

REVIEW



on dissertation for obtaining the **Doctorate Degree** in Higher Education: 3. Social, Business and Legal Sciences, Professional Field: 3.8 Economics, Scientific Specialty: 'Organization and Management'

Author of the dissertation: VALENTINA PANTEVA AGAPIEVA-ALIOSMAN, part-time doctoral student at the Department of Management and Marketing at the Agricultural University, Plovdiv

Doctoral Thesis topic: 'Organizational and Economic Problems of Organic Farming in Bulgaria'

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Vasko Nikolov Koprivlenski, Agricultural University, Plovdiv, Higher Education Area: 3. Social, Business and Legal Sciences, Professional Degree 3.7. Administration and Management, Scientific Degree: Organization and Management of Production, appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury with Order No. RD-16-1283/ 20.11.2019 by the Rector of the Agricultural University, Plovdiv.

1. Brief introduction of the applicant

Valentina Panteva Agapieva-Aliosman was born on 23.02.1982 in Kula, District of Vidin. In June 2012 she graduated with great success as a Bachelor in Agricultural Economics at the Agricultural University, Plovdiv, and in 2013 she achieved a master's degree in accounting and Control from the same University. After two years of study (May 2013 - March 2014) at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, she obtained a master's degree in English Philology – Translation and Business Communication, again with excellent success, where received a plaque. Three years later (October 2017 - May 2018) she graduated from the John Academy, London, United Kingdom and gained an Advanced Diploma in Financial Management. From October 2017 – present, she takes part in and continues her studies with the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) in Sittingbourne, England, United Kingdom, and receives Level 1, 2 and 3 for bookkeeping and accounts certificates. Since March 1, 2014, Valentina Panteva Agapieva has been enrolled as a doctoral student at the Department of Management and Marketing at the Agricultural University, Plovdiv and lately won a competition for Assistant Professor at the Department of Management and Marketing at the Agricultural University, Plovdiv. Currently Valentina Agapieva-Aliosman lives with her family abroad. In 2018, in the United Kingdom, she published two books in English, in the field of Accounting and the Organization and Management of SMEs in Agribusiness. She works in the Administrative and Accounting Department of a Private Company, in Sittingbourne, England, United Kingdom, as Company Secretary and Bookkeeping and Accounts. She is married and has two children.

For the period from 2007 to 2019 she makes efforts to improve her qualification and achieved certificates for skills in the field of Management, Accounting, Translation, Information and Communication Technologies, as well as for improving her theoretical and practical training in the field of Economy, Organization and Management. Works with many modern computer programs. She has high level of computer literacy and a

very good organizational skills and ability to work in a team. She is also, humble, educated, ambitious, hardworking and loyal in her relations with colleagues. She is fluent in English, very good written and spoken in Russian, good in Serbian and Polish, as well as German, Spanish and Turkish languages.

From the brief but meaningful biography it is evident that during the years, which she acquired practical skills and refined her theoretical knowledge, the doctoral student Valentina Panteva Agapieva-Aliosman formed a favourable combination of knowledge and experience for the successful completion of her research work.

2. The relevance of the topic under consideration

The topic is successfully formulated, dissertable and relevant to the economic development of organic agriculture in Bulgaria. In my opinion, the doctoral student Valentina Agapieva-Aliosman presents herself with a scientific work, which has not only a contemporary but also an original sound, since it is being developed under new and rapidly changing conditions for agricultural production, in general and organic agriculture in particular. Scientific research on this topic is essential for both theory and practice of the organization and management of organic farming in Bulgaria. It treats a new and under-researched area of scientific knowledge about our country. In this sense, the present development is a step in the positive direction. The development of organic farming in Bulgaria is characterized by considerable fluctuations in terms of its production potential, efficiency and competitiveness. The factors behind this are many and far too varied. However, institutional impacts related to changes in sectoral policies are clearly dominating. The problem under study is especially important for the sustainable development of organic agriculture after our country's membership in the European Union. The specific analyses carried out within the study have some practical value and the results obtained and the suggestions made could be used by the management structures involved in the progressive development of organic agriculture in Bulgaria. In addition, it should be emphasized that the development of the chosen topic requires thorough theoretical background and good analytical skills. I think that when evaluating the merits of a dissertation, this fact should be borne in mind as it reinforces the diversity and complexity of the problem under study.

