



## WORKING TOGETHER TO PRESERVE AGRICULTURAL DIVERSITY

**Savings Banks have the right answers to the challenges facing rural areas.**

Agriculture in Germany has undergone enormous structural and economic change in recent decades – yet one thing has remained the same: its fundamental role in supplying the population with plant and animal-based food.

Caught between the conflicting priorities of productivity and sustainability, harvest cycles and climate change, politics and society, and – particularly relevant at present – record municipal deficits and regional development, farmers need to have strong partners.

One such partner has long been the Savings Banks Finance Group with its local member institutions. They support agriculture with efficient measures aimed in particular at sustainable financing and industry-specific advice. The East German Savings Banks Association (OSV) plays a special role in this regard.

The OSV is responsible for the four eastern German states of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, which also play a prominent role in agriculture.



## “THE PLANNED FINANCIAL PACKAGE IS AN IMPORTANT SIGNAL”

Rural areas need real prospects for the future – an interview with Dr André Berghegger.

As Chief Executive of the Association of German Towns and Municipalities (DStGB) and former mayor, the trained lawyer has a particular focus on local authorities. At the same time, as a member of the German Savings Banks Association's (DSGV) Executive Committee, he is familiar with all aspects of Savings Banks business. Both local authorities and Savings Banks are indispensable for the positive development of rural areas and thus also for the agricultural economy. Dr André Berghegger highlights what is necessary from the DStGB's perspective to ensure that both can continue to meet this particularly challenging task.

**Dr Berghegger, how does the DStGB assess the current situation for local authorities, and what challenges are cities and municipalities currently facing in view of the record deficit in local government finances?**

→ The financial situation of cities and municipalities is dramatic. Local authorities ended the last financial year with a historic deficit of EUR 24.3 billion. Their ability to act and invest is under serious threat. The main cause of this structural underfunding is the continuing rapid rise in expenditure, which is largely beyond the control of local authorities. In addition to the significant increase in personnel costs of 8.9 percent to EUR 88.1 billion due to new hires and wage increases that took effect in 2024, the increases in spending on social services are especially striking, with an increase of

11.7 percent to EUR 84.5 billion. The high deficit on the municipal side is due in particular to the increase in expenditure on child and youth welfare and integration assistance in accordance with the German Social Code.

There is currently no sign of improvement in the precarious financial situation of cities and municipalities. On the contrary, the continued dynamic growth in social spending is accompanied by lower tax revenues due to the economic situation. Many municipalities will be forced to cut back on investment just to keep the financing deficit at around EUR 20 billion. Given the investment backlog of EUR 186 billion and necessary future investments in the triple-digit billion range, this would be disastrous. In this respect, the federal government's planned financial package for infrastructure is an important signal to the construction industry and local authorities that cities and municipalities can continue to invest in the future.

#### **How should the financial relations between the federal government, the states and the municipalities be reorganised?**

→ In order to maintain the municipalities' ability to act and invest and to prevent further erosion of the democratic community, the federal and state governments must finally react and put municipal finances back on at least a reasonably stable footing. First and foremost, this includes respect for genuine connectivity, which includes cost-intensive standard adjustments and the expansion of existing tasks. There also needs to be a political shift away from the state having responsibility for everything and the associated limitation of its tasks. Not everything that is desirable can also be financed.

On the revenue side, local authorities must be given lasting relief from social spending. In addition, the municipal share of community taxes must be significantly increased. In the current

municipal financial situation, municipal revenue shortfalls resulting from federal and state tax legislation must also be compensated.

#### **In which key areas should the planned EUR 100 billion for the federal states and municipalities from the multi-billion-euro financial package be invested in order to make cities and municipalities sustainable and fit for the future?**

→ The new federal government has announced plans to tackle the infrastructure renovation backlog. To achieve this, we need municipal investment in areas such as our schools, roads and bridges. Of course, this can only be achieved with the support of local property owners and building authorities, i.e. the cities and municipalities. Take the example of dilapidated bridges, which are often the focus of attention. Anyone who fails to take into account that three-quarters of roads and associated engineering structures are the responsibility of local authorities will ultimately achieve little. Even a renovated motorway is worthless if the local bridge behind the junction becomes impassable. We have very clear expectations that the federal states will pass on a large part of these additional funds to the local authorities.

#### **Money alone is not enough – what needs to be done to ensure that the allocated funds have the desired effect?**

→ Local authorities not only need investment funds, but also a significantly greater scope to act. Without strong local authorities, it will not be possible to build up the personnel required to implement infrastructure measures. In addition, excessive standards and regulations make investments in local infrastructure more expensive, slow them down and sometimes even prevent them altogether. Significant improvement is needed here. This also applies to documentation requirements in the context of funding programmes.

