

## **Heirloom Varieties as Ecological Luxury – implications for local sustainability?**

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- The purpose of the study is to characterize the current state of heirloom vegetable cultivation in the Czech Republic and the reasons for this renaissance.

Heirloom, regional and family varieties of vegetables are important mainly due to their genetic variability. At the same time these vegetables have cultural significance as they are the result of focused, long-term human work and thus they are cultural heritage artifacts. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century however these varieties were gradually eliminated. This was due to legislative measures that restricted the seed market, as well due to small scale growers' interest in new attractive varieties and F1 hybrids.

- Methods

Our case study presents the results of a qualitative survey of heirloom vegetable growers. We studied the growers' motivations, basic information about how seed is obtained, the ways in which the vegetables are grown, including organic farming, and the possibilities for commercializing heirloom vegetables.

- Summary of the results

The research indicates that these vegetables are cultivated under conditions that could be characterized as intuitive organic agriculture. Conscious attempts to protect biodiversity were not determined to be the primary motivation for growing the studied varieties; the protection and expansion of vegetable biodiversity are a side effect of the growers' actions, in other words a positive externality.

- Theoretical and practical implications

Growers' motivations were studied in comparison to the theoretical concepts of ecological luxury, the idealized value of food and neophilia. The study presents information about the potential of heirloom vegetables for the development of local gastronomy and locally specific organic farming products.