

YOUTH INSTALLATION AND GENERATIONAL RENEWAL IN THE FARMING SECTOR IN SERBIA

DATE: 16 JUNE 2024

LOCATION: ORGANELA ORGANIC FARM, SERBIA

Organela Farm, an organic farm established in 2017 and member of Agroecology Europe, hosted a participatory workshop in June 2024 focused on addressing the challenges faced by young people in agriculture. Known for its innovative approach to organic farming and research, Organela serves as a demonstration farm where various experiments, such as the newly implemented agrovoltaic system, are conducted. The workshop brought together a diverse group of participants—including farmers, students, policymakers, and community members—to exchange knowledge on agroecology and brainstorm innovative solutions for the future of sustainable farming. The farm's unique initiatives, such as "The Garden Can Do Everything," which provides organic produce to children undergoing cancer treatment, further underscore its role as a leader in both agriculture and community support.



The urgent need for generational renewal in Serbia's Agricultural Sector

Recent data from Serbia's 2023 agricultural census highlights a significant aging trend among farmers. The average age of a head of a family farm in Serbia is now **60 years, with only about 9% of them being under 40 years old.**

This marks a continued decline in the proportion of younger farmers, exacerbating concerns about the future of agriculture in the country. The overall number of agricultural holdings has decreased by 10% since 2018, further stressing the sector's struggles.

These findings underscore the ongoing "young farmer problem" in Serbia, where the agricultural workforce is aging rapidly without sufficient younger replacements. This demographic shift is seen as a major challenge for maintaining sustainable agricultural practices in the future([EU u Srbiji](#), [Serbian Monitor](#)).

The agricultural landscape in Serbia is predominantly composed of small family farms, with 99.6% of all farms being family-operated. The average age of Serbian farmers is over 60, with only 5.6% of the agricultural workforce under 35. Generational renewal is critical, but young people face significant barriers to entering agriculture, including limited access to land, capital, and knowledge.

DATA ON SERBIA'S AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

- **Contribution to GDP:** Agriculture contributes about 6.5% to Serbia's GDP.
- **Employment:** The sector employs roughly 15% of the workforce.
- **Farm Structure:** 99.6% of farms are family-run, with an average farm size of 5.4 hectares.
- **Farmer Demographics:** The average age of a Serbian farmer is over 60, with only 5.6% of the workforce under 35.
- **Youth Migration:** A significant portion of young people have migrated to urban areas or abroad, leading to a demographic imbalance in rural areas.

Source: Serbian Agricultural Census 2023, [EU u Srbiji](#)

An emerging trend in Serbian agriculture is the increase in newcomers—individuals without a family farming background—who are starting farms from scratch or revitalizing farms.

These newcomers often bring higher education, off-farm incomes, and specific aspirations related to lifestyle, environmental stewardship, and social engagement. They typically use tenancies, land purchases, and cooperative farming arrangements to establish their businesses, often focusing on high-quality products and on-farm diversification. This is the inspiring example of Organela Farm, lead by Pavle Đorđević, a young leader of sustainable farming in Serbia.

Presentation of Organela Farm



Organela Farm, founded in 2017, stands as a model of sustainable agriculture in Serbia. Specializing in organic fruits and vegetables, Organela serves as a demonstration farm where various experiments are conducted for research and educational purposes. One of its notable initiatives includes the installation of an agrovoltaic system, combining renewable energy production with agricultural practices by placing solar panels above shade-demanding crops.

As a founding member of the Kolubara Biodistrict, the first of its kind in Serbia and the Balkans, Organela is deeply involved in agroecological initiatives. The farm also runs a significant community project, "The Garden Can Do Everything," which provides organic produce to children undergoing cancer treatment, supported by volunteers and the farm's team.

Aim of the participatory workshop

The workshop at Organela Farm was developed to address the complex challenges faced by young individuals in agriculture. The event began with a structured discussion aimed at identifying and understanding the obstacles hindering youth participation in farming. The core of the workshop was a knowledge exchange among participants, enriched by presentations from agroecology experts who provided an overview of sustainable farming practices, including soil management, seed conservation, and plant protection.

Participants also engaged in a simulation exercise designed to foster creative thinking and collaborative problem-solving, encouraging them to devise innovative solutions to real-world agricultural issues. This interactive environment facilitated the sharing of insights and ideas, ultimately aiming to inspire and equip a new generation of farmers committed to sustainable agriculture.