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**Rural areas must be given greater political attention than they have received in the past.**

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Dr André Berghegger  
Member of the DSGV Executive Committee

#### **In your view, what role do Savings Banks and their partners play in revitalising the economy?**

→ A sustainable economic upturn can only be achieved through locally owned Savings Banks and their association partners. It is they who, as part of their public mandate, ensure the provision of banking and financial services across the country. Thanks to their regional roots, they are very familiar with local conditions and are therefore extremely important for the development of local businesses and the implementation of economic transformation on the ground. As reliable partners in times of crisis, they also play a central role in implementing government support and development programmes.

It is all too often overlooked that regionally rooted Savings Banks, with their local expertise, played a key role in helping the German economy recover from the global financial crisis of 2008/2009. Ultimately, the same applies to financial institutions as to politics: local responsibility creates trust – trust creates economic stability. However, in order for Savings Banks to be able to resume this role, the framework conditions need to be improved. Reporting requirements and the associated bureaucratic costs must be reduced across the board. Less bureaucracy generally creates more scope for investment.

**What opportunities and challenges do you see for rural development and the agricultural economy in Germany?**

→ More than half of our country's population lives outside of urban areas. This is where a large part of the value added is generated. However, the financial situation poses a major challenge, especially for structurally weak regions and rural communities. Here we are often dealing with small administrations that find it more difficult to participate in funding programmes, for example. Rural areas must therefore be given greater political attention than they have received in the past. Even though every region is different, it must be possible to create prospects for the future everywhere. This could be through tourism, an industrial estate or an agri-photovoltaic project, in which agricultural land is used simultaneously for food production and renewable energy generation. We consider the joint tasks of regional economic structure, agricultural structure and coastal protection to be particularly helpful in triggering private investment that strengthens small and

medium-sized enterprises and secures and creates jobs.

**What role does the above-mentioned joint task of agricultural structure and coastal protection play in ensuring sustainable agriculture and a secure food supply?**

→ The joint task is very important for agriculture. However, agricultural structure and coastal protection are much more than just agricultural aid. The joint task makes an important contribution to strengthening public services in rural areas and can also have a social impact. The funds are used, for example, to finance village community centres or town centre development, i.e. projects that send a clear signal that rural areas are not being left behind.

**How important are Savings Banks for rural areas?**

→ Savings Banks are indispensable partners for towns and municipalities in rural areas. They not only ensure comprehensive financial services for citizens and small and medium-sized enterprises, they are also strongly committed to the common good, for

example by promoting culture, sport and voluntary work. They are also important taxpayers and reliable lenders for local authorities. As a result, municipally supported Savings Banks are the central anchor of the regional infrastructure and make a significant contribution to local economic and social stability.



Agri-photovoltaic projects are one of many examples of how future prospects can be created in rural areas with the right support.



**43****Association Savings Banks  
of the OSV****≈ 6 million ha**  
of farmed agricultural land**EUR 746 million**  
agricultural loan portfolio**> 120,000**  
people working in agriculture

## IN THE REGION. FOR THE REGION. WITH THE REGION.

**Eastern German agriculture and Savings Banks  
form a strong partnership.**

Agriculture is an important economic sector in the business region of the East German Savings Banks Association (OSV). Unlike in the western federal states, where there are many small family farms, large farms dominate in the east – often with several thousand hectares of land. This is a legacy from the GDR era with its large agricultural production cooperatives (LPGs). After reunification, many of these collectivist structures were dissolved and converted into corporations and partnerships such as agricultural cooperatives, limited liability companies (GmbHs), limited liability partnerships (GmbH & Co. KGs) or private enterprises.

The large farm structures in particular enable greater specialisation, mechanisation and professionalisation of processes. This goes hand in hand with an increased need for capital and credit, whether for investments in land, technology or renewable energies. Especially as costs have risen massively, and not only in these areas. This makes the 43 member institutions of the OSV much sought-after partners for financing and advice.

In the rural areas of the four federal states of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, the Savings Banks' experts serve around 21,000 agricultural businesses with more than 120,000 employees. Together, they

&gt; 18,500

employees in the  
OSV Savings Banks

≈ 21,000

agricultural businesses

≈ 60 ha

average farm size in  
western Germany

&gt; 250 ha

average farm size in the business  
area of the East German Savings  
Banks Association (OSV)

Agriculture in eastern Germany is extensive, modern and plays a key role nationwide in food security, sustainability and renewable energy. The East German Savings Banks Association (OSV) has adapted to the requirements of this special clientele. This is also reflected in selected figures.

represent a significant economic force, whose further development the OSV Savings Banks are keen to actively support. Over the past ten years, they have more than doubled the volume of loans in this market segment. The OSV also offers targeted advisory services. The annual agricultural convention organised by the Association with renowned speakers and practical workshops, as well as the training courses offered by the North-East German Savings Banks Academy (NOSA) are particularly noteworthy.

