



## Winter harvest: supporting the development of organic winter growing

In Austria, very few organic vegetables from domestic production are available during the winter. The climate does not allow for a successful domestic organic production. As a result, consumers wanting organic produce have to go with imported fruit and vegetables. Elfriede Stopper from BIO AUSTRIA, Austria's organic farmers' association, and partners from other institutions felt it was time to address this issue together with farmers. They set up a farm-led project involving farmers and researchers to develop technical methods in the production of winter vegetables using non-heated systems.

### Winter growing and respecting organic principles

"It is very difficult meet consumer demand for home grown organic vegetables all around the year. The project winter harvest aims at overcoming this problem and creating an added value for farmers at the same time", Elfriede Stopper from BIO Austria explains. The project called *Winter harvest: seasonal, energy-extensive and innovative vegetable production* established links between farmers and scientific institutions in order to improve techniques for growing winter vegetables in Austria. The project focused on resource efficiency and climate protection, so the innovative techniques developed are still in line with the organic principles.



The possibility of a climate-friendly organic production during the winter months satisfies a growing consumer demand for such produce. It means that the farmers are not only able to use their production facilities during winter, but they can also continue their direct marketing for a longer period of the year and thereby increase the economic viability of their farms.

### Development of technical innovations

Between May 2014 and the end of April 2015, BIO AUSTRIA brought together seven organic farmers and six research and extension (mainly scientific) institutions to carry out on-farm trials in five federal states - Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria and Carinthia. "Research is essential for overcoming practical problems; a farmer-led process ensures that research addresses practical questions" Stopper told us.

The project involved:

- testing the frost resistance of the most important and innovative species and varieties of lettuce (120 in total)
- developing sequences of cultures and cultivation plans for winter salads and herbs
- documenting cultivation practices that increase frost resistance

- researching basic information regarding traditional knowledge, ecological footprinting and nutritional value
- carrying out a range of dissemination activities (e.g. leaflets for producers and consumers, tasting sessions etc.)

Farmers involved in the trials were able to optimise their sowing and planting times and frost proved less of a problem than expected. Red radish and chicories were the most promising varieties. Light and ventilation (to reduce fungal diseases) was found to play an important role in the management of winter production. Furthermore, farmers were able to raise their profile and improve their position through direct marketing (especially to restaurants seeking out high quality produce).



### Taking the research further

The project is to continue running trials. "Many questions remain open and there is still considerable potential for optimising winter growing systems further" concludes Stopper. BIO AUSTRIA will therefore follow-up through EIP-AGRI.

### Further information

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PHOTOS: BIO AUSTRIA



This example is taken from the "Organic cooperative approaches to rural development – A manual for stakeholders" published by IFOAM EU Group.

The manual was written as a reference for organic farming associations, advisors and educators, as a guide to understanding the opportunities provided under the new EU Rural Development policy. It focuses on building capacities and establishing greater cooperation among farmers and stimulating the further development of innovative approaches in the organic sector.

The publication firstly highlights the key measures in the Rural development Programmes which can support cooperation and capacity building for organic farmers such as Cooperation, Knowledge transfer and information actions, Advisory services, farm management and farm relief...

Then the manual goes on to give examples of how organic farmers and other stakeholders across the EU are pioneering cooperative approaches.

It also gives details on how to find out more information about cooperative approaches to rural development through different European and national organisations and platforms

[Download the manual.](#)