

AVALON

Promoting Sustainable Rural Development in Central & Eastern Europe

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have undergone immense political and economic reforms since the late 1980s. Although proceeding at varying rates and in differing ways in individual countries, these reforms will undoubtedly lead to an eventual improvement in the economic status and social conditions of most citizens of the region. But at what cost? Economic activity and quality of life are ultimately built upon environmental resources.

As the economies and societies of Central and Eastern Europe respond and adapt to political reform, will these environmental resources be adequately protected? Is sufficient action being taken to ensure that biodiversity is conserved, that vulnerable habitats are carefully managed and that the degradation of soil, air and water is reduced? Is the rapid pace of economic development environmentally and socially sustainable?

Nowhere are these issues more pressing than in the rural areas of the region where the concept of sustainable development inevitably comes a poor second to the daily struggle of making a living. However, rural communities can be helped to fully and effectively participate in building a civil and sustainable society in the place where it matters most - amongst local people at a local level.

Introducing Avalon

Avalon is an international, non-profit foundation based in the Netherlands. Since its establishment in July 1991, Avalon has been committed to the support of sustainable rural development in the transitional economies of Central and Eastern Europe.

We believe that economic, social and biological diversity jointly form the basis of sustainable rural development. We also believe that organic agriculture can make a fundamental contribution towards the maintenance and development of this diversity, as well improvements to the income of farmers, the quality of the environment, safe food and the health of the general public.

Much of our work therefore focuses upon harnessing the two instruments of market development and agri-environmental policy in order to create a favourable economic climate for organic agriculture to become established and to prosper to the benefit of local communities throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

In 1993, in his welcome address to a seminar organised by Avalon, the President of the Czech Republic, Mr. Vaclav Havel, expressed his government's continuing support for organic agriculture as follows:

“Organic agriculture has a natural place in our country. It will help heal our environment, increase the diversity of products on the market and should form an integral part of a truly sustainable development of agriculture. With government support and expert advice, organic agriculture is becoming part of the complex mosaic that is our new democratic society.”

Our Activities So-far

The work of Avalon is internationally acclaimed for its innovation and professionalism. Our main activities to-date, in co-operation with different partners, have been:

Introduction of organic agriculture in the post-conflict countries in the Balkan region.

Organisation of the conference 'Organic Farming in the European Union – Perspectives for the 21st Century' in Austria in 1999.

Support of marketing initiatives of organic farmers in Poland and the Czech Republic.

An inventory of marketing of organic produce in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, including the potential for local markets.

Involvement in the establishment of three demonstration centres for sustainable agriculture in Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania combined with a regional study on the market aspects of conversion to organic production.

Undertaking training programmes in organic agriculture for farmers and advisors in Latvia and Slovenia, to introduce knowledge about organic agriculture in farm advisory services;

Organisation of two workshops (on Introduction of Organic Agriculture and on Demonstration Centres for Sustainable Practice in CEE Countries) in 1994 and 1995 in Croatia and the Netherlands with participants from 17 countries.

Organisation of a seminar for policy makers on *The Contribution of Organic Agriculture to Sustainable Rural Development*, held in October 1993 at Castle Rudolec in the Czech Republic. This was the first high profile international event organised by Avalon and was attended by 60 participants from 15 countries, including 5 Ministers and 10 vice-Ministers.

Harnessing Market Development and Agri-environmental Policy

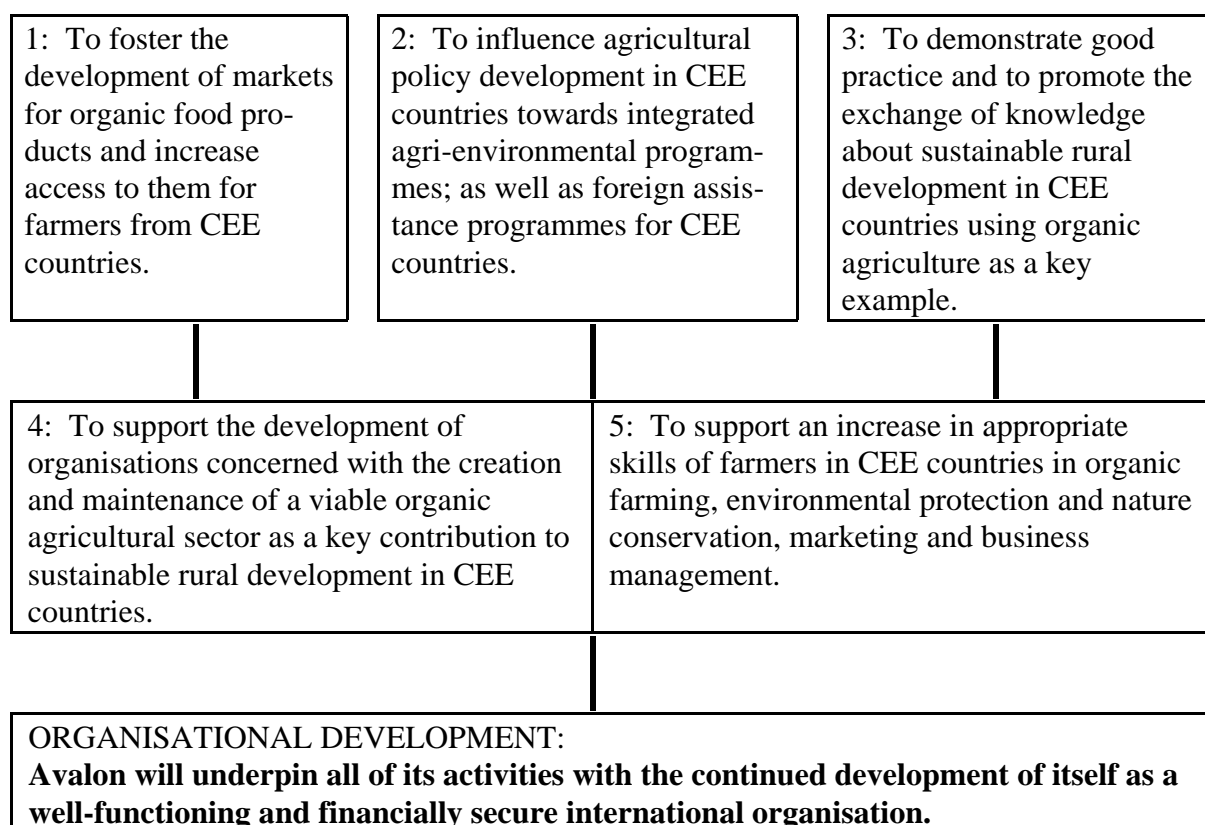
Some of Avalon's most innovative work is in the enhancement of appropriate political and economic incentives for sustainable rural development.

