

Policy Brief: *Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs in the organic sector (1000-1200 words max.)*

1. Overview of the Agri-food sector in the Lodzkie Region

- From the perspective of supporting organic sector development, what is the relevance of agri-food sector to your region's economy? Consider this in the context of promoting SME competitiveness and sustainability in your region.

In the Lodzkie region, the increasing demand for organic food conduces to development of organic farms, while growing demand for organic food is most often conditioned by health, the willingness to provide safe food for children and the need to improve diet. The main areas of support include the following: integration of neighbours from large urban agglomerations by expanding social cooperatives focusing on high-quality food; establishment of associations of entrepreneurs from organic food sector and organic farmers; marketing of local/traditional organic products in social campaigns combined with study visits, in particular for children and teenagers (showing how production looks like, participation of recipients in organic food manufacturing); support of local farmers in the field of logistics, marketing, modern sales technologies, and thus shortening the supply chain (producer - consumer). For policymakers, key consideration for supporting the organic sector will be the contribution of the organic sector to meeting overarching policy goals. This includes biodiversity, soil protection and climate change strategies, health and well-being, clean water, reduction in antibiotic use, green growth and job creation.

2. Policy context - Current regional support measures.

- Outline the main elements of your region's agri-food policy that apply to the organic sector. Consider the role of these policies in supporting SME competitiveness and sustainability

There are many support areas for organic sector within Regional Operational Programme for Lodzkie Region 2014-2020 (ROP) that are directed to SMEs, including organic initiatives. Many of the subactions of the Detailed Description of Priority Axes (DDPA) of the ROP allows SMEs to pursue investments that support their competitiveness, including the organic area.

Summarise the key measures and instruments (EU, national, regional) that can support your regional organic sector.

Instrument*	Responsible**	Beneficiary	Financial contribution**								
				Production	Processing	Commercialisation & marketing	Training & advice	Education	Innovation	Value chain efficiency & governance	

1. ROP	Lodzkie Region Executive Board	SMEs	regional							
				x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2. RDP	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	SMEs and farmers	national							
				x	x	x	x	x	x	x

*Refers to relevant European Investment or Structural Funds e.g. ERDF, EAFRD or national fund if applicable

** Refers to relevant managing authorities e.g. EU, national, regional if applicable

*** Refers to relevant EU, national, regional co-financing

3. Relevance of the regional policy support for the development and implementation of your action plan

- Provide an assessment of relevant policies (which may include those outlined in question 2 and/or others) that can facilitate the development and implementation of your action plan. This should consider policies:
 - (a) developed within/by your region and
 - (b) national and/or European policies implemented in your region
- What are opportunities and barriers associated policy instruments that your plan will include to support SME competitiveness and sustainability. Consider what is working, what could be improved, what is missing etc

Support:

RDP 2014-2020

Action "Systems of agricultural products and foodstuffs", Subaction 3.2 "Support for information and promotion activities carried out by producer groups in the internal market, support for producer group at least two producers (RDP 2014-2020) "; Cooperation Action (RDP 2014-2020); "Investments in farms located in Natura 2000 area under the "Support for investments in agricultural farms" sub-program covered by RDP 2014-2020;

ROP 2014-2020

Priority Axis II: An Innovative and competitive economy; Priority Axis V: Environment Protection; Priority Axis VI: Revitalization and endogenous potential; Priority Axis X: Employee and SMEs Adaptability in the region

Challenges:

There is small number of organic farms and processing plants in Lodzkie region. In addition, low awareness of society in the region as regards the importance of organic farming for human, animal and environmental health is noted.

Weaknesses:

- Low increase rate of the organic sector and small share of this category in the local market and in export of processed organic products
- Surface water pollution
- Insufficient level of surface waters and desertification in the north and northwest parts of the region, poor soil quality, high proportion of acidified soil
- Low quality of tourist infrastructure
- No integrated transport system

Opportunities:

- Large workforce

- Specialization of the region in fruit and vegetable cultivation and animal husbandry
- A large number of organic farms with a livestock-friendly structure
- The structure of farms supports the protection of biodiversity
- High quality organic products

4. Recommendations for regional policymakers to improve the current policy environment

- Based on your experience of action plan development and after reviewing the [ORGAP Golden Rules](#) consider what is still needed from EU, national and regional policymakers to support
 - (a) the development of new initiatives and
 - (b) better implementation of existing initiatives, to support SME competitiveness and sustainability.

Please provide specific examples

Activities supported by policymakers:

- A broad educational and promotion campaign for consumers and farmers (organization of workshops, seminars, conferences, promotion of organic food at local fairs, harvest festivals and other organic – oriented events, organizing of school events on organic food production and its importance for health. Study visits for children and youth to organic farms - demonstration farms (support by local authorities and schools)
- Establishment of producer groups (producers of apples and soft fruits such as chokeberry and currants)
- Increasing the number of organic processing plants in the Lodzkie region
- Make it easier for small processing plants to comply with hygiene requirements
- Green public procurement – catering in schools and healthcare settings – providing local organic products, that have significant influence on health
- Support from local authorities for communities (award for the community, where the share of organic food in public catering is highest)