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Organization of “Consumer Cooperatives” in Organic Agriculture - A Factor For Increasing Employment and Income of The Population

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Abstract: In the article, on the basis of the study of local and foreign experiences of the development of organic agriculture, conducting a social survey among the population, the necessity and socio-economic significance of the organization of “consumer cooperation” was scientifically explained, and the organizational stages of consumer cooperation were developed. Also, the role of cooperation in increasing the employment and income of the rural population is revealed. Within the framework of the study, the main organizational stages and mechanisms of forming consumer cooperatives were developed, taking into account the specifics of rural socio-economic conditions. Particular attention was paid to the institutional, legal, and financial aspects that ensure the effective functioning of such cooperatives. The analysis of international experience demonstrates that consumer cooperation contributes significantly to improving the competitiveness of organic products, ensuring product quality, and enhancing market access for small producers.

Keywords: Organic products, intensive technology, organic technology, certificate, cooperation, employment, labor income

Citation: Olimovich, A. S. Organization of “Consumer Cooperatives” in Organic Agriculture - A Factor For Increasing Employment and Income of The Population. Central Asian Journal of Innovations on Tourism Management and Finance 2026, 7(1), 22-31

Received: 10th Aug 2025

Revised: 16th Sep 2025

Accepted: 24th Oct 2025

Published: 07th Nov 2025



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1. Introduction

Despite the complexities and problems of modern world civilization, the demand for organic, biological products is increasing in domestic and foreign markets. This, in turn, is causing the global popularization of organic agriculture and a shift in global trends towards high-quality products in the food market [1]. In the period of transition from traditional intensive agriculture to organic agriculture, the production of agricultural and food products with improved ecological properties is relevant.

“Organic agriculture is practiced in almost 190 countries, and nearly 99 million hectares of agricultural land are managed organically by at least 4.3 million farmers . Global trade in organic food and beverages is expected to exceed €136 billion in 2023.”

Organic farming is an economic activity that generates a certain income [2]. Organic farming is committed to protecting the environment and uses environmentally friendly farming methods. In addition, these previously known but forgotten methods are still a source of know-how that ensures progress [3]. During the current stage of transition from traditional, intensive agricultural systems to organic farming practices, the production of ecologically clean and high-quality agricultural and food products is becoming particularly relevant. Organic agriculture, as a sustainable alternative to conventional farming, seeks to restore and maintain soil fertility, reduce the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and preserve biodiversity [4]. It emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of agricultural production and nature, prioritizing renewable resources, closed nutrient cycles, and animal welfare.

According to international statistics, organic agriculture is currently practiced in almost 190 countries, and approximately 99 million hectares of agricultural land are managed organically by at least 4.3 million farmers. Moreover, the global trade in organic food and beverages was expected to exceed €136 billion in 2023, demonstrating the rapid pace of growth and economic potential of the sector [5]. This steady expansion indicates that organic farming is not merely an environmental initiative but also a significant economic activity that contributes to rural development and income generation.

2. Materials and Methods

The research used the methods of dialectics, abstraction, observation, description, deduction and induction, analysis and synthesis, logical thinking, and social questionnaire.

Level of study of the topic. According to A.V. Sharkova, “the strategic objectives of many countries around the world are aimed at creating the necessary conditions for the transition of the economy to an innovative, socially oriented model. The latest technologies are becoming the material foundation that determines the technical level of modern production, its organizational and management forms, as well as the level of competitiveness of enterprises”.

“Cooperation is not only a part of the economy but also a sphere of social life with its own moral norms, principles, and traditions. The level of development of cooperation in a country serves as a reliable indicator of the moral standards of its population”.

G.V. Salov and Y.I. Tarasov emphasize that “rural cooperatives, especially consumer cooperatives, actively assist the rural population in adapting to changes in agricultural production and overcoming difficulties arising from external political, economic, and social conditions”.

