

Converting or not converting to organic farming in Austria: Farmer types and their rationale

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Abstract. Reasons for converting to organic farming have been studied in a number of instances. However, the underlying rationale that motivates the behavior is not always made clear. This study aims to provide a detailed picture of farmers' decision-making and illustrate the choice between organic and conventional farm management. Based on 21 interviews with farmers, a decision-tree highlighting the reasons and constraints involved in the decision of farmers to use, or not to use, organic production techniques was formulated. The accuracy of the decision-tree was tested through a written survey of 65 randomly sampled farmers. The decision-tree permits the identification of decision criteria and examines the decision-making process of farmers in choosing their farming method. It also allows for the characterization of farmer strategies and values, identifying five types of farmers: the "committed conventional;" the "pragmatic conventional;" the "environment-conscious but not organic;" the "pragmatic organic;" and the "committed organic." The importance of taking into account heterogeneity in farmers' attitudes, preferences, and goals and their impact on the choice of a farming method is emphasized.

Key words: Austria, Decision-tree, Farmer decision-making, Motivation, Organic farming

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Introduction

A goal of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union (EU) is to integrate environmental considerations with agricultural policy. In order to achieve this, the EU has created the framework for a national agri-environmental program in Regulation 2078/92. The national guidelines are based on voluntary measures, inviting individual farmers to contract with government agencies to produce environmental goods in return for compensatory payments. As organic farming is generally

seen as an environmentally sound farming practice, Austria is actively seeking to increase the number of organic farms by including an organic farming measure in the ÖPUL, the Austrian agri-environmental program.

The ability to reach this policy goal depends on the willingness of farmers to participate in the program and implement changes on their farms (Morris and Potter, 1995; Wilson, 1997; Beedell and Rehman, 2000; McGregor et al., 2001). Various studies have investigated the factors influencing farmers' motivations for participating in agri-environmental measures in general,