Avalon and its partners have implemented a pilot project on the feasibility of implementing an agri-environmental programme in north-east Poland. This region was chosen for the rich biodiversity of its farmland, which is under threat of intensification or abandonment. Sixty Polish farmers, including organic farmers, have co-operated in this three-year pilot project by carrying out beneficial management practices and recording the resultant effects on biodiversity and the costs incurred. Based on this information, appropriate agri-environmental schemes were designed for conserving biodiversity on farmland, based on EU Regulation 1257/99 (rural development). Similar studies, in a slightly modified way, have been implemented in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania.

The aim is to have agri-environmental pilots taken up in SAPARD (the EU Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development).

In Poland and the Czech Republic, Avalon and its partners are supporting groups of farmers in solving bottlenecks for marketing of their products. This project aims to conserve high natural values on farms by developing local markets for products from organic and other farms. There is an increasing need for projects that will support the development of a complete market chain in various CEE countries.

..and the Goals for Our Continuing Work



Achieving Our Goals...

We pursue our goals through a range of focused activities tailored to local rural needs and circumstances. Our strategies for developing these activities include:

Serving as a link between the organic food and farming sector in CEE countries and banks/donor organisations willing to finance its development;

Assisting groups of farmers, processors and traders in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of marketing, business and investment plans;

Supporting the incorporation of agri-environmental programmes and organic/sustainable agriculture development in the National Rural Development Plans and their subsequent implementation under SAPARD/PHARE;

Establishing and supporting demonstration farms and research and education centres to demonstrate, evaluate, refine and promote wide-spread application of appropriate best practice;

Promoting information exchange, networking and coalitions between companies, governmental institutes, NGOs and banks working towards sustainable rural development;

Developing the ability of national agricultural extension services in CEE countries to offer advice on organic methods by providing needs-based 'training for the trainers' using local knowledge and resources to the maximum possible extent.

... in Collaboration with Avalon's Partners

Avalon co-operates with an extensive network of national and international groups committed to the support of meaningful and sustainable change in the rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe. Present partner organisations, besides Ministries of Agriculture and Environment, include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agro-Bio Progress, Bulgaria• Biokultura Association, Hungary• Birdlife International, United Kingdom• Buys Agro-Services, the Netherlands• Centre for Ecological Engineering Tartu, Estonia• Ecofarm, Bulgaria• EKOLAND Association, Poland• Ekologica, Croatia• Estonian Biodynamic Association, Estonia• Elkana Biological Farming Association, Georgia• ETC, the Netherlands• FiBL (Research Institute for Organic Farming), Switzerland• Foundation for Organic Agriculture, Czech Republic• Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), United Kingdom• International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), Germany | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• IUCN CEE Subregional Office, Poland• Latvian Association for Organic Agriculture, Latvia• Latvian Fund for Nature, Latvia• Lithuanian Fund for Nature, Lithuania• Organic Agriculture Association of Albania• Soil Association, United Kingdom• Stiftung Ökologie und Landbau, Germany• Terra's Natural Food Association, Yugoslavia• The Ecologist Youth of Romania• Triglav National Park, Slovenia• Union of Ecological Organizations of Macedonia• Veen Ecology, The Netherlands• WWF Europe, Austria and Belgium |
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Investing in Our Vision

Avalon's vision for the role of organic agriculture in supporting sustainable rural development is shared by a number of organisations, which have provided financial support for our project work to-date. These are:

- Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Fisheries
- Dutch Ministry of Housing, Physical Planning and Environmental Protection
- European Commission DG VI – Agriculture
- * European Commission DG XI - Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection
- European Union's PHARE Programme
- European Union's TACIS Programme
- HIVOS, The Netherlands
- Schweisfurth Stiftung, Germany
- Stichting Milieubewustzijn, the Netherlands
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Our success with attracting project funding is an indication of the increasing credibility of our work, however we need on-going financial assistance to ensure that our core activities remain secure and that we continue to develop our full range of projects - most of which are unique to Avalon.

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Avalon is looking for international partners who share its vision and who wish to invest in its further development as well as for structural funding for core activities and funding for specific projects.