V.M. Kruchinina defines an “organic cooperative” as “a community of people united with the goal of producing organic products, operating in such areas as traditional and organic farming, education, legal frameworks, project management, marketing, and network development. Such a cooperative must establish a transparent and collective decision-making system in which the opinion of every member is taken into account”.

3. Results and Discussion

Economists predict that organic farming will become a major trend in the next decade. The reason is that organic agricultural production addresses problems that cannot be solved by traditional farming methods [6].

Firstly, socio-economic issues: the “*organic product*” label adds 30–100% of added value; demand exceeds supply; moreover, public health improves because the use of antibiotics, GMOs, growth hormones, and chemical food additives is prohibited in organic livestock farming. This helps to prevent diseases directly related to proper and high-quality nutrition in the country[7].

Secondly, organic agriculture creates additional employment opportunities, helps attract young, promising, and creative individuals to rural areas, and contributes to the sustainable development of villages.

Thirdly, environmental issues: the use of chemical pesticides is banned in organic production, resulting in healthier ecosystems, restoration of soil fertility, increased biodiversity, and preservation of biological resources.

However, organizing organic agricultural production requires additional labor and financial resources compared to conventional farming:

1. High costs of market entry and certification for organic products;
2. Control authorities’ requirement to conduct at least two on-site inspections per year to ensure transparency of organic production chains;
3. Organic agricultural products must be sold in specific markets at regulated prices and according to established rules;

4. Lack of state support for the production of high-cost products and an underdeveloped system for training qualified personnel in the field of organic agriculture;
5. Insufficient scientific knowledge, research, information, and consulting services in the organic sector [8].

It should be noted that despite these unfavorable conditions, the volume of organic production in various regions is increasing, and the necessary infrastructure for organic production is gradually being developed.

To study the problems of organic production more deeply, we conducted a social survey among consumers of organic products. Of the 166 respondents who participated in the survey, 65.0% were men and 35.0% were women. 44.0% of them were citizens aged 21-30, 38.0% of the respondents had higher education, 36.0% had incomplete higher education. 62.0% of the respondents had five or more family members, and 55% of them lived in cities and the remaining 45.0% in rural areas. When respondents were asked about the "average income of one family member", 52.9% of them answered "more than 2.6 million soums", 13.5% of respondents answered "from 2.1 million to 2.5 million soums", and the rest indicated a lower amount[9]. When asked "What is your understanding of organic agricultural products?", 45.8% of them answered "I fully understand, I know", while the rest stated that they did not have any information about this concept. This shows that consumers do not have a perfect understanding of organic agricultural products.

When the survey participants were asked "What is your attitude to signs indicating the naturalness of a product?", (19.0%) of them indicated "a wide range of products", and 19.0% indicated the taste of the product. When asked "Do you think there are factors and important signs that influence the purchase of organic products? If so, what do you think they consist of?", 41.0% of the survey participants answered "natural composition", while 24.0% of the respondents indicated "price". When the survey participants were asked about their regular purchase of organic products, 31.0% of them answered "I buy sometimes[10]. Once a month", while 24.0% said "I buy when I see it". This shows that the consumption of organic products is not very popular among the population of our country. When the survey participants were asked "Which supply channels do you prefer to use for organic products?", 59.0% of the respondents preferred to purchase "through supermarket shelves", while 29.0% of the respondents preferred to purchase organic products "through specialized stores"[11]. When the survey participants were asked about the places where organic products are produced, 64.0% of them answered "I prefer local producers (our own or in the nearby area)", which showed the superiority of organic agricultural products produced in our country with favorable natural and climatic conditions. When organic product consumers were asked about the problems in purchasing organic products, 45.0% of them mentioned "excessive price", 24.0% "presence of counterfeit goods", 16.0% "poor quality of goods", 12.0% "trade "lack of points" and 3.0% cited "lack of information about ecological products" as the main reason. When asked the question "Do you consider it reasonable to set high prices for organic products?", 48.0% of respondents answered "no, this is all a marketing approach", while 35.0% of them answered "yes, you should pay more for a high-quality product." In order to find out the attitude towards state support for organic consumers, the question "To what extent do you think (additional) price should be given to organic products?" was included in the survey questionnaire, 61.0% of respondents said that they consider it appropriate to subsidize up to 25% of the purchased product [12].

