

01

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE ORGANIC SECTOR IN THE CAP AND OTHER POLICIES

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INTRODUCTION

Demand for good food and good farming is on the rise in Europe. People of all ages, including farmers and citizens, are hungry for change and want to see better food and farming policies based on agro-ecological approaches (Eurobarometer, 2011; Good Food March, 2012). In recent years, EU policymakers have slowly come to recognise the dual role of organic farming. On the one hand, it strives to meet the consumers' demand for high quality products; on the other, it fulfils an important role in securing certain public goods. This includes, for example, the protection and improvement of water and soil quality as a result of organic land management practices (European Commission, 2004). That understanding began to emerge in the early 1990s, when organic farming was legally defined under EU Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91, and when organic farming support payments for conversion and maintenance were introduced under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Over time, recognition of organic farming has also extended into other EU policy areas, such as research, and some areas of market development (Dabbert *et al.*, 2004; Stolze and Lampkin, 2009). However major gaps still remain in many policy areas, which undermine a supportive climate for local and organic food chains. Meanwhile, EU citizens are also voting with their feet, with the EU organic market valued at EUR 20.8 billion in 2012. Yet, despite the growing consumer demand in many EU countries, supply remains insufficient to meet that demand. Not only do EU citizens favour organic methods of production, but a high proportion also believe farmers should receive encouragement to produce more organic products (Eurobarometer, 2010). Researchers and policymakers now also recognise the potential of agro-ecological practices and innovation (IAASTD, 2008; SCAR, 2011; Levidow *et al.*, 2013). Studies show, however, that a supportive climate for organic farming is critical as farmers not only require public support for agro-ecological approaches, backed by a strong demand for organic products, they also need to perceive the policymakers' commitment to the development of the sector (Offermann, *et al.*,

2009; Sanders *et al.*, 2011). This chapter outlines some of the opportunities and challenges that influence the new and existing EU policy frameworks for organic food and farming, and the agri-food sector, as well as ways that can help make Europe more organic.

FOSTERING ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN A GREENER AND FAIRER CAP

Greening direct payments for all farmers

For the first time, public good delivery constitutes a significant part of both direct payments and rural development.³ Under Pillar 1 of the CAP, direct payment eligibility depends on farmers undertaking three basic agronomic practices – crop diversification, the protection of permanent grassland and the allocation of 7 % of farmland as ecological focus areas. Collectively, these are known as the greening component. This new element represents 30 % of national funding for Pillar 1. Furthermore, under Pillar 2 Member States are legally required to spend at least 30 % of their rural development budgets on environmental measures, including commitments in support of organic production and agri-environmental climate protection practices which go beyond the Pillar 1 greening.

The introduction of greening marks the beginning of a process towards normalising public good delivery across the entire CAP. Organic farming is deemed to be *ipso facto* greening compliant. This acknowledges the public good delivery aspect of organic farming as the only EU-wide certified, systemic approach to sustainable agriculture. The recognition can be seen as a strong political signal from EU policymakers that they view organic farming as a priority model of agricultural sustainability, and as an active contribution to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, as well as for climate change mitigation and adaptation (IFOAM EU Group, 2010). On the other hand, the low level of ambition of the greening measures as well as the introduction of questionable exemptions will severely curtail the potential of greening to drive public good delivery. For instance, in the European Commission's original proposals the greening component referred to all farms⁴. However, in the final political agreement the measures are targeted primarily at arable farmers and will probably have very little impact on livestock farming. The concept of equivalency, whereby practices undertaken as part of agri-environmental measures or special certification schemes exempt farmers from greening requirements, also weakens the greening component. Ultimately, therefore, achieving a genuine paradigm change in agricultural sustainability will require corrections and improvements to be made in subsequent reforms.

