

DEVELOP ORGANIC IN YOUR AREA: USING ACTION PLANS STRATEGICALLY

Political and financial support provided through national and regional governments' policies are crucial for creating and further developing a steady market demand, a solid supply base and good operating conditions for the EU organic food market.

These factors have contributed significantly to the growth of the EU organic food market and the expansion of the supply base. Organic farmland represented 6.21% of EU agricultural land in 2015 and is backed by strong demand for organic produce amongst EU consumers. In the last decade alone, the EU market doubled in value from €13.1 billion in 2006 to €27.1 billion by 2015.

With current trends indicating that EU demand for organic produce is far outstripping current production levels, there are great opportunities to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the organic sector as innovative solutions for the whole agri-food sector.

Organic Action Plans can help organic SMEs and the European agri-food sector to develop in a more holistic way that stimulates high quality food production, rural job creation, environmental protection, climate action and animal welfare. They do this by providing a framework for integrating different policies into a broader policy picture, and setting common objectives, targets and actions that serve the organic sector's needs and meet public policy goals in a specific country or region.

SME ORGANICS brings together regional governments, development agencies, organic food and farming, enterprise bodies, universities and research institutes from eight regions across Europe over a 4-year period 2016-2020.

As part of a participatory learning process, partners and stakeholders exchange and share experiences of best practices for devising Organic Action Plans. The development of these action plans covers a number of areas such as production and processing, commercialisation and marketing, training and advice, and organic value chain efficiency and governance, that can support the competitiveness and sustainability of organic SMEs in their region.

10 THINGS TO MAKE AN ORGANIC ACTION PLAN SUCCESSFUL

1. Undertake a thorough analysis involving a diversity of actors at the outset
2. Link the plan to the country's or region's overall strategies for sustainability, (rural) job creation, SME growth, environment and biodiversity, good food, etc.
3. Define objectives that are clear and can be realistically achieved
4. Select actions that are well aligned with the plan's objectives and clearly address the policy goals and needs of the organic sector in the country or region
5. Allocate sufficient financial and human resources to implement the plan
6. Ensure balance between 'supply-push' and 'demand-pull' policy measures
7. Include activities that build capacity and strengthen the resilience of the organic sector
8. Integrate regular monitoring and evaluation from the outset
9. Stimulate participatory stakeholder involvement throughout the cycle – analysis and development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation
10. Invest in developing a broad stakeholder alliance that can support the Organic Action Plan's long-term development and implementation

SME ORGANICS aims to use Organic Action Plans to enhance entrepreneurship and support existing SMEs in improving their performance to promote the growth capacity of the entire organic regional sector in regional, national and international markets.



USING ACTION PLANS TO DEVELOP ORGANICS



SET **COMMON OBJECTIVES**, TARGETS AND ACTIONS TO MEET EU, NATIONAL OR REGIONAL GOALS



TAILOR POLICIES TO ORGANIC NEEDS THAT SUPPORT HIGH QUALITY FOOD, JOBS, THE ENVIRONMENT, ANIMAL WELFARE AND OUR CLIMATE



CREATE A **PARTNERSHIP** APPROACH BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



USE **PUBLIC POLICY** SUPPORT TO COMPLEMENT ORGANIC MARKET GROWTH



FOCUS ON **SUPPLY AND DEMAND** ISSUES OF RELEVANCE TO THE ORGANIC SECTOR



FOSTER A **POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT** TO ENHANCE THE COMPETITIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF ORGANIC PRODUCERS AND SMEs

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ORGANIC ACTION PLANS SET OUT A NUMBER OF ACTIONS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIC SECTOR IN A COUNTRY OR REGION. PLANS INCLUDE SPECIFIC FOCUS AREAS WHICH COVER DIFFERENT THEMES TO ASSIST THE NEEDS OF THE ORGANIC SECTOR.

WHAT DO ORGANIC ACTION PLANS INCLUDE?

