



Sowing spices – harvesting the future

Local organic spice growers access new markets thanks to BESH training



The challenge

Demand for organic spices such as cardamom, vanilla, cinnamon, cloves, paprika and poppy seeds is growing all over Europe. In his search for high-quality natural spices for his speciality products agricultural engineer Rudolf Bühler traveled to India, Serbia and Tanzania, where they have traditionally been cultivated for decades by small farmers and indigenous peoples.

Although conditions for growing and exporting their produce are ideal, the farmers mainly practise subsistence forms of agriculture. They have little knowledge of organically certified cultivation, storage and transport methods. Their crops are of a very high quality as they are grown without the use of chemical pesticides. However, the farmers lack not only the skills and resources needed to prepare them for sale but also to access international markets.

The solution

Faced with strong demand for the precious commodity from the 1,500 members of the farmers' cooperative Bäuerliche Erzeugergemeinschaft Schwäbisch Hall (BESH) AG, Rudolf Bühler – who is also BESH's chairman of the board - needed to source large volumes of organically produced spices. The cooperative therefore offered to help small farmers in India, Serbia and Tanzania cultivate their spices using methods based on organic and biodynamic principles. This approach is the most sustainable and resource-

efficient form of agriculture. As well as promoting healthy yields, it helps to maintain soil quality. In turn, this allows small farmers to earn a better and more reliable income by creating a long-term basis for the production and marketing of organic spices.

'Without develoPPP.de, the project would not have been possible. We have limited resources, and setting up quality assurance systems, training courses and advisory services isn't something we could have done on our own. But thanks to support from develoPPP.de, we have been able to do it.'

Rudolf Bühler, founder and chairman of BESH.

To facilitate the required investment in training and establish an EU-compliant system of organic certification, BESH formed a strategic development partnership with DEG (Deutsche Investitions- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft mbH). Funding is provided by the develoPPP.de programme set up by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), which supports long-term engagement by the private sector in developing and emerging-market countries.



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Our services

The farmers were trained in the use of modern harvesting technology, product development methods and quality management systems in a series of courses specially designed for the local organic growing conditions. They set up their own agricultural producer cooperatives to strengthen their negotiating position on regional and international markets. Thanks to the value chains they have built up for this purpose, they are now able to supply processing firms and end distributors directly 'from the field to the fork', thus cutting out intermediaries and maximising their profit. By supplying the European market directly, the small farmers in India, Serbia and Tanzania receive a guaranteed price for their produce – up to 50 per cent above the normal market rate.

However, the farmers can only market their natural spices as organic products if they can show that they comply with internationally recognised standards. To this end, training was arranged for local certification bodies so that they can issue the appropriate certificates under the EU organic and DEMETER biodynamic labelling systems. Equipped with this USP, the growers can then negotiate a good price for their organic and fairly produced spices and therefore boost their income.

The introduction of organic methods of spice cultivation in India, Serbia and Tanzania has made it possible for all those involved – in the North and South – to exchange ideas and transfer knowledge across borders. As well as the farmers themselves, this approach has benefited students, researchers and organisations working in the areas of organic agriculture, quality assurance and certification. Thanks to partnerships between the University of Kassel (Witzenhausen, Germany), the State University of Zanzibar, Mahatma Gandhi University (Kottayam, India) and the University of Novi Sad (Serbia), curricula are being established in the specialist fields of organic cultivation and food science.

Impacts and results

18,000 small farmers have successfully adopted sustainable organic methods of spice cultivation. Their products are certified under the EU organic and, in the future, also Demeter labelling systems. By selling directly, they can earn up to 50 per cent more for their produce. In return, members of the BESH cooperative in Germany have a reliable supply of natural spices for their own products, enough to meet all their needs for top-quality spices in the very highest premium segment.

The partnership between universities in Tanzania, India, Serbia and Germany is helping to create a lasting process of knowledge transfer and fostering the establishment of new courses in the areas of organic agriculture and organic food production. Small farmers and indigenous peoples have been able to strengthen their economic, cultural and social rights. The inherent skills and knowledge of smallholders and indigenous peoples remain protected thanks to the legal framework established by the Global Peasants Rights subproject and the Haus der Bauern foundation.

At a glance

Duration	29 May 2015 – 30 June 2019
Countries	India, Serbia, Tanzania
Objective	The sustainable cultivation of natural spices based on biodynamic principles and their sale on international markets boost the income of 18,000 small farmers in India, Serbia and Tanzania.
Partners	Bäuerliche Erzeugergemeinschaft Schwäbisch Hall and DEG
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 18,000 small farmers in India, Serbia and Tanzania have adopted sustainable organic methods of spice cultivation and increased their profits by up to 50 per cent.• Members of the BESH cooperative have enough supplies of high-quality natural spices to meet their own production needs.• Organic and Demeter labelling systems have been instituted together with a network of locally based certification bodies.

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