3. Purpose, tasks, hypotheses and methods of research

The study is based on an in-depth review of the scientific literature and the problems of organic farming. This study defends the thesis that: highlighting, analysing and evaluating the organizational and economic problems that accompany Bulgarian organic production is a necessary prerequisite for identifying, justifying and developing strategic guidelines for their fair and adequate resolution. The research thesis is well formulated and the necessary commitment to the set goals and tasks of the dissertation is achieved. The author aims to make a thorough, comprehensive study of the organizational and economic problems of organic agriculture in Bulgaria and to identify ways and opportunities for improving its management. The following important tasks have been successfully completed during the course of the work:

- The theoretical, methodological and methodological issues of cost-effectiveness arising from the specific features of organic farming have been clarified;

- The existing organizational and economic problems in the production of organic agricultural production have been identified;
- An in-depth analysis of the level and dynamics of the economic efficiency of organic agriculture in Bulgaria (following the example of the Plovdiv region) is made and the power and direction of influence of the factors that determine them are revealed;
- Opportunities have been identified and concrete proposals have been made to increase the economic efficiency of organic production of agricultural produce.

The formulated research thesis is proven. The subject and object of the dissertation are logically related to the presented thesis, purpose and tasks. The methodology and research tools chosen are in line with the complex nature of the study. The functional, process and structural approach, the upgrading of studies already carried out, theoretical analysis and synthesis, the collection, systematization and summarization of statistics and their graphical, tabular and schematic presentation were used. A wide range of statistical and economic methods were used for the purposes of the study: Statistical grouping method; Comparative and Monographic Methods; Index factorial analysis; Correlation and ANOVA; SWOT-analysis; Peer review method; Questionnaire survey method; Chi-square, and more.

The set of economic research methods applied in the dissertation is a proof of the profound knowledge of the doctoral student in this field and allow her to successfully complete the tasks set in the dissertation. The limitations of the survey and its scope, due to the lack of statistical information from previous surveys in this field, the territorial fragmentation of the farms, the administrative irregularities in the management of the sector, the lack of financial resources, the inefficient institutional changes that led to serious fluctuations in the number of organic producers and yields of organic production, etc.

I commend the literary review, the methodology and methodology used, and the accomplishment of the tasks set to achieve the goal of the dissertation.

4. Visualization and presentation of the results obtained

The dissertation is divided into four chapters, an introduction, a conclusion, a list of used literature and five appendices, spread over 220 pages. The main text includes 2 diagrams, 12 tables and 28 figures. The contents of the chapters are divided into separate paragraphs, specific conclusions are made at the end of each chapter. The volume of applications is 24 pages. These include 12 snapshots, a questionnaire to collect empirical information, 1 chart and 36 tables. Under each table and diagram are correctly indicated their own and foreign sources of information. Each part of the dissertation contributes to solving the common problem. The individual chapters are interrelated and sequential. This construction gives a definitive character to the development, allowing to cover the main questions on the topic, and the content shows that the doctoral student has a clear and accurate idea of the problems under consideration.

5. Discussion of the results and the references

For the purpose of the study, a literature of 308 titles, divided into three categories, was used: 143 titles in Cyrillic, 85 titles in Latin and 80 online sources. The mentioned literature sources are relevant and directly related to the topic of the

dissertation. Correctly, in brackets, the numbers of the used literature sources are displayed, which facilitates the reference by the cited authors. What is striking is the good theoretical underpinning of the development. The author has been able to systematize existing scientific theses on the problem and to subordinate them to the goals of her own research. Scientific publications and works of Bulgarian and foreign authors have been used; newsletters of international organizations; reports and bulletins of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as a number of regulations. The study is based on rich factual material. The database for the needs of the survey is also provided by sample surveys as well as in-depth interviews conducted at the level of agribusiness organizations and specific biological farms through the questionnaire prepared by the author. The empirical information was collected and analysed after conducting direct interviews with farmers on the territory of Plovdiv. The survey covers the period 2014-2019, and the analysis of information on the status and trends in the development of organic agriculture in Bulgaria was made for a ten-year period, 2009-2019. The study was performed on the basis of seventy-three sites. The choice of study sites is substantiated and substantiated in terms of their representativeness.

In the first part of the development, the author clarifies the theoretical aspects in the development of organic agriculture with an emphasis on the basic organizational and economic features of organic farming, the existing organizational forms and the specific features of the organization and functions of management of the organic farm; The Doctoral student made a significant contribution to the successful periodization of organic farming in Bulgaria and identified three major periods in its development - the first stage from 1993 to 2000, the second stage from 2000 to 2007, and the third stage from 2007 to the present. The criteria for the periodization include: the scale of bio-production and the economic conditions in which it is developed, the state of the material and technical base, the technologies used, organizational and managerial changes over time, the development of the organic products market, legal regulation, financial and institutional support sector, etc. The SWOT-analysis is aimed at identifying the strengths, weaknesses and threats to organic production and outlining possible directions for its future development. At the end of Chapter One, 5 logical conclusions are outlined.

