



Organic - part of the solution!

BIODIVERSITY: powering natural systems

Species diversity in nature means productive and resilient ecosystems, important not only for unmanaged lands but for cultivated ones too. Crucially, crop and livestock diversity enables agricultural systems to adapt to changing environmental conditions. It is also important to build dietary diversity for human nutrition and health. At the farm level, diversity of products protects the farmer's livelihood by spreading risk.

Organic agriculture and biodiversity: a win-win partnership

To create high diversity at all levels is a crucial economic interest of organic farmers because organic weed, pest and disease management all strongly depend upon it.

- Organic farming encourages more types of crop to be used in rotations, and also employs cover crops for weed control. Thus, the **number of cultivated crop types** is higher on organic farms than on conventional. Also, **mixed plant and animal** farms encourage on-farm nutrient cycling.
- Indigenous plant varieties and animal breeds adapted to local conditions thrive naturally with less need for off-farm inputs. Many organic farmers aim to use and further develop these locally adapted varieties and breeds. This gives rise to **regional diversity** of farms.
- Organic farms provide wildlife habitat in and around production areas. They create **multifunctional landscapes**, including hedges, fallows, beetle banks, meadows and waters, resulting in an abundance of birds, mammals, insects and plants.
- Organic farmers control pests and diseases with soil quality management, tillage practices, intercropping and mechanical weeding. The absence of agrichemicals **improves conditions for species diversity** in cultivated land, semi-natural habitats and unmanaged land, and the farm benefits from enhanced ecosystem health.

Biodiversity in EU Policy

In 2001, the EC and Member States committed to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010, but a mid-term assessment concluded this target is unlikely to be met even with rigorous efforts. Supporting organic production can be a powerful tool for policy makers to enhance diversity on agricultural farmland and to tackle the biodiversity challenge.

Meanwhile, restrictive laws for the marketing of seed still hinder optimal use of genetic resources and must be improved.

Biodiversity is one of the four new emerging 'challenges' under the CAP. Through the promotion of organic farming together with special programmes for landscape features and the use and development of genetic resources, the CAP can contribute to enhanced wildlife and domestic biodiversity.