Recognising organic farming as greening compliant

From the perspective of organic farming, the ultimate impact of greening recognition will depend on how the CAP Regulations are implemented. For instance, there might be significant adverse impacts if Member States use the recognition as an excuse to neglect support for organic farming under Pillar 2. Member States must therefore guarantee a more confident and dynamic support framework for the progression towards sustainable agriculture in Europe, by ensuring that greening is combined with strong support for organic farming under Pillar 2. Support for organic farming is based on the requirements set out under EU Regulation (EC) No 834/2007, as well as national legislation. It reaches beyond the scope of the greening objectives. Pillar 2 payments must therefore provide comprehensive support for organic farming, with recognition serving as a positive signal of the EU's commitment to sustainability that can help to drive agro-ecological transformation throughout Europe.

Advanced sustainability in rural development

Whereas the orientation of Pillar 1 towards public goods delivery is a welcome development, measures under Pillar 2 are still the main drivers for the growth of organic farming and greater sustainability in rural areas. In the new rural development programming period of 2014 to 2020, organic farming is to be viewed as a measure in its own right, with support available to certified organic farmers or groups of farmers for a period of five to seven years, on a per-hectare basis. Payments are designed to compensate farmers for additional costs incurred and income foregone, and to cover transaction costs such as increased management efforts, certification costs and training and advice.⁵ Today most authorities in the Member States offer organic support payments under their national or regional rural development programmes (RDPs). However, support levels differ between and within Member States, and they often fail to adequately cover all the extra costs, or to take into account the reduction in yields organic farmers might face (DG AGRI, 2013; Pohl, 2009). Therefore, organic farming support payments must represent a significant top-up compared to conventional farm support payments, in order to provide farmers with strong incentives to convert to and maintain organic farming. In the new programming period, organic farmers are also still eligible for optional agri-environment-climate payments that go beyond the requirements of organic production, such as the preservation of indigenous animal breeds or the conservation of plant genetic resources. However, the provision of combination payments is at the discretion of Member States; it can be made organic-specific or may apply to all farmers, varying significantly across national and regional RDPs (Schwarz *et al*, 2010). To stimulate more far-reaching agro-ecological approaches, organic farming systems should be clearly prioritised under new agri-environment-climate schemes.

Combining organic farming support with other RDP measures

New RDPs also continue to offer options for combining organic farming support with other RDP measures, such as farm investments, diversification, advisory services, information and promotion activities, and producer groups. Explicit support for organic farming is now more visible in a number of measures. For instance, organic farmers are now eligible for a 20 % higher rate of support for investments that improve farm sustainability and performance or activities related to processing, marketing and farm product development. Furthermore, the organic sector can also be supported in EU information and promotion activities, while the new CAP Regulations state that organic advisory services should be covered by the Member States' farm advisory systems. Other measures are also relevant to organic sector, such as support for diversification of non-agricultural activities, assistance with the setting-up of producer groups, and support for collaborative initiatives related to the environment and climate change, the formation of short supply chains, or innovation. In some Member States organic farming is explicitly mentioned or specifically prioritised in similar measures under RDPs for 2007-2013. However, provisions under these measures vary significantly between countries and within Member States, with many authorities failing to go beyond the classical agri-environmental area payments model by introducing a more holistic model combining organic support payments with other RDP measures (Sanders *et al.*, 2011; Schwarz *et al.*, 2010 IFOAM EU Group, 2012a). The greater visibility of organic farming in other relevant RDP measures, such as investments and advisory services, provides new opportunities to mainstream organic farming in RDPs.

Stimulating agro-ecological innovation in the new EIP-AGRI

Of particular interest in terms of mainstreaming organic farming in rural development is the acknowledgment by EU leaders of the need for agro-ecological innovation to redirect European agriculture onto a more sustainable path. Innovation is a priority of the next programming period, and will be promoted through the newly established European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI). This is an EU policy instrument supported jointly under Horizon 2020 and rural development policy until 2020. The main objective of the EIP-AGRI is to bridge the gap between research and farming practice by encouraging stakeholders from different areas of the agri-food system – farmers, businesses, researchers and advisers – to share ideas and experiences, develop innovative solutions to current problems and challenges, and to put the results of research projects into practice. Under the Rural Development Regulation, the EIP-AGRI asserts the need for progress in the development of agro-ecological production systems, emphasising the important role of organic farmers at the heart of innovation activities supported by the new RDPs. The EIP-AGRI therefore offers a lot of potential to promote the development of agro-ecological approaches by building on the strengths of organic farming, addressing its existing weaknesses and taking advantage of new opportunities for innovation (IFOAM EU Group *et al.*, 2012a).

