

# **Training Course for Good Agriculture Practices of Organic Apricots**



**Mission report to Batken, Kyrgyzstan  
from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2012  
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## 1 Background and Objectives

Since several years, farmers in Kyrgyzstan successfully grow organic cotton, supported by international projects in their efforts to profitably sell their products and find export markets.

In a joint effort to promote organic apricot farming in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Bio Service Public Foundation in Kyrgyzstan and Public Organization Sugdagroserv Organic (SAS), Tajikistan – with financial support of USAid - jointly conducted a 3,5 days seminar in Batken, Kyrgyzstan in April 2012. The seminar brought together 12 participants from both countries to learn about and discuss key issues related to the topic. The workshop was an important initial step towards improving cultivation and post-harvest techniques of organic apricots.

## 2 Mission Programme

<b>day</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Details</b>
1	<b>23. April</b>	travel	Flight Izmir – Istanbul - Bishkek
2	<b>24. April</b>	arrival + field visits	Flight Bishkent-Batken Meeting with the participants and joint visit of apricot orchards discussion of the local system of apricot growing and management.
3	<b>25. April</b>	workshop	Good agricultural practices of organic apricots
4	<b>26. April</b>	workshop + field visits	Review of the previous day Good agricultural practices of organic apricots SWOT-analysis Visit of apricots orchards and practical instructions
5	<b>27. April</b>	workshop	Review of the previous day Introduction of good manufacturing practices of organic apricots Evaluation and closing of workshop
6	<b>28. April</b>	wrap-up	Visit of a chemical shop in Batken Visit of a farmers market in Batken Final meeting with Saparbek Alymkulov, Bio Service
7	<b>29. April</b>	departure	Continuation of discussion with Saparbek Alymkulov Flight Batken - Bishkek
8	<b>30. April</b>	travel	Flight Bishkek – Istanbul - Izmir

### 3 Training

The workshop titled “Good agriculture practices for organic apricots” was held in Batken and was attended by 12 participants, 7 from Kyrgyzstan (staff of Bio Service and Alysh-DAN farmers cooperative) and 4 from Tadjikistan (SAS Organic). All participants had either a background in organic consulting or in organic farming. The presentation was given in English and translated to Russian by a local interpreter.

The following subjects have been presented and discussed in the training course:

<b>workshop issues</b>	<b>details</b>
Principles of organic agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ History of organic agriculture</li> <li>✓ Organic life style</li> <li>✓ Consumer behaviour and consumption</li> <li>✓ Environmental issues</li> </ul>
Dried apricots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ World market situation</li> <li>✓ Market requirements</li> <li>✓ Quality risks</li> </ul>
Cultivation practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ New orchard plantation</li> <li>✓ Climatic conditions</li> <li>✓ Soil quality</li> <li>✓ Soil cultivation</li> <li>✓ Sustaining soil fertility</li> <li>✓ Compost</li> <li>✓ Green manure</li> <li>✓ Fertilization</li> <li>✓ Manuring techniques</li> <li>✓ Water and irrigation</li> <li>✓ Pruning of trees</li> </ul>
Pest and disease management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ General principles</li> <li>✓ Application time</li> <li>✓ Spraying equipment</li> <li>✓ Risk of drift</li> <li>✓ Shothole (<i>Coryneum beijerincki</i>)</li> <li>✓ Monilia (<i>Sclerotinia laxa</i>)</li> <li>✓ Bacterial canker (<i>Pseudomonas syringae</i>)</li> <li>✓ Capnodis</li> <li>✓ Aphids spp.</li> <li>✓ Archips L.</li> <li>✓ Eriophyes sp.</li> <li>✓ <i>Cydia pomonella</i></li> <li>✓ Peach twig borer</li> <li>✓ Rhynchites spp.</li> <li>✓ Cochenille (<i>Parthenolecanium corni</i>)</li> <li>✓ Gummosis</li> </ul>
Processing on farm level (basic introduction)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Apricot production + processing chart</li> <li>✓ Harvesting</li> <li>✓ Drying and pitting</li> <li>✓ Transport and labelling</li> <li>✓ Storage</li> </ul>

Good manufacture practices (basic introduction)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Storage</li> <li>✓ labelling and traceability</li> <li>✓ Residue control</li> <li>✓ Shock freezing</li> <li>✓ CO2 treatment</li> <li>✓ Washing</li> <li>✓ Selection and sizing</li> <li>✓ Packing and labelling</li> <li>✓ Transport and export</li> </ul>
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## 4 Project Development

### 4.1 Actual situation

In a wrap-up meeting with Saperbek Alymkulov, executive director of Bio Service Public Foundation, the history of the organic farmer group in Batken and the general situation on site were intensively discussed.

Alysh-DAN farmer cooperative in Batken has started in 2010 with 44 farmers and has meanwhile 75 farmers with 108 ha of apricot orchards. The harvest potential is estimated to 110 tons of dried apricots per year. The farmers, who are presently in the second year of conversion (smallholder group certification by IMO Switzerland) are very motivated, however they do expect a substantial increase in income once the organic certification has been achieved (harvest 2013). Bio Service is operating the internal control system (ICS) of the cooperative and does also support the group in regard to technical and marketing consultancy.

