of developing organic farming in this area. In this same topic a round table was held to debate the problems and possibilities of developing organic agriculture in Armenia as a way of effecting the improvement of the living conditions of the rural population in the context of combating hunger and poverty.

After the round table the guests along with the representatives on Green Lane NGO toured to the village of Tolors to visit to Hovik Badalyan's farm. He is a farmer active in the Green Lane program. Assisted by the consultant of Green Lane Rafael Sarukhanyan, he practices outdoor keeping of the cattle, which is a novel animal husbandry system in Armenia.

In the village of Tolors the group visited another milk-collecting centre established with the help of Green Lane NGO. The farmers of the village told about the support received from the Green Lane consultant Rafael

Sarukhanyan, who helped them to reorganize the Milk Consumer Cooperative established in 2001 so that it can be run in profitable way. Currently the cooperative has 60 members and is led by 6 individuals.

Later in the day the participants made a visit to Salim goat dairy. It was a surprise to the foreign experts to find that in the small mountain village was a modern facility of the highest standards (90 goat breeders with about 800 goats are involved in the project). The family that constructed this modern facility had received a grant from USDA. The group observed the equipment and the milk production process (milk production is .8 l. per goat). The farmers told about their business: the annual milk production is between 7 and 10 metric tons and the cheese produced is sold in Armenia and in California. The problem the farmers have encountered to date is – faced as well with the producer of medicinal teas – the fact that there is insufficient capacity for the cheese to be produced in a sufficient amount to meet the Armenia market and still satisfy the export to California

15 August, 2006

- Round table in Yerevan – Current Situation in Organic Agriculture in Armenia Brief presentations by the organizations.
- The current state of Organic Farming in Romania, Hungary, Moldova, and Bulgaria; Steps to be made and measures to be undertaken in the current stage of the development in Armenia

The closing round table was held in the hall of the hotel Golden Tulip in Yerevan. The event brought together the hosts, the guests, and many participants representing the Ministry of Agriculture, the Romanian Consul and the members of the July Armenia delegation to Romania. The meeting totaled approximately 25 people and was carried on two television channels.

Nune Sarukhanyan, the president of Green Lane NGO, once again presented the project and stressed that it created a good opportunity for the foreign experts to visit different regions of Armenia and to form an opinion on the prospects and potential for developing organic farming in our country. Mrs. Sarukhanyan stressed once again that, as it was already mentioned by the European experts, in all countries represented at the meeting the development of organic farming system in its early stage encountered lack of understanding from the side of national authorities. In Armenia we have strong support from the government, Nune Sarukhanyan emphasized, which realizes the advances of using organic systems by the Armenian farmers. This was pointed out by Mrs. Sarukhanyan as one of the strong points in developing this sector of economy in our country.

The work of the session was led by Mr. Garnik Petrosian, the Head of the Department for Plant Production and Plant Protection of the Ministry of Agriculture. He stressed that due to its natural resources, diversity of geo-climatic zones, absence of chemical industry and a number of other favorable factors, Armenia has a large potential for developing organic agriculture. And this is the main reason for the government to promote the development of this sector of agriculture.

- The idea of organic agriculture in Armenia has been brought forward by the non-governmental organizations - Green Lane, Ecoglobe, Shen, - said Mr. Petrosyan, - and it's my great pleasure to draw your attention to the fact that many of those organizations are led by women. Thanking them for the spirit of contributing as servers to the well being of ecological agriculture in Armenia, the speaker mentioned that in the present assignment that the NGOs are the most important promoters of the knowledge of the organic system and the conditions and regulations in this domain.

Mr. Hrachia Tsepnetnyan, the Head of the Department for Agriculture and Rural Social Development, presented the draft Law on Organic Agriculture, which is under discussion currently. He stressed, that a legal framework for organic agriculture is on the list as a priority by the government. This is a portion of the negotiations to collaborate with the European Union.

After that the foreign experts made presentations, sharing ideas and impressions of the project and telling about the situation in organic agriculture of their own countries. They made expert evaluation of the situation in the field of organic farming in Armenia and outline the ways of promoting this sector in the most effective way.

16 August 2006

Departure of the guests

III Stage, August-October 2006

At this stage, Green Lane Agricultural Assistance NGO published booklets, leaflets and a newsletter on organic agriculture as well as made a short film telling about the Armenian-Romanian cooperative project on organic agriculture. The members of Green Lane NGO as well as the national and international institutions interested in organic agriculture have been provided with these information materials free of charge.

Besides Green Lane NGO prepared an electronic fact sheets in English to deliver information about the project to all the partners, including those out of Armenia, through e-mail. The fact sheets have been sent to different international organizations working in the field of organic agriculture.

More than ten fact sheets on different organic agriculture related topics have prepared and delivered to all organic farmers of Armenia, to the specialists working with the Ministry of Agriculture of RA, research and education institutions as well.

Nune Sarukhanyan, PhD

Project coordinator,

President of Green Lane Agricultural Assistance NGO

15.10.2006