Much of the work implemented under the EIP-AGRI will be conducted by operational groups. These groups are meant to build bridges between different stakeholders to tackle specific practical problems and will be supported as a voluntary measure in the Rural Development Regulation. This means that it will ultimately be up to national and regional authorities rather than EU officials to determine the objectives and the content of the EIP-AGRI in the Member States. It is therefore vital that these authorities support the operational groups that embed organic and agro-ecological problem solving in the new initiative. The EIP-AGRI will also act as a catalyst to boost the flow of information and foster exchanges of knowledge and expertise across projects, sectors and borders. It will link farmers, advisors, agri-businesses, researchers and civil society to form a network – the EIP Network – facilitated by the EIP-AGRI Service Point.⁶ One particularly welcome development has been the creation of a 20-member focus group on optimising organic arable yields, headed by the European Commission. This brings together various different stakeholders. It is looking at ways of increasing yields on less productive organic farms, so that they match the higher levels of production on other farms using similar farming systems. The focus group will collect existing knowledge (from scientific reports and projects, as well as practical experience) that can contribute to innovative solutions, while also identifying specific areas where new research is needed. It will also be able to propose the topics and criteria for future operational groups, as well as tools and methods for knowledge sharing.

A new common framework for the Cohesion Fund and Structural Funds

The programming period for 2014 to 2020 also offers the potential to prioritise and increase the visibility of organic farming, not only under RDPs, but across a range of different EU policy frameworks as programmes are linked to a new EU instrument called the Common Strategic Framework (CSF).⁷ This will pursue a set of clear investment priorities for the financial planning period 2014-2020, in Member States and their regions. Here, for the first time, an effort is being made to connect rural development with the Cohesion Fund and other EU structural funds. This should encourage better policies, while combining funds with other efforts to meet Europe's growth and jobs targets for 2020, as well as national priorities. The CSF is also linked to other EU policy instruments such as CAP direct payments, Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020. Commitments between the European Commission and the national and regional authorities for the next seven year period are set in the partnership agreements. With greater institutional recognition of the social, economic and environmental benefits of organic food and farming, prioritisation in these agreements provides opportunities to mainstream organic farming across the new RDPs and other EU policy frameworks.

CAP spending 2014-2020

Agricultural policy is the only sector that is almost entirely funded by the EU, with the bulk of funds spent on annual direct payments and market measures (100 % financed by the EU) while the remainder are allocated to multi-year rural development measures which are also co-financed through national and regional budgets. For over a decade, Pillar 2 measures have orientated the CAP toward the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of farming enterprises, and toward greater economic diversification and quality of life in rural areas. Member States have also been obliged to build up their available funding for rural development through so called modulation – moving funds from Pillars 1 to 2. Despite the trend towards greater support for rural development over the last ten years, Pillar 2 spending is still just a fraction of that for Pillar 1. Over the next seven years (2014-2020), rural development will account for just 9 % of the total EU budget, compared to the 29 % provided for direct payments and market measures. A comparison of figures for 2013 and 2020, for example, would see a reduction of -18 % for rural development (from EUR 13.9 billion to EUR 11.4 billion) compared to -13 % for direct payments and market measures (from EUR 43.2 billion to EUR 37.6 billion). If voluntary modulation is included the reduction for 2020 would rise to -19.7 % (Little *et al.*, 2013).

Furthermore Member States now have the possibility to modulate 15 % of their direct payments and rural development funds from Pillar 1 to 2, but also in the opposition direction from Pillar 2 to Pillar 1. Through what is known as reverse modulation, some Member States can even move up to 25 %.⁸ Member States also have the option to adjust the percentage for specific years during the programming period.⁹ It is still unclear how Member States will decide to use these options, with some likely to make full use of the reverse modulation option, while others will choose modulation to close the gap in Pillar 2 spending which results from budget cuts. While the new CAP places a stronger emphasis on public goods delivery across both Pillars 1 and 2, the low level of ambition with respect to greening, coupled with the threats of reverse modulation and cuts to the Pillar 2 budget, could seriously undermine support for organic farming and other measures that could potentially contribute to the development of more sustainable food and farming in Europe.