The results of the conducted social survey show that the population of our country does not have sufficient information about organic products, and the consumption of organic products has not yet become commonplace, which indicates that the production of organic products in our country is still in its initial phase [13].

The survey also shows that there are problems such as the rural population consisting of large families, their low income levels, their low purchasing power, and their lack of understanding of the advantages of organic products over conventional products.

Based on the topic of the study, when we analyzed the dynamics of employment of the population in the labor market of Uzbekistan, their distribution in sectors and areas of the economy, and changes, in the period covered by the analysis, those employed in agriculture, forestry and fisheries amounted to 3,671.3 thousand people in 2017 and 27.2% of the employed population, while by 2024 this figure will amount to 3,240.7 thousand people and 22.7% of the employed. While 13,520 thousand people were employed in the labor market of Uzbekistan in 2017, by 2024 this figure will increase to 14,261.9 thousand people, an increase of 105.5%. In the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector, the number of employed people decreased by 430.6 thousand people during the analysis period, representing a change of 88.3%, see Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of the dynamics of employment, share and changes in the population in sectors and areas of the economy in the labor market of Uzbekistan

t / r / t	Indicators	Years																Change 2024 compared to 2017	in to
		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024			
		a m ou nt	%	a m ou nt	%	a m ou nt	%	a m ou nt	%	a m ou nt	%	a m ou nt	%	a m ou nt	%	a m ou nt	%	amount	%
1	Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	3671.3	27.2	3520.7	22.7	3520.7	22.7	3420.7	22.7	3420.7	22.7	3420.7	22.7	3344.9	22.7	3240.7	22.7	88.3	-4.4
2	Mining industry and open pit mines	835	0.6	787	0.6	848	0.6	925	0.7	947	0.7	575	0.4	589	0.4	632	0.4	75.7	-0.2
3	Manufacturing industry	1599.9	1.8	1598.3	1.0	1612.9	1.1	1597.7	1.1	1642.4	1.2	1630.1	1.1	1699.9	1.2	1548.3	1.0	96.8	-1.0
4	Electricity, gas, steam supply	853	0.6	695	0.5	791	0.6	723	0.5	762	0.6	735	0.5	686	0.5	681	0.5	79.8	-0.2
5	Water supply	581	0.4	564	0.4	447	0.3	474	0.4	506	0.4	495	0.4	465	0.3	497	0.3	85.5	-0.1
6	Construction	1290	9.5	1205	9.1	1324	9.8	1305	9.9	1350	10.0	1314	9.6	1502	10.7	1360	9.5	105.4	0.0
7	Wholesale and retail trade	14802	10.9	14018	10.6	14364	10.6	14046	10.6	15636	11.3	15213	11.1	15111	11.3	15088	10.6	101.7	-0.4
8	Transportation and storage	654.9	4.8	645.2	4.9	646.1	4.8	610.5	4.6	654.2	4.8	634.1	4.6	640.4	4.6	601.5	4.5	91.8	-0.6
9	Accommodation and catering services	313.3	2.3	301.9	2.3	315.3	2.3	302.8	2.3	341.1	2.5	348.8	2.5	367.2	2.6	363.5	2.5	116.0	0.2
10	Information and communication	643	0.5	627	0.5	622	0.5	587	0.4	705	0.5	773	0.6	878	0.6	986	0.7	153.3	0.2