The total volume of agricultural loans granted in 2024 remained stable at EUR 746 million. The funds are invested in new marketing strategies, drones and digitalisation, as well as in nature conservation, biogas plants, solar and wind farms. All with the aim of ensuring that agricultural businesses in the OSV's business area continue to make a disproportionately large contribution to Germany's agricultural production and thus to the supply of high-quality food, despite the low population density. In the current uncertain times, it is

becoming increasingly important to be as independent as possible from imported goods. Moreover, regionally produced and purchased food is more sustainable.

The two examples of cooperation on page 26 illustrate how the collaboration between OSV Savings Banks and agricultural businesses works in practice.

### OSV active for agriculture:

#### Head of the Agriculture Working Group:

- Participants include Savings Banks that are particularly active in the agricultural sector, selected partners and representatives of the Landesbanken
- Annual meetings (usually held at trade fairs)
- Representatives of state farmers' associations are also invited
- Visits to trade fairs (Green Week, agra, BraLa, MeLa)

#### Focus of the Agricultural Convention:

- Annual information event with 250 to 300 guests from politics, agriculture and the Savings Banks Finance Group
- Specialist presentations and workshops covering the entire value chain of agricultural products
- Platform for exchange and networking, especially between farmers

#### Training courses offered by the North-East German Savings Banks Academy (NOSA):

- Annual exchange of experiences in agriculture
  - Practical reports from Savings Banks for Savings Banks
- Specialist conference on agricultural business
  - Exchange on current topics and specialist presentations from the agricultural sector

# MAKING AN IMPACT TOGETHER

## Ludger Weskamp and Hanka Mittelstädt in a double interview on the special situation for Savings Banks and agriculture in the OSV's business region

The Executive President of the East German Savings Banks Association (OSV), Ludger Weskamp, and Brandenburg's Minister of Agriculture, Hanka Mittelstädt, both have strong regional and practical ties. Ludger Weskamp was previously a district administrator, while Hanka Mittelstädt was most recently the managing director of an agricultural business and previously also worked as a banker. Both are therefore well placed to comment on the special economic and political conditions in the OSV's business area.

**Mr Weskamp, the world is in turmoil and Germany is also facing major economic challenges. What does the current situation mean for the Savings Banks in eastern Germany?**

→ **Ludger Weskamp:** To use a popular German farming expression, in recent years federal subsidy policy has often given the impression of "jumping in and out of the potato field" – or of chopping and changing. This is fatal. Reliability, predictability and the ability to plan are essential in almost all areas of life – especially for our farmers. The economic situation is and will remain tense in the coming months. For our eastern German Savings Banks, this could mean stricter lending conditions, increased uncertainty for investments and even stronger competition from

other financial service providers. Eastern German Savings Banks must respond flexibly and innovatively to ensure their stability. But they have been doing this for more than 200 years.

In addition, the new federal government took office in the spring of this year. I hope that the current mood of change does not fizzle out. We must now move from talk to action and all pull together. I am optimistic that the German engine will then start up again.

**Agriculture is an important economic sector in eastern Germany. How are eastern German farms faring?**

→ **Weskamp:** Fifty years ago, there were more than 1.1 million farms in the Federal Republic of Germany. Today,



Ludger Weskamp, Executive President of the East German Savings Banks Association (OSV), hopes that politicians will move more quickly from talk to action.

there are only around 260,000 nationwide – the most productive of which are in eastern Germany, which is why they receive the largest share of agricultural subsidies from Brussels. In the four federal states of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, more than 120,000 people work in around 21,000 agricultural businesses. Agriculture is one of the most important economic sectors in eastern Germany. The eastern German Savings Banks have been intensifying their agricultural business for more than a decade. During this period, they have more than doubled the volume of loans in this market segment. Where other banks are pulling out, we are providing individual advice and support on the ground. Despite the economic uncertainties, the agricultural loan portfolio remains stable at around EUR 746 million, with only minor fluctuations.





As Brandenburg's current Minister of Agriculture, Hanka Mittelstädt sees opportunities to reverse the current downward trend in eastern German agriculture if the right conditions are in place.

→ **Hanka Mittelstädt:** Farms are under a great deal of pressure, especially in livestock farming. We have lost a lot of ground here in recent years. Sow farming, pig fattening and dairy farming have seen a substantial decline in Brandenburg – generally due to a lack of economic prospects. Nevertheless, I am convinced of their future viability and efficiency: highly trained agricultural managers are ready to take the future of these businesses into their own hands. The figures mentioned above show a willingness to invest. If we succeed in providing reliable framework conditions for livestock farms at EU and federal level over the next two years, I see opportunities to reverse the downward trend.

**Mr Weskamp, how are the economic difficulties affecting your agricultural corporate customers on the one hand and the Savings Banks themselves on the other?**

→ **Weskamp:** Farming is capital and credit-intensive, whether it's land purchases, animal housing or technology – costs have risen massively in all areas recently. In addition, agricultural businesses are confronted with an endless array of laws and regulations, which require ongoing additional investment. Politicians need to create reliable framework conditions quickly. Securing debt servicing capacity is particularly important for agricultural businesses, especially as they often have seasonal cash flows. Maintaining liquidity throughout the year until subsidy payments or harvest revenues are actually received is a particular challenge. This is important in order to be able to cover ongoing

operating and personnel costs. Forward-looking, early financial planning is therefore crucial. This is where the eastern German Savings Banks come into play as reliable local financial partners.