Lessons Learned

The workshop at Organela Farm provided key insights into the challenges and opportunities for youth engagement in agriculture:

- **Youth Motivation:** Many young people in Serbia are motivated to pursue farming due to their passion for agriculture, a desire for healthy living, and the opportunity to be their own boss. For many, continuing family traditions is also a significant factor.
- **Innovative Approaches:** Young farmers are increasingly adopting innovative, consumer-oriented business models. These include value-added products, on-farm diversification, and participation in community supported agriculture schemes and online direct selling. Such models are often combined with off-farm activities, depending on local conditions.
- **Role of Education and Networking:** Continuous education, training, and knowledge transfer are crucial for equipping young farmers with the skills needed to start a farming activity. Additionally, building strong networks among innovative farmers and **supporting intergenerational partnerships** can facilitate the transfer of knowledge and resources.
- **Local Community Involvement and Support:** Building a supportive community around young farmers is essential. The workshop highlighted the importance of creating local networks and fostering collaborations that can help young farmers overcome challenges. Having local community members involved made the discussions more relevant to the region, ensuring that the ideas generated could have a real impact locally.

Challenges and Limitations

- **Resource Access:** Many young farmers struggle with accessing essential resources like land, seeds, and funding.
- **Climate Change:** Unpredictable weather and extreme conditions are making it tough for young farmers to keep their crops healthy and manage resources.
- **Market Conditions:** Getting products into the market is a real struggle, making it tough for young farmers to both grow their businesses and find the time to sell their produce.
- **Labor Shortages:** Finding skilled help is a real challenge, leaving young farmers to juggle everything themselves and limiting their farm's growth.
- **Policy Shortcomings:** There's a clear need for better policies that support youth in agriculture and encourage the use of agroecological methods.
- **Ongoing Learning:** While the workshop was a great start, there's a need for more continuous education and training to help spread sustainable practices more widely.

Policy recommendations

Facilitate Land and Resource Access

- Land Mobility Programs: Prioritize young farmers in land redistribution, offering long-term leases and preferential purchase terms.
- Incentives for Land Transfers: Provide tax breaks and subsidies for senior farmers who transfer land to younger generations.
- Resource Centers: Establish regional hubs for shared access to seeds, machinery, and infrastructure.

Enhance Financial Support

- Youth-Focused Financial Products: Develop micro-loans, start-up grants, and low-interest credit specifically for young farmers.
- Niche Market Incentives: Offer financial support for young farmers producing high-quality, niche products.
- Crowdfunding and Cooperatives: Promote and support crowdfunding and cooperative financing models.

Strengthen Education and Training

- Agroecological Education: Integrate sustainable farming practices into formal and vocational education.
- Ongoing Training Programs: Provide continuous professional development in farm management and innovative practices.
- Mentorship Programs: Support junior-senior partnerships to facilitate knowledge transfer.

Improve Rural Infrastructure

- Rural Development: Invest in essential infrastructure like roads, energy, and broadband in rural areas.
- Social Services: Enhance healthcare, education, and childcare in rural communities to attract young families.
- Affordable Housing: Expand programs offering affordable housing for young farmers.

Boost Market Access

- Local Market Development: Strengthen local markets and short food supply chains to help young farmers sell their products.
- Support Diversification: Provide financial and technical support for on-farm diversification, such as agro-tourism.
- Promote Cooperatives: Encourage cooperative farming models to enable resource sharing and market access.

Align Policies with EU Standards

- **EU Integration:** Align national policies with EU generational renewal initiatives to maximize support for young farmers.
- **Tailored National Programs:** Customize rural development programs to meet the specific needs of young farmers.
- **Coordinated Policy Approach:** Ensure agricultural, educational, and infrastructural policies are harmonized to support young farmers.

Promote Farming as a Career

- **Early Engagement:** Introduce agriculture into school curricula and provide farm internships to spark interest early.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Highlight farming as a viable career path through national campaigns.
- **Support Rural Entrepreneurship:** Encourage young people to combine farming with other rural business opportunities.



About Agroecology Europe

Agroecology Europe, is a non-profit European association intending to place agroecology high on the European agenda of sustainable development of farming and food systems. The association fosters interactions between actors in sciences, practices and social movements, by facilitating knowledge sharing action. It aims at the creation of an inclusive European community of professionals, practitioners, and more generally societal stakeholders in agroecology.

PHOTO CREDITS: ORGANELA FARM



FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE FONDATION DE FRANCE . VIEWS AND OPINIONS EXPRESSED ARE HOWEVER THOSE OF THE AUTHOR(S) ONLY AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THOSE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION OR THE FONDATION DE FRANCE. NEITHER THE EUROPEAN UNION NOR THE FONDATION DE FRANCE CAN BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THEM.