1	Financial and insurance activities	72	0.5	73.5	0.6	75.8	0.6	72.5	0.5	70.4	0.5	69.6	0.5	73.4	0.5	79	0.6	109.7	0.0
1	Real estate transactions	69.3	0.5	66.7	0.5	62.4	0.5	53.4	0.4	63.2	0.5	62.2	0.5	64.9	0.5	63.2	0.4	91.2	-0.1
1	Professional, scientific and technical activities	140.9	1.0	141.5	1.1	140.9	1.0	131.6	1.0	138	1.0	135.7	1.0	139.2	1.0	144.4	1.0	102.5	0.0
1	Management activities and support services	76.1		76.1	0.6	95.4	0.7	98.4	0.7	100.2	0.7	108.1	0.8	108.7	0.8	107.5	0.8	141.3	0.8
1	Public administration and defense	577.8	4.3	631.7	8.4	636.6	4.7	635.9	4.8	637.3	4.7	636.8	4.6	637.9	4.6	634.9	4.5	109.9	0.2
1	Education	1106.6	8.2	1111.7	8.4	1134.4	8.4	1158.2	8.8	1220.5	9.0	1268.7	9.3	1299.5	9.3	1320.2	9.3	119.3	1.1
1	Health and social services	602.6	4.5	604.4	4.6	616.7	4.6	669.5	5.1	650.8	4.8	671.3	4.9	694.8	5.0	695.2	4.9	115.4	0.4
1	Arts, entertainment and recreation	65.3	0.5	65.6	0.5	66	0.5	67	0.5	70.2	0.5	71.7	0.5	71.9	0.5	66.6	0.5	102.0	0.0
1	Providing other types of services	1508.9	1.2	1545.1	1.6	1562.2	1.5	1358.2	1.3	1358.2	1.0	1534.1	1.2	1560.3	1.1	2252.4	5.8	149.3	4.6
	total	13520	10.0	13273.1	10.0	13541.1	10.0	13236.4	10.0	13538.9	10.0	13706.2	10.0	14014.2	10.0	14261.9	10.0	105.5	0.0

We compare the labor income of the rural population engaged in agricultural production and its changes with other sectors and industries of the economy, we can see that the nominal salary of an employee in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector (as of 2024) is 2914.3 thousand soums, which is 5.2 times less than the salary of an employee in financial and insurance activities, 4.5 times less than the salary of an employee in the information and communications sector, 3.1 times less than the salary of an employee in mining and open pit mines, and 2.6 times less than the salary of an employee in the electricity, gas, steam supply and air conditioning sector[14]. At the same time, during the period analyzed by us from 2017 to 2024, the monthly salary of an employee in real estate operations increased by 6.4 times, the salary of an employee in financial and insurance activities by 5.7 times, and the salary of an employee in public administration and defense; The data in Table 2 shows that while mandatory social security increased by 5.6 times, the salary of employees in the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sector increased by 3.3 times.

Table 2. Analysis of the average nominal monthly wage and its changes in sectors and areas of the economy