Taking stock of EU organic legislation and policy developments

In addition to support under the CAP, EU legislation on organic food and farming has continued to develop since EU Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 was established in the early 1990s. This development process also included a full revision of the Regulation, culminating in the adoption of EU Regulation (EC) No 834/2007. Since its adoption, rules on its implementation have been agreed, detailing the organic production, as have specific rules on organic wine,

organic yeast and organic aquaculture. EU organic regulations seek to develop a harmonised approach to consumer protection, preventing unfair competition and ensuring common standards for organic production, labelling and marketing in the EU. At the same time, private and other national organic standards build on the EU requirements reflecting the specific cultural, structural, geographic and climatic diversity of individual Member States and regions, and help to pioneer innovation in organic standards across the sector. Since they constitute the only EU-wide sustainability label for food, organic standards and certification can help boost sustainable agriculture, while highlighting the scope for increased sustainability across the whole agri-food sector (IFOAM EU Group, 2012b).

A review process of organic policy and legislation initiated by the European Commission in 2012 is expected to culminate in the development of a new EU Organic Action Plan in 2014, and the replacement of EU Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 in the next EU legislative term 2014-2019. This should enhance the development of the EU framework for organic food and farming by striking a balance between policy aspirations and legislative necessity. That could affect issues ranging from the incomplete and unreliable collection of data and the outstripping of production by market demand, to the lack of specifically organic inputs such as seeds, young animals and protein feed, as well as the administrative burdens that discourage smaller-scale farmers and operators. It is important to remember that the current Regulation only came into force in 2009. Therefore, the review must consider that the aims, objectives and principles of the existing Regulation have not yet been fully exploited through the development of additional implementing rules, and that any improvements to the regulatory and policy framework must be seen in the context of ongoing developments in organic farming. The review process must also facilitate coordinated and coherent responses between EU organic legislation and the new EU food and farming policy frameworks for 2020, such as the CAP and Horizon 2020.

Ensuring organic legislation is fit for purpose

It is essential for any review that the legislative goals and objectives reflect the rich diversity of opportunities and challenges facing organic food and farming across the EU. While EU policymakers have the ultimate power to decide between small improvements to EU legislation or an entirely new regulation based on organic principles or market forces, they must remember that any changes will have significant implications for the organic sector's future in Europe.¹⁰

For instance, a market-driven approach could place too much emphasis on market-orientated outcomes, resulting in fewer strict legal requirements and sacrificing organic principles. For example, moves to secure on a permanent basis any exemptions granted to Member States under the current Regulation, or to reintroduce the option of national ministries authorising imports could have a seriously adverse impact on the development of truly sustainable organic agriculture, and incur the risk of competition distortion between Member States.

A principle-driven approach could help to orientate organic production more closely to the principles set out in the Regulation, while strengthening the standards. However, if this would necessitate the removal of elements of flexibility or exemption rules available to Member States, this approach would not be fit for purpose and could impede the sustainable development of organic farming. Sector realities in different Member States and regions must be taken adequately into account. Whilst some exemptions are no longer necessary, others need to be modified in line with the progressive increases in standards that the organic sector has delivered since the inception of the Regulation. However the immediate removal of all the exceptional rules would be inconceivable today, since a number of them remain critical for certain production sectors and in geographical areas where the organic sector is still in its infancy.