**Where do you see the focus of your support for eastern German agriculture in the near future?**

→ **Weskamp:** The East German Savings Banks Association regularly attends major agricultural trade fairs and organises two great events every year: the annual agricultural business conference and the traditional agricultural convention. Farmers value these events as a platform for exchanging ideas and networking with experts from agriculture, science and interest groups, as well as with the Savings Banks' agricultural customer advisors on current agricultural issues.

**Ms Mittelstädt, where do you see your current priorities as Minister?**

→ **Mittelstädt:** I would like to focus my work strategically on developing future-oriented framework conditions. This means not just thinking in the short term, but looking beyond the current legislative period. The realignment of EU policy under the auspices of a new defence and infrastructure doctrine has already led to fundamental changes in priorities. I firmly believe that a stable, crisis-proof farming and food industry in Europe is also an integral part of European security policy. In state politics, we are working to strengthen agriculture again after overcoming the existential threat to our livestock farming posed by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Ministers of the eastern federal states are working hand in hand, as the framework conditions for our farms are similar and require a





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Ludger Weskamp  
Executive President of the  
East German Savings Banks Association

strong voice at federal level and in Brussels. Our farmers in Brandenburg are excellent business managers who innovatively meet the demands of society, changing markets and even climate change. We must free this entrepreneurial and professional excellence from excessive constraints.

**Mr Weskamp, how are eastern German farms affected by the skills shortages and a lack of succession – and how should they be addressed?**

→ **Weskamp:** No one would wish to gloss over the fact that the shortage of young talent is already putting significantly more pressure on existing staff. Many farms are also facing the serious challenge that the next generation does not want to or is unable to enter the agricultural sector. This often leads to farms being sold or abandoned. We

need to get young people interested in farming again, promote training and further education opportunities, and create attractive financial conditions. In recent years, the East German Savings Banks Association has offered workshops on the shortage of skilled workers and succession as part of the agricultural convention, because the barriers to taking over farms are currently too high.

**Ms Mittelstädt, how much regulation does agriculture need – and which rules tend to be more of a hindrance?**

→ **Mittelstädt:** A large proportion of agricultural products are raw materials that are traded worldwide and across Europe, mostly for further processing into food. This means that regulations have a strong influence on competitiveness with other regions. We already have such distortions of competition in Europe, one example being the high German standards in livestock farming. This has led to a significant shift in pig production to Spain. Fruit and vegetable cultivation in Germany is also suffering massively from very different wage conditions in Europe due to the high demand for seasonal workers. And we have very different rules on the approval of pesticides, regulations on fertilisation and other nature conservation restrictions. We therefore need to find a balance between necessary – but fair – regulations within Europe and the reduction of over-regulated standards. We even have problems with this in our federal structures. What a farmer is allowed to do in Bavaria may be prohibited in Brandenburg. Future regulation and deregulation must take better account of the aspect of comparable standards.

**What specific steps are you planning to reduce bureaucracy?**

→ **Mittelstädt:** We know that we have to cut through a lot of red tape. The first approach we are taking at state level is to review all regulations and laws that go beyond federal and EU legislation to assess their effectiveness and usefulness. It is important to have direct contact with the people affected by

bureaucracy, who can explain their problems to us objectively. This takes place in regular meetings. In order to then move into an implementation phase, we have created working structures in our ministry to internalise the permanent reduction of bureaucracy, not as a threat, but as a measure of success. In the first six months of my term of office, we have already been able to contribute to the introduction of the first deregulation in the areas of land use and the environment into the parliamentary voting process – a first concrete step that we will follow up with others.

**Mr Weskamp, what does your association expect from the new government, especially after the farmers' protests in early 2024?**

→ **Weskamp:** First and foremost, I would like to see farmers appreciated and acknowledged for the important role they play in regional supply and the economy. After the protests in early 2024, it is important that the government promotes dialogue with farmers in order to develop sustainable solutions together.

**What framework conditions does sustainable and stable agriculture need in the future?**

→ **Weskamp:** Sustainable and regional agriculture requires clear and fair legal requirements and competitive conditions that promote environmental and climate protection without jeopardising the economic existence of agricultural businesses. Financial support and long-term, unbureaucratic subsidy programmes are needed to promote sustainable farming methods and innovative technologies.

**Ms Mittelstädt, you ran a farm yourself for several years. What do you think characterises a modern, sustainable agricultural business?**

→ **Mittelstädt:** A willingness to innovate and entrepreneurial drive – I'm very clear on that. It doesn't help at all to complain about the general conditions. And that actually applies to every

company. Even if it can be difficult at times, action must be taken: diversifying the business, being open to market opportunities and having a little courage to experiment. I also think it's important to be open to partnerships and cooperation. The time when we could solve all our issues on our own is over. Additional strength comes from pooling expertise and financial clout – I sometimes wish there was more openness among farm managers in this regard.

