



**European Committee
of the Regions**

NAT VII/019

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OPINION

EU action plan for organic farming

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- welcomes the EU action plan for organic farming and the ambitious EU-wide target set out in the Farm to Fork Strategy of 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030;
- points out that LRAs are best placed to know and address the actual needs of local organic sectors; thus, to achieve the objectives of the new organic action plan, they should be closely involved in both the implementation and the evaluation of its actions;
- urges the European Commission to establish a platform for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the action plan, bringing together all stakeholders, particularly representatives of LRAs;
- calls on LRAs to get involved in the creation of Bio districts, supporting the development of bottom-up initiatives which can contribute to developing rural areas and increasing consumption of local organic products;
- stresses that in order to triple the EU organic land area by 2030, a three to five fold increase in CAP expenditure on organic farming is needed, meaning that up to 15% of CAP spending should be dedicated to the organic sector;
- recommends that the Commission thoroughly evaluate the national strategic plans submitted by the Member States in order to monitor that they will contribute to achieve the target of 25% of agricultural land devoted to organic farming by 2030;
- recommends that the Member States introduce a bonus-malus system as part of the eco-schemes of the new CAP and investigate how the "polluter pays" principle can be implemented;
- highlights the nutritional and environmental benefits in consuming organic food and calls to address the question of accessibility to the consumption of organic products, both in terms of affordability and availability of organic products at points of sale that are easily reachable by consumers, in order to allow all consumers to purchase organic food;
- proposes tweaking the EU organic logo by adding the words "EU organic" as well as the possibility of indicating the production region under the green leaf in order to increase consumer recognition;
- is pleased that the European Commission intends to organise a yearly EU-wide "Organic Day".

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Rapporteur

Uroš BREŽAN (SI/GREENS), Mayor of Tolmin

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions –
EU action plan for organic farming**

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes the EU action plan for organic farming and endorses its comprehensive approach structured along three strands, aiming to stimulate demand and production and to improve organic farming's contribution to sustainability and environmental challenges;
2. believes that, thanks to its positive impact on the environment and climate in terms of improved carbon sequestration and soil health, biodiversity conservation and animal welfare, organic farming will contribute to meeting the European Green Deal's objectives and the targets of the EU Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies;
3. among these targets, welcomes the ambitious EU-wide target set out in the Farm to Fork Strategy of 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030, the impact of which should be assessed by the Commission. Suggests setting binding national targets to take account of the diversity of agriculture in different European countries and their regions;
4. regrets that the CAP is not fully consistent with the objectives of the EU Action Plan for Organic Farming, the Green Deal and the EU's Farm to Fork and biodiversity strategies and cannot sufficiently reward farmers who make an extra effort to implement the green transition on their farm, for example by using their land for organic farming;
5. is pleased that the eight categories of rural development measures proposed for the new 2023-2027 CAP include payments for environmental, climate and assorted other management commitments. Such measures are compulsory for the Member States which are required to earmark at least 30% of EAFRD funding for measures designed to achieve climate and environmental objectives. This includes organic farming, which can therefore be funded through eco-schemes, through the agricultural, climate and environmental commitments of the second pillar or through both;
6. the challenge of 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030 must be in line with the reality of regional production and achieved through policy tools supporting the balanced development of both organic production and demand, appropriately implemented at EU, national, regional and local level;
7. considers that it is essential to focus, among other things, on stimulating supply while encouraging demand for organic products by increasing awareness of its benefits and consumer trust in the organic logo;

8. would welcome more concrete measures and support in the design of measures for organic farming in rural areas that intend to promote more equal access and more equal income between women and men in the sector and intend to encourage and attract young farmers;
9. regrets the lack of a dedicated and specific budget for each initiative, and calls for the various financial instruments available to implement the action plan at EU and national level, namely LEADER/CLLD, the EU promotion policy and Horizon Europe, to be used consistently for this purpose; also, calls for this action plan to be better financed by supplementary EU, national, regional and local funds;
10. underlines the case of the outermost regions, which, due to their specific situation, have to cope with severe constraints when it comes to developing organic farming. They therefore need special treatment through specific measures accompanied by additional funding;
11. is pleased that the European Commission intends to organise a yearly EU-wide "Organic Day";
12. approves the proposal to include monitoring and evaluation activities from the outset, to assess the implementation of the action plan, to step up collection of market data and to extend the EU Market Observatories' analysis to include organic products;
13. urges the Member States to adopt national organic action plans in order to address the specific challenges both at national and local level.. They should be the result of an open and democratic consultative process, with bottom-up approach, engaging all stakeholders, especially organic farmers and associations, local and regional authorities (LRAs), consumer representatives and the hospitality industry;
14. is pleased that the organic action plan mentions for the first time the "true cost of food" and that the Commission intends to dedicate a study to this issue, which is pivotal for supporting the transition to a fairer and sustainable food system. The study should help recognise the value of organic farming in generating public goods;
15. stresses that pesticide residues are almost omnipresent in the environment and potentially affect organic products as well. Since organic farmers guarantee high environmental standards in production, they must not be burdened with risks for which they are not responsible. The CoR therefore points out that a zero tolerance approach to pesticide residues on organic products would greatly damage the sector.
16. suggests that in order to tackle this issue, the European Commission should:
 - put forward initiatives aiming to simplify the authorisation of active substances and plant protection products suitable for organic farming, if they are known to be harmless to nature, the environment and humans; particular attention should be paid to production in the outermost regions, which for the most part differs in scale and characteristics from mainland agriculture;
 - promote further harmonisation of the handling of pesticide residue findings, by considering all the pros and cons of the different approaches taken by the Member States;
 - promote the study of and research into new treatments compatible with organic production;