Content of the post	Years								Change in 2024 compared to 2017, in %.
	2017	2018	2 019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	885 , 1	1162 ,1	1412 ,2	1694 ,7	1937 , 4	2390 , 6	2706 ,8	2914 ,3	329.3
Mining and open pit mining	2974 ,7	373 4.0	4426 , 7	5998 , 0	6719 , 5	7109 , 0	8325 , 3	9099 ,1	305.9
Manufacturing industry	2073 ,2	2737 , 0	331 3.0	3408 ,7	3962 , 4	4767 , 0	5456 , 8	6194 ,8	298.8
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	1880 , 2	2632 , 2	3029 ,6	3446 , 3	4162 ,0	5695 ,9	6588 , 4	7486 , 1	398.1
Water supply; sewage system, waste collection and disposal	1079 , 9	1297 ,4	1573 ,1	1794 , 0	2261 , 5	242 9.0	2871 , 3	4169 ,8	386.1
Construction	1777 ,9	2292 ,4	2751 , 3	3311 ,8	3960 , 1	4677 ,6	5179 , 7	6001 , 4	337.6
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	1676 ,5	1980 ,8	2462 ,8	2766 , 9	3183 , 2	3917 , 5	5002 , 0	621 6.0	370.8
Transportation and storage	2028 ,6	2505 , 0	2966 , 0	3409 , 7	4240 , 6	5123 , 7	6848 , 9	8122 , 6	400.4
Accommodation and catering services	1037 , 9	1251 ,5	1749 , 1	1839 , 5	2402 , 8	3046 , 0	4120 , 0	4677 , 8	450.7
Information and communication	2502 , 1	3329 ,6	3968 , 8	4390 , 4	5577 ,2	7560 ,8	10596 , 0	13207 ,2	527.8
Financial and insurance activities	2694 , 7	3497 , 1	4804 , 8	6270 , 6	8309 , 7	10799 , 9	13357 , 5	15275 , 3	566.9
Real estate transactions	708 , 6	788 , 6	971 , 1	1333 , 0	1897 , 4	2597 , 2	3021 , 7	4546 , 4	641.6
Professional, scientific and technical activities	1283 ,7	1618 ,9	2341 ,1	3020 ,9	3776 , 2	4760 , 4	5737 ,8	7022 , 4	547.1
Management activities and provision of support services	1069 , 8	1185 ,2	1293 ,8	1867 , 6	2216 , 8	2712 ,4	3282 , 2	3888 , 5	363.5
Public administration and defense; compulsory social security	1393 , 1	2079 , 3	2813 , 6	3122 , 5	4172 , 7	5213 , 6	6513 , 7	7814 , 8	560.9
Education	1160 , 1	1381 , 5	1843 , 0	1980 , 3	2308 , 9	2688 , 3	3125 ,7	3638 ,9	313.6
Healthcare and social services	979 , 3	1171 , 6	1534 ,5	1811 ,2	2153 , 6	2602 , 3	3006 ,5	341 5.0	348.7

Arts, entertainment and recreation	1381.9	1669, 2	2046, 6	2262, 5	2744.6	3096.5	3784, 1	4311, 2	312.0
Providing other types of services	10 40.0	1368, 9	1466, 6	1978,5	2770, 7	306 2.0	4209.5	447 9.0	430.7

Naturally, the wage fund of manufacturing enterprises is formed based on the volume of their production and sales of products. Therefore, in order to increase the salary of an agricultural worker, it is first necessary to increase the volume of income from the sale of products at the enterprise and reduce production costs. One of the important areas for increasing income in an agricultural enterprise is the organization of the production of organic products. These products are sold in the organic market at a price of 30-100% higher than conventional products, depending on their type, and the production of organic products requires less cost than the production of chemical products.

Secondly, the majority of the country's population lives in rural areas and is engaged in agricultural production. However, in recent years, the migration of rural residents from their areas of residence to other regions has increased, which is causing a shortage of skilled labor in this area. In order to maintain the rural workforce, it is necessary to provide it with jobs and incomes that meet its needs. Organic production requires more labor and helps to eliminate the above-mentioned problems.

Third, organic agricultural production prevents environmental pollution, loss of biodiversity, and soil degradation.

We believe that it is appropriate to implement measures such as using the media to eliminate existing problems, conducting extensive explanations among the population about organic products, organizing advertisements, roundtable discussions, fairs, and increasing the purchasing power of the rural population by increasing their employment.

It is also important to establish zero-level, one-level, two-level and three-level product supply channels between organic producers and consumers, select the optimal methods of their use based on the situation, and take measures to reduce the number of participants (intermediaries) in the logistics channel chain as much as possible.

Another important direction for providing employment and increasing incomes for the rural population is the establishment of "Organic Agricultural Consumer Cooperatives". A consumer cooperative is a primary link between farmers and private subsidiary farms, a set of organizations united to carry out common activities, from purchasing raw materials to producing products, processing them, storing them, packaging them, delivering them to consumers, and providing after-sales services. This model allows chain participants to increase economic efficiency, reduce costs, and enter new markets. This ensures the sustainable development of the organic agricultural sector.