#### Where do you see the greatest need for political action?

→ **Weskamp:** Clearly in reducing bureaucracy and overregulation. As in all industries, these two factors stifle initiative and innovation in agriculture. The whole country is talking about digitalisation, but compared to ten years ago, companies in Germany now have to fill out almost 16 per cent more paperwork in the form of applications and invoices. And it's the same for farmers, doctors, retailers, associations and, yes, even local government. This bureaucracy costs EUR 65 billion a year in direct costs for companies alone. Farmers want to supply us with food and other important raw materials – out in the fields, not at a desk!

→ **Mittelstädt:** Reducing bureaucracy alone will not be enough, but it is an important building block. In my view, what we need is a clear vision for agriculture in Germany in 2040. A resounding yes to restructuring livestock farming, appropriate legal certainty and a sufficient support package. A resounding yes to grassland sites and pasture farming. A resounding yes to reviewing the

approval of pesticides in line with European standards, taking into account climatic changes, and a yes again to the use of innovative, environmentally friendly methods in arable farming, including natural genetic engineering.

#### What might cooperation between the OSV Savings Banks and agriculture ministries such as the MLEUV Brandenburg look like in the future?

→ **Weskamp:** The exchange already exists. It is now important that it is actively maintained and expanded. In the case of Ms Mittelstädt, it is of course a stroke of luck that, as a former farmer, she is very close to the concerns of the farms. Together, we could develop targeted support programmes in the future to help farms with investment, modernisation and sustainable management.

→ **Mittelstädt:** My idea of cooperation is to bring together the best of all perspectives and arguments and work together to achieve results. This is where the ministry can and should play an important role as a link between the industry and the associations. Wherever we can provide impetus for future-oriented development, we will be there to give our full support.



» The ministry should play an important role as a link between the industry and the associations.

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Hanka Mittelstädt  
Minister for Agriculture, Food, the Environment  
and Consumer Protection  
of the State of Brandenburg (MLEUV)

# ORGANIC FRUIT COMPANY ON THE RISE



**1952**

Foundation of the agricultural cooperative LPG “1st May” in Coswig

**1976**

Start of aronia cultivation on the Elbe meadows

## How Sparkasse Meißen is supporting the continuing growth of a special kind of organic fruit farm in Saxony

An organic fruit farm that is at the forefront of the healthy aronia berry industry conducts research and offers cultivation advice – this sounds less like traditional agriculture and more like a living transformation. Bioobst Görnitz in Coswig near Dresden has developed from a former GDR collective farm into one of the market leaders in biodynamic apple and specialty crop cultivation. Sparkasse Meißen, a strong financial partner with regional expertise, has supported its sustainable orientation from the very beginning.

Michael Görnitz stands between the endless rows of his aronia bushes. Their green leaves glisten in the morning dew and, despite the dryness of this spring, the plantation looks vibrant. “We are very satisfied with the fruit development this year,” explains the farmer, whose family has been farming in Coswig for decades. He can also be satisfied with the investments made in recent years: numerous new well systems, a water collection basin, an extensive irrigation network with over 100 kilometres of underground water pipes and a clever choice of varieties help to effectively combat drought stress.



“Today, we not only have to think organically, but also climate-smart,” explains Görnitz, who has been farming his land organically since 2008 and biodynamically according to Demeter standards since 2015. With almost 50 hectares of cultivated land, Bioobst Görnitz is one of the largest organic aronia growers in Germany. Apples, pears, berries and special crops such as rose hips also thrive on a further 230 hectares. This means a total of around 300 hectares of land is dedicated to fruit cultivation. The farm has long since become more than just a producer: in addition to marketing its products nationally to retailers and selling them in its on-site farm shop, it also develops

its own products such as Demeter juices, smoothies and apple sauce, which it sells under its own brand.

### From agricultural cooperative to green pioneer

The path to today's traditional family business began with a dramatic change: after reunification in 1991, the East German agricultural cooperative LPG “1st May” became a fruit-growing community that continued to operate conventionally, with Volker Görnitz, Michael Görnitz's father, as one of three founding partners. The next big step was the transition from fruit-growing community to the Görnitz family business in 2009 when Michael Görnitz also joined the



The farm is also popular with pick-your-own visitors.

