

The Conversion of the Rural Area of Gallecs to Organic Farming in the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona

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Abstract

Gallecs is a publicly owned peri-urban agricultural area of 753 hectares located 15 km north of Barcelona. It has a fundamental role generating landscape diversity, humanizing the surroundings of the city and acting as a green lung in a strongly urbanized environment. In 2006, 11 farmers and the Consortium of the Area of Natural Interest of Gallecs started the conversion to organic agriculture of the non-irrigated land. The Agroecology Research group of the University of Barcelona collaborates with the Consortium and evaluates the conversion process from the agronomic, environmental, and economic points of view. The aim of the project is to monitor the conversion of 100 hectares to organic farming and to spread it to the whole of this territory, thus us converting Gallecs in the largest area devoted to organic farming in Catalonia. It is intended to carry out a new agricultural management model that is economically viable and respectful with the environment, focused human feeding crop production, while at the same time favoring biodiversity, soil protection and the improvement of the soil quality, the recovery of the traditional varieties. This is a model that guarantees the quality of food and fosters farmers' association in the frame of peri-urban agriculture.

The main incentives to the farmers to start the conversion have been: (i) an increasing environmental awareness (a result of their emotional relationship with the area, the singularity of the space, and respect for the nature) with the goal to watch over the preservation of the territory for the long-term through the application of sustainable agricultural practices; and (ii) the possibility of creating added value to the products that they cultivate, and therefore assuring the economic feasibility of the management of their exploitations.

Before the conversion, cereals occupied the 90.03% of the surface. Two years after conversion, however, this area decreases to the 48.15%, reflecting the crop diversification. The comparison among organic and conventional crops in 2006 shows that the gross margin of wheat in conversion is 243.92€, while for conventional agriculture it is 110.26€. In 2007, the gross margin of the wheat in conversion was 444.06 €, which was very similar to the conventional margin (434.10€), although the production decreased approximately 20%. The survey carried out during the last two years has also shown that the biodiversity increase is mainly related to crop diversification and that the soil fertility has been favored by the introduction of legumes species in the crop rotations. The economic evaluation is more favorable in relation to conventional crops in the case of Montcada's wheat. Regarding the economic balance, the gross profit margins of the crops in conversion during the second year (2007) have increased in comparison with the first year (2006), mainly because of the more favorable weather conditions, which made possible higher yields, and due to the higher price of cereals.

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