A cooperative enterprise is an independent, private business association of individuals whose members are both producers and consumers of goods and/or services. Producers, suppliers, and small traders operating in the field of organic agriculture form cooperatives for the following purposes:

- gaining the opportunity to purchase larger volumes of products and resources at lower prices;

- find new markets and sales channels for the sale of their products;

- reduce costs by expanding production scale.

In other words, the more agricultural producers unite in a cooperative, the lower the total cost of production[15]. At the same time, small marketing entities within the cooperative can compete on equal terms with large companies in the open market. In addition, members of an agricultural cooperative have the opportunity to more easily introduce and exchange modern technologies, including advanced farming methods.

The main tasks and directions of the cooperation are :

- Supply: Reduce the costs of each cooperative member through the joint purchase of organic seeds , fertilizers, machinery, and other necessary resources.

Processing: Establishing enterprises within the cooperative to process organic products (e.g. vegetables, milk, meat , etc.).

Marketing: Creating a sales system for delivering organic products directly to consumers or through your own sales network.

Service : Provide members with product storage, transportation, certification, and organic farming advisory services .

Strengthening competitiveness: The cooperative allows small farmers to compete with large producers by joining forces and creating a sustainable market for organic products.

agricultural consumer cooperatives operating in the organic sector :

Recycling cooperatives are organizations engaged in the processing of organic raw materials .

Sales cooperatives are associations that specialize in the marketing and sale of organic products. Supply cooperatives are structures that provide members with seeds, fertilizers, machinery, and other resources necessary for organic production .Service cooperatives are units that provide storage, repair, certification, and other additional services.

Benefits for cooperative members: Risk reduction is the ability to make decisions collectively and share responsibilities. Efficiency is the ability to obtain resources at a lower cost and market a product more widely.

Sharing experiences is an opportunity to learn from each other and implement advanced methods of organic farming. Access to technology – increasing efficiency through the joint use of expensive machinery and equipment.