## 1991

Privatisation of the LPG and founding of the Coswig fruit-growing community

## 2008

The fruit-growing cooperative is turned into the Görnitz family business

## 2011

Bioobst Görnitz GmbH & Co. KG is founded as an organic branch



company after completing his studies in biochemistry and horticulture. From then on, the business underwent a decisive shift towards organic farming and the first organic fruit crops were planted. In 2011, Bioobst Görnitz GbR was founded as an organic subsidiary of the business. Sparkasse Meißen was heavily involved in both realignments as an advisor and financier. Finally, in 2015, after years of consolidation and realignment, the existing businesses were taken over and the company changed its legal form to

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The complete conversion to organic farming was more than just a strategic decision for us, and we were glad to have Sparkasse Meißen at our side. Biodynamic fruit production is our identity.

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Michael Görnitz  
Managing Director of Bioobst Görnitz

Bioobst Görnitz GmbH & Co. KG as part of an internal family succession, with a complete focus on biodynamic cultivation. “Even the establishment of the subsidiary, and even more so the complete conversion, was more than just a strategic decision for us, and we were glad to have Sparkasse Meißen at our side. We wanted to show our commitment – to people, nature and the market,” emphasises Michael Görnitz. “As a family business, it was of course equally important for us that the transition to the next generation went so smoothly thanks to the active support of Sparkasse Meißen.”

Lars Richter, agricultural consultant at Sparkasse Meißen, looks back fondly: “Even though I have only been working with Bioobst Görnitz since 2021, the cooperation with my predecessors was

always based on trust. Sparkasse Meißen has provided financial support and advice on succession planning, the switch to organic farming and almost every step of the company's growth since then." Richter knows the industry and now also the business very well and is a regular visitor: "It feels like I have a second office on the farm," he says with a smile.

#### Partnership through all stages of maturity

Like the fruit he grows, the business has also continued to mature, and Görnitz appreciates the close support provided by Sparkasse Meissen. Whether it's land



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Sparkasse Meißen has provided financial support and advice on succession planning, the switch to organic farming and almost every step of our growth since then.

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Lars Richter  
Agricultural Consultant at Sparkasse Meißen

### 2015

Complete conversion to biodynamic farming (Demeter)

### 2020

Awarded the "Innovative through Research" seal of approval for the third time

### 2021

Expansion of hail protection systems and expansion of land and vehicle fleet

#### Brief profile of Bioobst Görnitz

This family business based in Coswig (Saxony), whose roots date back to 1991, evolved from the agricultural cooperative LPG "1<sup>st</sup> May". Since 2015, the fruit has been grown completely biodynamically in accordance with Demeter guidelines. The company grows apples, pears, red and black currants and raspberries, as well as special crops such as aronia, rose hips and jostaberries on a total of around 313 hectares. The aronia cultivation covers an area of around 80 hectares, making it one of the largest contiguous cultivation areas in Germany. Bioobst Görnitz has received multiple awards as a research-based company and it also offers cultivation advice to other businesses.

» [www.bioobst-goernitz.de](http://www.bioobst-goernitz.de)

purchases, technology financing or interim financing for EU agricultural subsidies, Sparkasse Meissen has always been a reliable partner. The most recent example is the financing of the further expansion of the hail protection system, which is becoming increasingly important in view of climate change.

A flexible framework loan will enable the organic fruit farm to make even faster investment decisions in the future. These may also be necessary due to the farm's other exciting activities. After all, innovation is not just a buzzword at Bioobst Görnitz, but an everyday reality, as reflected in the company motto "Regional genius since 1991". The company not only cultivates fruit, but also conducts research and advises other companies. Its own research activities include developing new cultivation

strategies and testing varieties for climate suitability. This internal research, combined with the experience gained and specialist knowledge, enables the company to offer its expertise to other farmers through consultations, workshops and collaborations.

Bioobst Görnitz is a project partner in the EU project HortiQD, which is being implemented by a total of twelve companies and institutes from four European countries. The project is working on the



Aronia berries are the farm's speciality.

development of an autonomous tractor that uses a high-resolution special camera and artificial intelligence (AI) to detect pests and diseases in orchards and transmit information to fruit growers in real time.

➤ [www.hortiqd-project.eu](http://www.hortiqd-project.eu)

For its research achievements, Bioobst Görnitz has been awarded the “Innovative through Research” seal of approval by the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft (Donors’ Association for the Promotion of Sciences and Humanities in Germany) since 2016. “We see it as our duty to think beyond our day-to-day

business,” emphasises Michael Görnitz. “Only those who look ahead can operate sustainably.” The Sparkasse, in turn, sees its support for the organic fruit farm as part of a larger whole: “We stand for long-term, regional development,” explains Lars Richter. “This also includes supporting innovative businesses like Görnitz and growing together with them.”

During the long years of cooperation, Bioobst Görnitz has benefited not only from the services offered by Sparkasse Meißen, but also from the East German Savings Banks Association (OSV). Michael Görnitz himself is involved in

this, giving specialist lectures and hosting events such as the OSV agricultural symposium in September 2024, which took place partly on the farm premises. Görnitz once again demonstrated how regional agriculture can shape the future. For Sparkasse Meißen, the agricultural business therefore remains a central part of its identity. With deep regional roots, expert advisors with industry know-how and a clear commitment to sustainable development, it aims to continue promoting agriculture in Saxony in a targeted manner.

