

Organic farming and resilience

Salzburg, Austria



Modernisation's potential to undermine resilience

Farmers increasingly become office workers: only those who handle the **paper work** well, survive. This reduces the time and energy available for other tasks (e.g. time with the family, experimenting, networking).

Farm women are **overburdened**: they have to help with handling large milk quantities, keep abreast of changing legal and documentation requirements, need to take care of the children and the household. Low quality of life threatens succession.

Modernisation often means larger machinery. But: the **bigger the tractor**, the bigger the distance from nature.

Standardized production methods may not be appropriate for local soils. **Mechanisation** reduces human-animal interactions. Feedback loops are severed.

To achieve economies of scale, **farms must grow**. This leads to path dependencies which reduce the room for manoeuvre of farmers.

Higher debt load
More investments
Work overload
Larger machines
More grassland
More cows
Investment must pay off
Must build a new barn
New regulations

MUST GROW!

To put pressure on farms to grow, means that **smaller farms** have to make way. This weakens solidarity, reduces diversity, and limits the number of potential partners for joint initiatives.

Pressure to invest means a constant **debt load**, which reduces the ability to respond to emerging opportunities.

Modern production methods require high expenditures for agrichemicals, veterinarians, etc. As commodity prices tend to be volatile, farmers are often caught in a **cost-price squeeze**.



Lessons learned

- ✓ **Organic farmers** are more likely to develop alternatives to 'get big or get out'. This has enabled small farms to thrive and contributed to social cohesion.
- ✓ Many farmers welcome a **territorial, multifunctional approach to farming**. Yet, formal institutions tend to have a sectoral approach, which narrows the type of initiatives they endorse.
- ✓ **Diversity** has many advantages. On a farm it allows to buffer shocks and enhances adaptability. A diversity of farms in a region is a valuable source for common initiatives and fosters **social innovations**.
- ✓ Encouraging **experimentation** and **open-ended learning processes** is important to enable initiatives between diverse stakeholders. This requires a broader understanding of learning, i.e. one not limited to technical knowledge transfer.
- ✓ **Quality of life** on farms is essential to ensure succession. Offering coaching services would help address inter-generational issues and support women.

Organic farming's potential to strengthen resilience

Organic farms are often diversified, which allows them to weather shocks. They not only integrate diverse agricultural activities, but address diverse societal demands, e.g. through **energy production**, **tourism** and **education services**.



Higher direct payments means less pressure to grow. This leaves more time to discuss emerging opportunities and to think how the farm may be **adapted**. Less debt also strengthens the ability to **transform** the farm.

Organic farming builds on **closed nutrient cycles** and **experiential knowledge**. This ensures locally adapted production methods, and reduces dependency from the agrichemical industry.

A territorial orientation enables **joint initiatives** with a variety of rural stakeholders.

Organic farms use economies of scope rather than economies of scale. As many small farms remain, there is **lively rural community**.

Cooperation rather than competition enables **peer recognition**. Organic farming also receives more societal recognition for environmental services.



Contact: ika.darnhofer@boku.ac.at
Visit our website: www.wiso.boku.ac.at/afo/forschung/rethink
Illustrations: Alexander Czernin