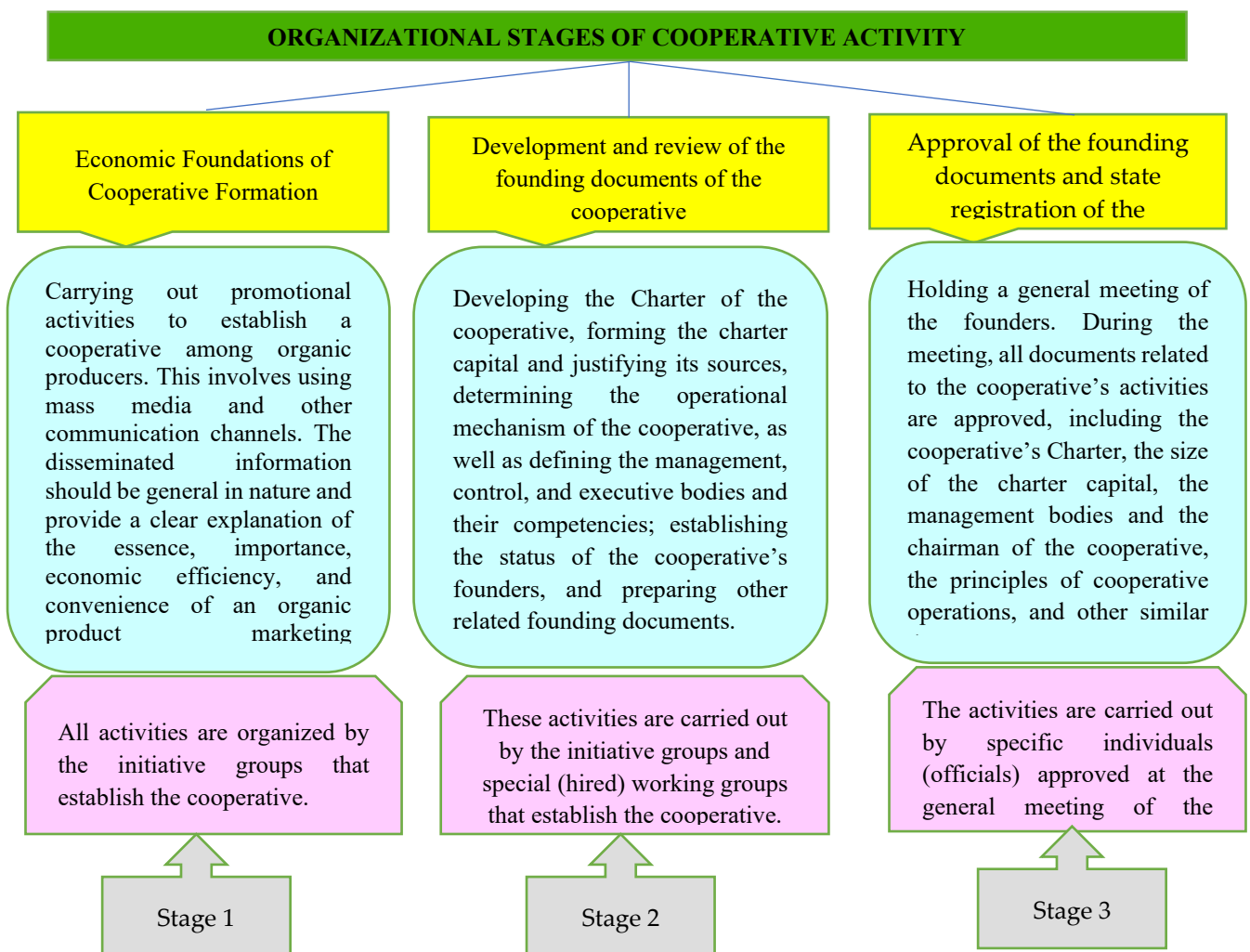


Figure 1. Organizational stages of cooperative activities in organic agriculture

Cooperation allows to effectively solve such issues as increasing the potential of rural areas and the level of employment of able-bodied citizens, timely purchase of products produced for sale by the population, development of the sphere of services for agriculture and handicrafts of the population. In addition, the organization of cooperative relations for the supply, sale and after-sales service of agricultural products is of great economic importance. This includes personal subsidiary and household farms producing goods and, first of all, allows to guarantee the sale of products at stable prices without seasonal fluctuations. As a result, the production of agricultural products in dehkans – farmers, personal subsidiary and household farms will increase. The measures being taken to develop cooperation and provide state support to peasant farmers, personal assistants, and household farms will, to a certain extent, help maintain positive trends in the economy, ensure the socio-economic development and prosperity of villages, and increase employment and incomes of the

4. Conclusion

Research and the experience of foreign countries show that it is advisable to organize the production of agricultural products at an early stage. However, to solve common issues, it is necessary, first of all, to organize certification, product sales, information technologies, the use of organic technologies, veterinary and technical services, associations, in particular, the organization of consumer cooperatives of agribusiness (see Figure 1). Consumer cooperation is an important tool in the development of organic agriculture, which allows farmers to join forces, achieve common goals and meet the growing demand for environmentally friendly products. In this context, the creation of consumer cooperatives in agribusiness becomes a crucial mechanism for coordinating the interests of small and medium-sized producers, providing them with access to resources, services, and markets. Consumer cooperation contributes to reducing production and transaction costs, improving product quality control, and ensuring compliance with international organic standards. Furthermore, cooperatives promote social and economic cohesion in rural areas by increasing employment, strengthening local communities, and enhancing the overall resilience of the regional economy. The collective form of organization allows farmers to overcome individual limitations related to finance, logistics, and innovation potential.

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