The Tajikistan organic apricot group started 2009 with 39 farmers and has meanwhile 500 farmers. The ICS provider is Sugdagroserv.

The question where to of final processing of the apricots is still open for both projects: there are no processing facilities available in Batken. The installation of simple pre-processing facilities with a sizing unit and a cool room are considered. It was reported that conventional apricot processors are available on the Tajikistan side; such facilities could be used as subcontracted processor for both apricots projects. Another option is to let the apricots process in a certified operation in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. No final plans have yet been worked out.

Connected with the processing is the marketing of the apricots. Both groups are interested in export and their target market is Europe. Emerging markets in Asia are also considered as an option. Bio Service has made a comprehensive cost calculation for the organic apricots. Adding a Fairtrade certification to the product is another potential for adding value to the product. However so far no final plans are yet in place.

### 4.2 Evaluation and future perspectives

The overall seminar objective was based on the assumption that successful marketing of organic apricots need more knowledge on the specific requirements for rural producer groups to engage more professionally in the production and marketing of organic products. Quality awareness and technical knowhow are regarded to be the “hot topics” in this context and have therefore been put in the centre of the present workshop. The message was well received by the participants and strong interest, an investigative attitude and great personal motivation was shown throughout the training.

According to the contract signed between Bio Service and the international consultant, a second training visit is planned for June 2012. This visit will mainly focus on Good Manufacture Practices including HACCP principles as well as harvesting and post-harvesting activities performed by farmers. The compilation of a quality manual for organic apricots is the expected output. This course should enable participants to actively assist the interested communities they work with to improve their organizational and managerial skills to gain a better market access and explore the potential to engage in organic production and fairtrade.

### 4.3 Personal impression

It was a pleasure to work with such a motivated group full of questions and eager to learn more about organic agriculture! Motivation is of precious value and will help to further develop organic agriculture in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Although no judgement can be made for the quality of apricots in the concerned growing areas, successful marketing of organic apricots will be very hard to achieve due to the following constraints:

- Competition with organic apricots from Turkey.
- Relatively high price level (based on a cost calculation with an organic premium).
- No advanced cultivation techniques in place.
- Very poor harvest and post-harvest methods applied.
- No professional processing facilities available.
- No marketing expertise.
- Lack of overall project strategy .
- Presently no project sustainability; the work of Bio Service is fully dependent on external funding (however a share for sustainability purposes is foreseen in the organic price calculation).

Nevertheless the project has been based on two promising columns: (1) Batken is in principle a very suitable area for organic apricots: chemical inputs are generally of low use and no substantial risk of drift problems are to be expected. (2) The basic investment for the setup of the project has been done and a functioning organization is in place. Both groups are however in great need for professional management if they want to accomplish their aim of profitably marketing organic apricots.

### 4.4 Recommendation

sector	recommendations
Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ There is a lack of inputs for organic pest management: copper, BT, coppersulfate (Bordeaux mixture), pheromon traps etc. Purchase sources for such materials need to be found.</li> <li>❖ Soil and water analysis should be done in order to adapt the cultivation programs accordingly.</li> <li>❖ Composting techniques need to be introduced including the use of green manure.</li> <li>❖ Due to low rainfall (100-150 mm/year, the water keeping capacity of the soils should be actively increased by mineral inputs, such as Zeolith or Perlit.</li> </ul>

Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Bio Service and Sugdagroserv should clearer separate between internal control duties and consultancy.</li> <li>❖ Farmers organic premiums should not be fixed but rather based on farmer performance criteria, such as: pruning, attended trainings, use of compost and green manure etc.</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The focus of the 2nd training, which is scheduled for June 2012, will be based on the conclusion from this first workshop and mainly comprise good manufacturing practices, including harvest methods and drying techniques on farm level. The started quality awareness efforts will have to be continued. The training should also comprise practical training in the orchards.</li> <li>❖ Trainings should be part of the strategy; they need to be given continuously in order to be sustainable. On farm level as well as Train the Trainer.</li> <li>❖ A study tour to Turkey should be considered in order to see professional farm production and processing facilities.</li> </ul>
Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ To better support the positive impact of organic production in Kyrgyzstan the Government need to regulate organic agriculture in order to promote the integrity of organic products from the country.</li> <li>❖ Trade with organic products should be facilitated by simplification of procedures, reduction of taxes and duties and stronger promotion of private enterprises.</li> <li>❖ All institutions need to create favourable conditions for the growth of the domestic market.</li> </ul>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Organic dried apricots from Kyrgyzstan will most probalby not have a great potential for the world global market. Prices are too hight compared with high quality aprictos from Turkey. Potential markets, however might be found in Russia and Kazakhstan (Almaty) as well as in China and Singapur. Respective market research should be initiated.</li> <li>❖ The national market potential should be determined; a market might exist in the cities of Jalalabad and Bishkek, especially among the expatriate communities.</li> <li>❖ Crop diversification is essential for a sustainable income for farmers: seedless black grapes, local prunes and walnuts are crops with marketing potential</li> <li>❖ Adding value to existing products is another possibility for better income: apricot kernels is one option, Fairtrade, FairforLife certification another.</li> <li>❖ Residue analysis of dried apricots should be done.</li> <li>❖ For the calculation of a reasonable and fair price, it is better to choose the top to down approach rather than to start from the bottom.</li> </ul>