17. encourages the Member States to investigate how the "polluter pays" principle can be implemented to allow organic farmers to receive compensation for loss of earnings resulting from adventitious contamination of their organic produce;

The role of local and regional authorities in the implementation and evaluation of the action plan

18. points out that LRAs are best placed to know and address the actual needs of local organic sectors; thus, to achieve the objectives of the new organic action plan, they should be closely involved in both the implementation and the evaluation of its actions;
19. points out that LRAs have a key role in helping to structure the organic sector in terms of production, logistics and trade, facilitating the creation of structured cooperation between producers and consumers, raising awareness at local level, informing consumers about the positive impact of organic farming, and developing educational programmes for preschools and schools;
20. points out that LRAs have long been involved in supporting the development of organic farming, in particular through the management and implementation of regional rural development programmes;
21. regrets the limited involvement of LRAs in the implementation of the previous action plan for organic farming, which failed to achieve its objectives as shown by the mid-term review carried out by the European Committee of the Regions;
22. urges the European Commission to establish a platform for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the action plan, bringing together all stakeholders, particularly representatives of LRAs;
23. emphasises that, when involving LRAs, a place-sensitive approach is required in line with the precepts of the Territorial Agenda 2030, to address the different needs of rural, peri-urban and urban areas across Europe;
24. recommends that LRAs ensure coordination and good governance among all administrative levels. Supporting cross-cutting actions at local level is key, as well as involving all local stakeholders connected to the organic sector;
25. asks the Commission to place greater emphasis on conservation of water resources and calls for an exchange of experiences to encourage LRAs to implement these good practices;

Promoting consumption

26. welcomes the recognition of *Bio districts* as successful tools for rural development and praises the Commission's intention to support their development and implementation within the Member States;

27. recommends that the Commission involve LRAs in the implementation of this initiative;
28. points out that *Bio districts* are a great opportunity for LRAs to support the development of sustainable food systems, relying on collaboration between farmers, citizens/consumers, local public administrations, associations and commercial, tourist and cultural enterprises acting according to the principles and methods of organic production and consumption;
29. stresses that the integrated and multifunctional approach of *Bio districts* also brings great benefits in terms of environmental, economic and social sustainability;
30. calls therefore on LRAs to get involved in the creation of *Bio districts*, supporting the development of bottom-up initiatives which can contribute to developing rural areas and increasing consumption of local organic products;
31. recommends that the European Commission adopt a common framework and guidelines at EU level to guarantee harmonised implementation of *Bio districts* at Member State level, taking care to preserve their integrated and multifunctional nature as well as their specific features, in order to assure successful take up;
32. recommends that the European Commission set up a network of *Bio districts* at EU level, to provide support and common services to all *Bio districts*;
33. recommends that LRAs boost local consumption of organic products with own, national and EU financial support for local markets and direct sales, as well as with information and communication campaigns on existing markets and operators registered for direct sales;
34. highlights the nutritional and environmental benefits in consuming organic food and calls to address the question of accessibility to the consumption of organic products, both in terms of affordability and availability of organic products at points of sale that are easily reachable by consumers, in order to allow all consumers to purchase organic food;
35. welcomes the increase in the EU promotion budget for organic products and calls on the Commission to maintain it over the following years;
36. with regard to the current revision of the EU promotion policy, recommends that the Commission give priority to organic products produced in the EU, from agricultural raw material to processing;
37. proposes tweaking the EU organic logo by adding the words "EU organic" as well as the possibility of indicating the production region under the green leaf in order to increase consumer recognition;
38. welcomes the proposal to consider options for animal welfare labelling in the framework of the Farm to Fork Strategy, and calls for progress on this issue as clear, standardised and mandatory labelling of the husbandry method could encourage consumers to buy organic products;