Theoretical and methodological statements on the nature of economic analysis and the peculiarities of the economic efficiency of organic production occupy an important place in Chapter Two of the thesis. A thorough analysis of the status of the main permanent factors of bioproduction was done – soil and climatic conditions, land, material and technical base, labour resources, organization and management of financial resources. In this part of the paper is presented the discussion of different authors on the nature of the issues discussed, broken through the specifics of organic production. The author's position on them is clearly stated. The doctoral student demonstrates a very good knowledge of theoretical and methodological issues on the issues under consideration. In practice, in this part of the development is presented and commented creatively, the whole categorical apparatus, which is relevant to the topic studied. The chapter concludes with 6 conclusions summarizing the results of the analysis on the farms surveyed for the period 2016-2018.

In Chapter Three, a methodological toolkit is developed to analyse the economic efficiency of organic production in the farms observed. Cost-effectiveness is measured by a system of indicators in which the rate of profitability is accepted as the main synthetic, summary indicator, and labour productivity, production cost, gross area unit profit, etc. are used as additional, analytical indicators. The level of economic

efficiency is measured in two versions - with and without financial assistance to justify the need for external support for the development of the sector. Chapters 2 and 3 are full of factual data drawn from the primary records of the farms observed. These chapters conclude with clear, accurate and definitive conclusions from the results of the study and aimed at solving the problems identified in the structural part of the development.

Chapter four outlines basic guidelines and proposals for improving the economic efficiency of organic production in Bulgaria. It is structured in four parts. Of interest are the author's views on organizational and management strategies for the development and enhancement of organic farming; Proposals for the improvement of technologies for the production of organic products; Opportunities for the use of precision farming methods in the implementation of economic and ecological production of agricultural food, with increased sustainability and environmental protection, as well as the introduction of innovative methods of production with ecological focus. At the end of the chapter, interesting author's views are presented concerning some short, medium and long-term strategic directions for solving the organizational-economic problems that accompany organic agriculture in Bulgaria.

In terms of composition, the scientific work is properly constructed.

The conclusions are clear, accurate, substantiated and based on the results of the analysis.

Style is at the required height. The language is highly economic.

The technical layout is very good.

6. Contributions to the Dissertation

The doctoral thesis presented is a completed research work. The quality and scope of the development is greater than that recommended in the development of the dissertations.

I fully share the contributions the doctoral student made in the abstract. I would like to highlight the following from scientific contributions:

- A large amount of up-to-date and objective information has been summarized and systematized, on the basis of which an empirical analysis of the state and development of organic farming on a global and national scale has been carried out;

- For the first time in Bulgaria an attempt has been made to periodize organic farming on the basis of carefully selected objective criteria;

- The specific features of organic farming that influence its organization, management and the level of its economic performance indicators are justified;

- Adapted methodological approach and tools for the needs of the specific study;

From the applied scientific contributions, I will highlight:

- Strategic models for the development of the individual organic farm have been developed and proposed. Ways to increase its profitability and competitiveness are outlined;

- A model for improving the policy of subsidizing organic production in Bulgaria has been proposed;

- Innovative methods and environmentally friendly production practices in organic farming have been proposed as a prerequisite for its sustainable development.

7. Critical notes and subject matters

Some unnecessary repetitions and descriptions have been made in the scientific work, as well as technical and stylistic errors, which I consider to be insignificant for the volume and scale of the whole study. These critical remarks do not diminish the merits of the dissertation and are intended to assist the doctoral student in her future work.

Recommendation: In my opinion, the results of the dissertation have a high degree of practical applicability. In this regard, I recommend that the doctoral student deepen her scientific and research activity on the topic by enriching it with new facts, highlights, conclusions and recommendations that can be used as legislative initiatives and for improving the organization and management of organic agriculture in Bulgaria.

8. Published articles and citations

Valentina Panteva Agapieva-Aliosman's research and publication activities include 8 dissertation publications, 4 of which are self-contained and 4 in a team. The doctoral student has presented five of her research papers at scientific conferences abroad and in the country, and three publications have been published in scientific journals.

The Abstract of Dissertation presented objectively reflects the structure and content of the dissertation.

CONCLUSION:

On the basis of the various methods of research, the correctly performed experiments, the summaries and the conclusions made, the dissertation submitted meets the requirements of the Application of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, and the Regulations of the Agrarian University for its application, which gives me a reason to evaluate it **POSITIVE**.

I allow myself to propose to the venerable Scientific Jury also to vote positively and to award to **VALENTINA PANTEVA AGAPIEVA-ALIOSMAN** the educational and scientific degree '**Doctor**' in the scientific specialty: 'Organization and Management'.

Date: 2 December 2019
Plovdiv, Bulgaria

REVIEWER:
(Prof. Dr. Vasko Koprivlenski)