Therefore, a mix of the different approaches is needed to ensure a good balance between the fundamental principles of organic farming and the long-term development and expansion of the European organic sector. Changes, such as the introduction of group certification systems (which are currently only accepted in developing countries outside Europe), or the requirement that processors and traders measure the environmental performance of their activities, present opportunities. Group certification systems in the EU, for example, would enable groups of small-scale farmers to gain certification as single entities, thereby decreasing the bureaucratic burden of certification; and greater environmental performance requirements for processors could build on sustainability standards delivered by organic growers and livestock producers in order to move EU organic food to an even wider concept of sustainability. Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 has been an important driver of the organic sector in Europe. A new regulation should continue to support the development of the sector by enabling a process orientated approach that advances standards in the direction of the fundamental organic farming principles. Consumers and producers should work hand in hand to support the growth of the sector, with EU and national policy frameworks contributing to this dynamic through new EU and national organic action plans.

A new EU Organic Action Plan

Interest in organic farming is growing in the context of EU food and farming policies, as policymakers begin to appreciate the multi-layered significance of organic systems and sustainable food and agriculture. This ranges from the production of high quality food products and the delivery of public goods, to job creation and the stimulation of the agri-food sector and rural economies. Nevertheless, a coherent organic policy framework with a mix of policy measures is still needed in order to exploit the full range of benefits provided for by organic production. Following the implementation of a number of actions set out in the 2004 EU Organic Action Plan, such as specific standards for organic wine and aquaculture, the Commission's announcement of a new EU Action Plan in 2014 is a welcome initiative.

This should foster the continued development of the organic sector until 2020. The final outcomes of the 2004 Action Plan also provide the impetus to take stock of progress towards a coherent organic policy framework at EU level, including not only the achievements, but also an assessment of where work still needs to be done. For instance, better links are needed between national organic actions and national and regional RDPs, as outlined in Action 6 of the 2004 Action Plan, in order to establish greater coherence of policy frameworks for the organic sector in Member States (Sanders *et al.*, 2011). This is an area in which more work still needs to be done in order to mainstream organic farming in new RDPs by 2020.

The EU and national organic action plans clearly need to be complementary, in order to ensure the right outcomes are achieved across Member States and regions. Consequently, all action plans up until 2020 should benefit fully from all EU policy frameworks. They should:

- make best use of all relevant instruments and measures under the CAP, from organic and agri-environmental support payments to tools that support knowledge transfer and innovation, market development and capacity building
- mainstream organic approaches in EU research programmes and innovation tools, in order to promote greater transition to agro-ecological approaches
- align the organic regulations with the horizontal legislation more effectively, such as labelling and the regulation of farm inputs
- increase the availability of quality protein feeds by promoting local protein feed production and exploring alternative protein sources
- increase the availability of organic seeds and propagating material by financing long-term breeding programmes for locally adapted and organic plant varieties that enhance agrobiodiversity and maximise the yield potential of organic farming
- launch a new promotion campaign for organic products, associated with the EU organic logo, while prioritising organic farming in educational programmes and green public-sector procurement
- improve the collection of organic data, which is currently collected by researchers and Member States' authorities, but is not sufficiently harmonised for it to be used effectively by policymakers and stakeholders
- enhance legislation to protect the organic sector from GMO contamination
- support the registration of organic, traditional plant protection substances under horizontal legislation.¹¹

For more information on national and regional organic action plans in Europe, see Chapter 4 in this volume.

EU research policy and organic funding scenarios

Since the early 1990s, organic issues have been gradually taken up into the EU research policy framework. Until the 1980s, research activities on organic farming had been carried out mainly by private research institutes, with the first EU projects on organic farming funded in the 1990s. Since then, the EU budget for organic research has increased from EUR 767 000 in 1993 to more than EUR 6 million in 2013. This makes the EU an important investor in organic research, and as such also in the development of the sector. It is therefore crucial to understand the different EU policy instruments for research and innovation, and how these can be influenced. The EU's most important funding instrument for research for the period 2014-2020 is the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020, with a total budget of almost EUR 80 billion. As outlined above, support for agricultural innovation implemented under the EIP-AGRI comes from both Horizon 2020 and the new RDPs. Horizon 2020 addresses three key areas: *scientific excellence*, *industrial leadership* and *societal challenges*. The last of these is particularly important for the agricultural sector (especially the issue of food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine, maritime and inland water research, and the bio-economy). With at least 5 % of the total Horizon 2020 budget (EUR 4 billion) allocated to address *societal challenges* for the next seven years, the budget for these research areas has almost doubled compared to the previous programming period.

