Some social and economic aspects of Estonian berry cultivation on the example of producers in Southern Estonia

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Abstract
Small orchards with a few fruit trees, some berry bushes and small berry plots are pretty universal to Estonian rural households. However there are relatively few larger producers specializing on berry cultivation and commercial production. The berry production output has declined considerably from 11 700 tons a year in 1990 to 3500 tons per year in 2009. The aim of the present paper is study some social characteristics and economic aspects of berry production in Estonia. The analysis is based on the results of questionnaire surveys conducted in 4 Southern Estonia counties in 2007 and 2008. Besides the economic data and production details the respondents were asked also to assess their strengths and weaknesses, their future plans. Chi-square test and analysis of variance was used to analyze the berry producers' assessments.

The average size of the land under berries was 2 ha per farm. Most popular berry culture was strawberry, followed by currants, raspberries and sea buckthorns. The strawberries offered the highest turnover and were often sold at farm-gate, by pick-yourself or in the market. The results of the analysis show that the biggest problems was the lack of seasonal labor, lack of capital for renewal of plantations, low market prices that makes the harvest unprofitable, too small production volumes that do not interest supermarket chains, lack of cooperation in production and marketing and lack of successors who would replace older farmer etc.

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Key words: berry production, small-scale farming, Estonian agriculture

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