

Abstract:

Following milk and dairy products fruit and vegetables are the most important product categories of organic food sales in Germany. While most market segments for organic products are saturated there is an Europe-wide undersupply of organic fruit and vegetables. At the same time more than 30% of the crops go bad on their way from the farms to the consumer. Among other things this can be attributed to uncoordinated and to less product-specific handling by participants of the supply chain. In this research, typical chains of organically produced vegetables in Germany, in Switzerland and in the Netherlands were investigated. Here, qualitative interviews with actors and experts were carried out to look at the various activities of quality safeguarding in the respective chains and countries. The different meanings of quality by the actors, insufficient technical resources, badly coordinated working processes and low consumer demand for organic products were identified as weaknesses of the systems in place. Many of the success factors for improving quality, such as a common goal and control of the participants, intensive communication, exchange of knowledge and information and an informal leader of the chain are also characteristic for network structures in general. Furthermore, efforts to boost consumer demand are considered to be important. In Switzerland, success of the system in place is based both on a clear position of the food retailing sector as an informal leader and on structures that encourage trust and ensure a stable balance of power between actors. In the Netherlands, in turn, the traditionally professional production and the general preference for personal contacts and dialogue were identified as the specific advantages of the existing structures.