New instruments under Horizon 2020 include multi-actor projects and thematic networks. These will be used to fund specific projects contributing to the EIP-AGRI. Multi-actor projects are intended to involve different stakeholders (researchers, farmers, advisors, enterprises, educators, NGOs, administrations and regulatory bodies). They are targeted at the needs and problems facing farmers and other practitioners. They also seek to foster participatory research – something with which the organic sector already has broad experience, for example, through on-farm breeding programmes. Thematic networks, on the other hand, will focus on specific themes, mapping the current state of existing scientific knowledge and best practice. The networks will help to develop materials that facilitate knowledge exchange, and which are easily accessible. Like the multi-actor projects, thematic networks should involve all the relevant stakeholders, and provide a platform for actors in the organic sector to exchange their knowledge at EU level. Given the sector's long history of strong collaboration across disciplines and between researchers and producers, the multi-actor approach presents opportunities. Moreover, many of the calls for multi-actor research projects are expected to be specifically relevant to organic agriculture, for example calls related to soil quality and function, or genetic resources and agricultural diversity. The EU's big investments in research notwithstanding, the majority of research funds are still managed by Member States. Research funds of relevance to organic farming and sustainable food and agriculture include CORE Organic, ERA-Net SUSFOOD and the Joint Programming Initiative on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change (FACCE-JPI).¹² These examples of Member States pooling national research funding are supported by the EU. The aim is to establish greater coherence between the EU and national research policies.

Organic perspectives of the broader EU policy framework

While EU organic legislation and policies, such as the CAP and policies on research and innovation, affect organic farming directly and indirectly, other EU policies also have significant implications for the development of agro-ecological approaches. A paradigm shift towards sustainability in EU food and farming also depends on EU rules and regulations that empower rather than impede the growth of small and local businesses and sustainable consumption. Organic farmers have always been pioneers of sustainability of food and agriculture, offering solutions that not only benefit the rest of organic sector, but which can also inspire the entire food and farming sector. Below, a number of organic stakeholders share their outlook, and describe the challenges facing farmers and consumers with respect to other areas of EU policy that affect the future of our food and farming.

Rules adapted for small and local farm businesses

Many organic farms engage in on-farm processing and direct marketing. While these activities allow them to generate added value, implementing the 2004 EU food hygiene package has been difficult for the farmers of many Member States, since they incur additional costs in meeting strict requirements. Some farmers have had as a result to give up processing altogether. Meanwhile, Member States often do not properly implement the flexibility provisions, which permit adapted rules and derogations for primary producers engaged in direct supply chains involving small quantities of primary products, or for local retailers supplying directly to consumers.¹³

Hygiene rules have an impact on the processing sector, leading to greater consolidation of processing facilities. For example, many small slaughterhouses have been forced out of business due to a combination of strengthened hygiene rules and economic constraints. This limits the opportunities for organic farmers to deliver their products to certified organic processors within an appropriate distance of their farm.

Andrea Ferrante, AIAB, Italy

Farmers who want to build up local and short food chains or diversify their farms must face EU legislation that is made for large scale food factories and widely transported processed food that has a long shelf life. They also face seed marketing rules that disregard the importance of farmer-led breeding activities that support the maintenance of agro-biodiversity and the future of food security.

The EU is a Union of diverse regions - it must promote the diversity and sovereignty of food cultures and therefore must:

- *implement adapted food safety rules for small scale food processing and local food marketing*
- *allow free exchange and sales of seed and planting material between farmers without any registration or certification requirements. We must remember that farmer to farmer sales are built on trust*
- *maintain genuine food quality schemes of geographic origin, encourage the uptake of sustainability aspects in the quality schemes and promote the combination of geographic indications with organic farming.*

GMO-free food and farming

Despite the fact that a majority of European consumers reject genetically modified organisms (GMO) in food (Eurobarometer, 2010), the risk of GMO contamination in food is still not being properly addressed by the EU. The organic sector still incurs high costs in preventing this risk. For example, there have been several instances of GM maize contaminating organic fields in Spain, which led to farmers losing their organic certification and their premium prices. Many of these organic farmers consequently stopped growing maize in traditional maize growing regions, resulting in the loss of local varieties. In 2009, processing companies working with soy and maize reported costs of about EUR 20-86 per tonne for the prevention of contamination (Stolze and Then, 2009).