## 2022

Bioland member

## 2023

Participation in the EU project  
“Horti QD”

## 2024

Organic pear orchards with  
weather, frost protection and  
sensor systems

### The Savings Bank in the Meissen district

Business area



- ➔ 368 employees
- ➔ 5 advisory centres
- ➔ 12 branches

■ Advisory centres  
■ Branch office

### Brief profile of Sparkasse Meißen

Sparkasse Meißen has been active as a financial services provider, employer and regional sponsor in the district of the same name for almost 200 years. With more than 120,000 current accounts, total assets of EUR 3.38 billion and a customer loan volume of EUR 1.64 billion, it is an important factor in the region's economic stability. Particular attention is paid to supporting regional companies, including agricultural businesses, which are provided with industry-specific advice and tailor-made financing solutions as well as agricultural income accounts as a basis for business payments. In addition to Lars Richter, an agricultural consultant is also available.

➤ [www.sparkasse-meissen.de](http://www.sparkasse-meissen.de)





## GROWING TOGETHER

**Sparkasse Uckermark has always supported the Menke family business through change, growth and generational succession.**

Josef Menke started out with 100 cows when he took over the Jagow estate in the Uckermark region in 1992. The business grew over the years, adding cattle, chickens, farmyards and fields. The generational change has now also been successfully completed. Throughout all these changes, Sparkasse Uckermark has been a constant companion and reliable advisor to the family business.

Farming takes perseverance. When Josef Menke decided in the early 1990s to take over the Gut Jagow dairy farm in the municipality of Uckerland, it was the start of a long process that has since resulted in a large farm with around 1,500 hectares of agricultural land. The farm in Jagow was expanded to include property, fields and stables in Brüssow, Kraatz, Kutzerow and Fahrenholz – and the family business became an employer for around 40 people, including trainees.

“We have achieved a lot in the last few decades. Step by step, with a great deal of perseverance and effort. Today, we are a modern agricultural operation, a local employer and a successful family business,” Menke looks back with pride.

#### A holistic approach

However, the beginnings were much smaller. The family initially farmed around 300 hectares of land for their cows. The following year, a new cubicle barn for 250 cows was built. A new milking parlour, a residential building and the lease of additional fields were

added – and that was just the beginning. Because that is the other side of farming: financing investments in farms is a long-term undertaking. Sparkasse Uckermark gave Josef Menke various loans for the purchase of the properties, new buildings and renovations.

With advice and financing from Sparkasse Uckermark, several older houses have been purchased and completely renovated over the years, and new single-family homes were built. Menke rents these out primarily to employees to offer them long-term housing locally and integrate them into the business on a permanent basis.

Everything followed the grand plan of doing as much as possible on the farm himself. Menke therefore built stables for calves and young cattle in order to maintain and expand his herd independently. He also added fields for fodder. As early as 2008, he began using photovoltaics to reduce operating costs and become more independent in this area as well. “We started early on to set up the farm in such a way that we could take as many steps as possible ourselves,” he explains.

Josef Menke takes a holistic approach to farming. He combines arable and livestock farming in a way that conserves nature and resources. Two of his three children, Henrik and Magnus, also work in agriculture – and are already entrepreneurs themselves. The result is a farm that harmonises production with nature conservation, and one that plans for the future.

#### Guided by a long-term vision

To achieve all this, he needed a partner who understood this long-term approach and shared his vision, as Thorsten Weßels, CEO of Sparkasse Uckermark, explains: “Investment in agriculture always involves long time frames and many uncertainties. Weather, market prices and political conditions are dynamic. This makes it all the more important for a bank to be a reliable partner who thinks along



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We have been a reliable partner since the company was founded, and we have built a sustainable business relationship. Our trusting cooperation, even in challenging times, is the basis of our joint success.

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Thorsten Weßels  
Chairman of the Board  
of Sparkasse Uckermark

with you and supports the project. The Menke family had a clear idea of how they wanted to develop their business right from the start. We are happy to support such concepts, especially when they are implemented with such perseverance and foresight and are so important for the local economy.”

Sparkasse Uckermark has been a reliable partner to the Menke family from the very beginning. In the early 1990s, Josef Menke received a loan from the local Savings Bank to purchase land from the Treuhandanstalt, which privatised state-owned businesses in the GDR. The Savings Bank also provided loans to support the modernisation of the stall barn, the lease of additional land and the construction of a dry cow barn and a machinery building.

#### Brief profile of the Menke farm

The Menke family farm in the Uckermark has been growing steadily since 1992. Today, the farm cultivates around 1,500 hectares of usable land, 70 per cent of which it owns. With 670 dairy cows, around 500 young cattle, 300 fattening bulls and tens of thousands of organic laying hens, Menke is one of the largest agricultural employers in the region. Around 30 employees work there all year round, plus trainees, temporary staff and interns. The farm grows crops including wheat, rapeseed, silage maize and lupins. A sustainable approach and continuous modernisation secure the future of the family business.