INFORMATION AND AWARENESS-RAISING

An understanding of organic food and farming can vary significantly amongst consumers and other stakeholders. Many stakeholders may have an interest in knowing more about organics, but might not have immediate access to information or not see it as being directly relevant to their work. Plans actively highlighting the benefits of organic food and farming, including the promotion of EU and national organic logos can help to increase recognition and address misconceptions.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Although organic is a more knowledge intensive way of farming, it is often not taught or advised in a specialised way, whilst teachers and advisors may not be aware of many organic farming practices. Those working in the organic supply chain and retail environments need a specific understanding of the specificities of organic production and the value to consumers. This can be addressed in plans by tailoring training and advice to organic needs.

RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Globally, only 1% of agricultural research funding is directly targeted at the organic sector. This funding is insufficient to stimulate investment, especially by SMEs, and to meet the innovation needs of the fast growing organic sector. Plans can aim to remedy this by identifying research needs for the sector and allocating funding to them to deliver on societal challenges and policy goals.

PRODUCER SUPPORT

To strengthen the supply base products, most countries, even those without Organic Action Plans, use organic farm payments to support farmers who wish to convert to organic or who are already organic. Plans can also help to develop one area of production such as milk production or fruit-growing sectors, and build producer capacities in a specific area, such as advisory services or investments in infrastructure.

MARKET DEVELOPMENT

Historically, public support for organic farming has focused on production-oriented land area payments. However, promotion and organic market development, including support for short supply chains, are increasingly being considered priorities in plans. Particular attention is given to public procurement and export opportunities.

INSPECTION, CERTIFICATION AND REGULATION

The organic sector develops and improves continuously. As a result, there may be a desire to improve how inspections and certification are carried out, or a need to promote or enhance the standards for organic in general, or for a specific product group. Plans can be used to address many of these issues.

WHAT ACTIONS ARE PART OF PLANS IN PRACTICE?

INFORMATION AND AWARENESS-RAISING

Programmes targeting consumers, procurement and catering teams, other public and private organisations, civil society and policymakers to promote the economic, environmental and social value of organic produce (Scotland, UK).

Programmes developed with the Ministry of Education targeting schoolchildren, parents and teachers to raise awareness about organic farming through school gardens, farm visits and food tastings (France).

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Reviewing how advice for farmers interested in conversion can be improved, including the responsibility of relevant government departments and bodies to offer agricultural advice and education (Germany).

Improving knowledge of organic production and its economic and environmental efficiency through technical materials for farmers, strengthening partnerships for developing organic production and enhancing training for organic producers (Andalusia, Spain).

RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Working with researchers to identify and address challenges facing organic production and distribution. Collecting biodiversity data from organic farms to promote habitat management using organic farming under agri-environment climate schemes (Scotland, UK).

Continuous development of federal research for organic farming to further expand its pioneering role in the field of sustainable land management and resource use by building on past programmes (Germany).

PRODUCER SUPPORT

Creating a more stable support payments system that is easier to understand and offers more incentives for farm viability. Priority funds given to agroecological projects and organic farming in areas with water quality problems (France).

Making a direct link in the plan to support payments offered, placing specific focus on farmlands with reduced nitrogen as well as areas used for organic fruit production (Denmark).

MARKET DEVELOPMENT

Establishing new points of sale for organic farmers. Educational seminars for supply chain actors to identify market success factors and promote better cooperation amongst producers, processors and retailers (Czech Republic).

Developing educational activities and materials and subsidising organic fruit and vegetables in schools. Providing support and advice to convert public catering to organic, and the promotion of organic brands in canteens and restaurants (Denmark).

INSPECTION, CERTIFICATION AND REGULATION

Improving organic control systems to make them more transparent ensuring the co-existence of organic production with other production systems - in particular the promotion of regulatory and administrative instruments to prevent GMO contamination (Andalusia, Spain).

Improving animal welfare inspections by developing methods and training for organic farming inspectors (Czech Republic).

SME ORGANICS: A DYNAMIC LEARNING PROCESS



REGIONAL DIAGNOSIS OF ORGANIC SECTOR



PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS REGULARLY EXCHANGE



DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL ACTION PLANS



IDEAS AND BEST PRACTICES SPREAD ACROSS EUROPE



FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE SEE **ORGANIC ACTION PLANS: A STAKEHOLDER GUIDE**. IT PROVIDES A THOROUGH ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF ORGANIC ACTION PLANS IN EUROPE, INCLUDING CASE STUDIES OF SIX PLANS.

DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE FROM WWW.IFOAM-EU.ORG