Dorota Metera, Organic farming expert, Poland

EU legislation must give consumers and farmers the freedom to choose food and feed that is free from genetically modified organisms (GMO). Not only do consumers want GMO-free food, but GMOs and the industrial farming methods associated with them put our environment and health at risk. Whilst organic food and farming is by definition GMO-free, the current legal situation in many Member States does not protect GMO-free producers.

The cost of keeping GMOs out of the food chain through segregation and prevention measures as well as the burden of costs for sampling and testing causes increasing financial headaches for producers. The EU and Member States must finally ensure that the burden of cost is put on the shoulders of the producers who cause these problems. This means the companies who place GMOs on the market are solely responsible. Furthermore the precautionary principle must be adhered to by the European Commission when conducting a risk analysis of any new GMO authorisation.

If our EU and national leaders really want the sustainable development of farming in Europe and quality food production, if they want to preserve biodiversity and cultural heritage, they must provide EU citizens with a policy framework that protects organic and other GMO-free farmers and food producers from GMO contamination!

Legislation on the marketing of seed and planting material

Organic farming relies on the availability of a broad range of plant genetics to respond to consumer demand and to different geographic conditions. With Europe facing growing environmental challenges such as resource depletion and climate change it is essential these plant genetic resources are preserved and developed in use. It must be possible to market new varieties and populations adapted to low input and local conditions. As EU legislation on the marketing of seed and planting material restricts market access to registered plant varieties and sets strict criteria for registration and certification of plant reproductive material, it contributes to market concentration in seed companies and loss of genetic diversity in crops. Legislation therefore needs to be adapted to support farmers' rights and facilitate the conservation and further development of genetic resources and the diversity of crops (IFOAM EU Group, 2013).

Gebhard Rossmannith, Bingenheimer Saatgut AG, Germany

The future of organic farming depends on the availability of adapted varieties which are in line with the organic principles and the independence of our seed supplies. The ongoing trend in conventional breeding and farming towards even more uniformity and the use of high-tech-hybrids must be confronted face on by the organic sector through activities that promote the breeding of adapted varieties and keep crop genetic diversity alive.

EU legislation on the marketing of seed and planting material must not put disproportionate burden on organic breeders or farmers who use and preserve traditional varieties. We need a legislative framework that guarantees fair market access of organically bred natural varieties and finally recognises the importance of increasing the availability of a broad diversity of crop varieties for farmers and gardeners.

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Encourage young people to start organic farming

Europe's farming population is aging rapidly. In 2007, for every farmer under the age of 35 in the EU, there were nine farmers over 55. From 1975 to 2007, total farm numbers for Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the UK fell by more than 2.6 million, which works out at an average loss of 83 000 farms per year. Of these, almost 1.8 million were in Italy and France alone. (European Commission, 2012).

Generational renewal is critical for the development of economically viable rural areas and the preservation of diverse cultural landscapes, and for high quality food production, biodiversity and food cultures. Younger farmers also need access to land. As no EU-wide framework can provide an all-in-one solution, a coordinated mix of policy measures is needed, which takes into account the CAP and other EU policies and encourages young people to take-up farming. This should include a common understanding between Member States of land use policy.

» Lieve Vercauteren, Bioforum Vlaanderen, Belgium

Tackling demographic and structural change is a major challenge for farming and rural areas today and depends on young people who dare take up organic farming or start other small businesses in rural areas. To encourage young people to farm as profession, Member states need to provide information on farming as a profession for students, whilst offering appropriate training and advice for conversion to organic farming as well as management of an organic farm and marketing

We need to stop the loss of farmland through urban sprawl, transport infrastructure and land intensive industries. This can also mean regulating land markets and land property and setting limits on land concentration. The fact that large, intensive, specialised farms often have greater financial means to buy or rent land in some countries causes significant problems for smaller mixed farms and family farms, this also concerns many organic farms. Fair access to farm land is needed.