Menke's long-term vision is also evident in the renovations to the farm. In 2008, he built an irrigation well and installed a photovoltaic system on a new storage shed. The following year, he received financing to build additional photovoltaic systems and commissioned a 600-kilowatt biogas plant in 2010. "Sparkasse Uckermark has been a reliable partner for us right from the start. Especially when it came to larger investments such as photovoltaic systems and the purchase of land, it was important to have someone at our side who understands regional farming and thinks like us in the long term," says Josef Menke.

#### **Economic fluctuations require strong partners**

In 2011, tens of thousands of laying hens, which Menke keeps according to organic standards, joined the dairy cows and bulls. A year later, he commissioned two more laying hen facilities, followed by two additional barns in Brüssow in 2014. At the same time, he built more photovoltaic systems and now generates 1,200 kWp. In Kutzerow,

he connected his buildings to the heating network.

This is not just an expansion of his own farm, but also a response to the changed economic and ecological situation. Climate change is posing major challenges for farmers throughout Germany and forcing them to rethink their approach. The Uckermark region has been suffering from drought for years.

In farming, these climatic changes are compounded by economic volatility. Significant investment is needed to remain viable. However, market fluctuations can hit businesses hard. When milk prices fell dramatically in 2015, Sparkasse Uckermark granted a loan to support the Menke's business. "A lot is expected of farmers today. Necessary investments cannot be made without the financial backing of partners such as the Sparkasse," sums up Josef Menke. "We support local agriculture because it is important for the country as a whole. It is in the nature of things that there are sometimes bad years, when we have to provide support to ensure

#### **Uckermark region**

The Uckermark is one of the most sparsely populated regions in Germany. To the east lies the Lower Oder Valley National Park and to the south the Schorfheide-Chorin Biosphere Reserve and the Grumsiner Forest/Redernswalde UNESCO World Heritage Site. Farming plays a central role in the local economy. Around 58 per cent of the Uckermark – approximately 176,500 hectares – is used for agriculture, mainly for growing grain, rapeseed, maize and other crops. Around 540 farms, from family farms to large enterprises, characterise the region. In addition, there is a diverse infrastructure with dealers for seeds, agricultural machinery and operating resources. The natural conditions – fertile soil and a temperate climate – make the Uckermark an important agricultural location. Farming creates jobs, secures incomes and thus makes a significant contribution to regional stability and development.



It all started with dairy cows: the former Jagow estate has now been transformed into a modern family business with a sustainable focus.

long-term food security in Germany. And every farm counts," acknowledges Thorsten Weßels.

Sparkasse Uckermark is therefore an active partner of regional agriculture. It is a member of the district farmers' association and supports the district harvest festival and the farmers' ball. It invites farmers from the region to the OSV agricultural convention to exchange experiences. Farmers benefit not only from the Savings Bank's expertise, but also from its network: contacts with agricultural machinery dealers, tax offices and consulting firms provide concrete advantages in everyday life. In this way, the Savings Bank helps to make farming businesses in the Uckermark fit for the future.





As a forward-thinking farmer, Josef Menke knows that it's not just in the field that you have to keep moving.

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Josef Menke  
Farmer

Josef Menke is also committed to the region. In addition to his work on the farm, he is politically active as a councillor in both the local and district council, where he represents the interests of the rural population and farming. He volunteers for the Uckermark Farmers' Association and the Uckerseen Water and Soil Association, where he promotes the sustainable use of natural resources. His commitment shows how closely farming, responsibility and the common

good are linked for him. His goal: ecologically sustainable and socially anchored farming.

Today, Menke and his employees farm around 1,500 hectares of land. They keep almost 1,500 cattle – dairy cows, young stock and fattening bulls – as well as tens of thousands of chickens. The fields are planted with wheat, barley, rapeseed, lupins and maize. Feed for the cattle is harvested from 200 hectares of meadows. The farm is a success story, built on good cooperation. But standing still is not an option. The modernisation of the dairy cattle and barn facilities in Kutzerow is already planned, as is the renovation of the barn in Fahrenholz. New, high-performance machines will make the farm more efficient. "There is no standing still in farming," summarises Josef Menke. "There is always something to improve – the barns, the machinery or the processes. If you don't invest today, you'll be left behind tomorrow. That's why we are constantly planning to keep the business fit for the future."

#### **Brief profile of Sparkasse Uckermark**

Sparkasse Uckermark is a leading business partner in the region. Its 200 employees are not only closely connected to the Uckermark region, they also understand the specific challenges and opportunities facing local farming and support local farmers in all their projects with sound advice and quick decisions. Headquartered in Prenzlau, Sparkasse Uckermark has seven other branches and manages a total of over EUR 1 billion in customer deposits.

» [www.spk-uckermark.de](http://www.spk-uckermark.de)