It's time to discuss priorities for land use through a democratic process with civil society that confronts issues such as food production versus agro-fuels

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Empower consumers to make informed food choices

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Food choices are influenced by many factors, from cultural backgrounds to the availability of information supporting the transparency of production process. The EU legislation on food information to consumers,¹⁴ for instance, helps to provide consumers with detailed information about ingredients. The organic logo is a success story based on a certification scheme that considers a broad range of sustainability aspects. The introduction of different labels and logos is now also being discussed at EU level. Examples include an animal welfare label, a logo for local products and the extension of the eco-label for food.¹⁵

» Cecile Lepers, SYNABIO, France

Sustainability, animal welfare, nutritional and health aspects are increasingly important for consumers making their food purchasing choices. The EU must set clear rules to facilitate these choices. Overloading consumers with irrelevant, unreliable or confusing information must be avoided with consistent labelling rules, and the credibility of labels ensured.

The EU organic farming logo has been established as an EU flagship label for sustainability in the food chain. The label gives the EU the possibility to promote a comprehensive farming system that is delivering numerous aspects of sustainability. Continuous efforts must be made to ensure the credibility and quality of the label, as well as to raise awareness of the label amongst consumers. An additional eco-label for food would confuse consumers and is therefore unnecessary.

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ENDNOTES

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- 2 Bram Moeskops, TP Organics - Technology Research Platform for organic food and farming, info@tporganics.eu, www.tporganics
- 3 Refers to final agreement, reached by the EU Institutions in June/September 2013, concerning the Regulations on direct payments, rural development, the single common market organisation and financing, management and monitoring as part of the CAP post-2013. More information at: www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/agricult/138923.pdf
- 4 The Commission's legal proposals for the CAP after 2013 were published in October 2011, following a public debate on CAP launched in April 2010. More information available at: ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/
- 5 Up to 20 % of the premium payments for the organic commitments, 30 % in the case of groups of organic farmers who undertake commitments
- 6 Established in April 2013 EIP-AGRI Service acts as a mediator within the EIP Network and seeks to enhance communication and cooperation between innovation stakeholders at EU, national and regional level.
- 7 The CSF replaces the EU Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development 2007-2013

- 8 Member States with direct payments below the EU average have the option to shift an additional 10 % of the rural development budget back to Pillar 1
- 9 For Pillar 2 Member States must notify the European Commission of changes by the 31 December 2013, 1 August 2014 and 01 August 2017 for the years 2014, 2015-2019, and 2018-2020 respectively. For Pillar 1 the options to adjust the percentage apply to the years 2015, 2016-2020 and 2019-2020
- 10 The Commission is expected to submit its proposal for a new Regulation to the European Parliament and the Council in March 2014.
- 11 More information on the future EU organic action plan is available at: www.ifoam-eu.org/sites/default/files/page/files/ifoameu_reg_organicactionplan_input_20131126.pdf
- 12 Core Organic is a consortium of 24 partners from 20 countries. It is the only transnational funding structure dealing 100 % with organic research. The most recent call has been launched in December 2013. More information available at: www.coreorganic2.org. ERA-Net SUSFOOD consists of 25 partners from 16 countries. It deals with sustainability of the food chain beyond the farm gate. The first SUSFOOD call was launched in February 2013 with a second SUSFOOD call expected in February 2014. More information available at: www.susfood-era.net. The Joint Programming Initiative on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change (FACCE –JPI) , brings together 34 partners from 21 countries. More information available at: www.faccejpi.com
- 13 These activities are excluded from the scope of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 (general food hygiene) and of Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 (hygiene of products of animal origin). Member States are obliged to adopt national rules, general provisions of Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 and Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 also apply.
- 14 Refers to Regulation (EC) 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers
- 15 Currently an EU Eco-label logo is given to non-food products or services that are deemed to be environmentally friendly.