39. is pleased that the Commission intends to promote organic canteens and to analyse the application and increase the use of green public procurement (GPP) criteria, and welcomes the objective of setting minimum mandatory criteria for sustainable food procurement to promote healthy and sustainable diets. The regulatory framework for public procurement may need to be revised to give authorities more scope to require and to increase the use of locally produced food; particular attention and support should be channelled to the development of short supply chains in outermost regions;
40. suggests that schools and educational institutions to offer organic products for students, that would contribute to the healthy eating habits from an early years, therefore would facilitate the raising awareness on the importance of local, traditional and healthy food;
41. stresses the role of LRAs in encouraging higher uptake of local and regional organic products in public food procurement, in contributing to collective information and education, and in raising consumer awareness and confidence in organic production. Through public procurement, LRAs can develop long-term partnerships with their local organic producers and encourage conventional farmers to convert to organic production;
42. points out as well that LRAs are confronted with several barriers to supplying public canteens with local and regional organic products: logistic barriers, namely the lack of adapted premises; structural barriers, such as the need to structure the market and strengthen the supply chain to reconcile local supply and demand; and the lack of human and technical resources;
43. notes that strong political commitment at national and regional level is needed to encourage the right uptake of organic food in public and private canteens, catering and restaurants;
44. suggests that common criteria could be developed at EU level to serve at best practice in order to establish corresponding inspection rules for public canteens;
45. notes that the increase in demand encourages the development of regional production and therefore calls for labelling of canteens and restaurants, both in the public and private sectors, indicating the minimum percentages of healthy, organic and locally produced food that is used in production processes;
46. calls on the Member States and LRAs to check their public procurement and budgetary law to assure that the organic products used in public canteens are certified;
47. recognises that LRAs still lack knowledge about the possibilities offered by GPP and encourage them to overcome the barrier of the price criterion and use sustainability criteria;
48. suggests the development of an EU common platform for EU organic producers from Member States that would facilitate the share of good practices, understanding of EU regulations, trainings, events and project partnership possibilities to name a few;
49. to this end, insists on the importance of providing an adequate training and capacity-building programme for both purchasing authorities (national, regional and local) and organic producers

and processors, to address the structural and logistic barriers and promote the use of GPP criteria;

Stimulating the production side

50. notes that in 2019 the EU had an organic land area of around 9%, with only 64% of the certified organic area receiving organic support payments¹;
51. points out that organic farming is underfunded in the current CAP; whereas 8% of total EU agricultural land is under organic farming, subsidies for organic farming represent only 1.5% of the total of the European agricultural budget. Particular attention and support should be channelled to the development of small rural areas, less developed regions, where the main economic sector is represented by agricultural activities;
52. stresses that in order to triple the EU organic land area by 2030, a three to five fold increase in CAP expenditure on organic farming is needed, meaning that up to 15% of CAP spending should be dedicated to the organic sector²;
53. however, notes with regret that the deal reached on the next CAP lacks ambition regarding financial support for organic farming;
54. is concerned to observe that, considering the EU-wide targets to be reached on organic agriculture, some of the available National CAP Strategic Plans' drafts fall short of providing adequate subsidies for organic farmers compared to the previous programming period;
55. recommends that Member States and LRAs give priority and adequate financial support to addressing the specific needs of the regional and local organic sector in their strategic plans;
56. recommends that the Commission thoroughly evaluate the national strategic plans submitted by the Member States in order to monitor that they will contribute to achieve the target of 25% of agricultural land devoted to organic farming by 2030;
57. supports the approach of assessing, in the framework of the new CAP, the specific circumstances and needs of the Member States, and in particular the difficult production conditions in the outermost regions, relating to the growth of the organic sector and ensuring that Member States make the best use of the possibilities offered by the new CAP to support the national organic sector. The Commission should pay particular attention to supporting those Member States/regions lagging behind, while providing further guidance for those that have already contribute to attain the 25% target. Every Member State should contribute to achieving the common target by 2030;
58. recommends that the Member States and LRAs anchor organic farming more firmly in education and university agricultural departments and develop learning materials and training

¹ [IFOAM Organics Europe](#).

² Ibid.

on organic farming, addressing the needs of primary production as well as processing and transformation;

59. recommends that LRAs speed up the conversion rate to organic farming by providing support and advice for the set-up, conversion or transfer of farms opting for organic farming;
60. stresses the importance of developing the organic agro-industry at regional and local level to consolidate the growth of primary production. The promotion of short food supply chains can benefit both organic farmers and consumers: it reduces transport costs and increases sustainability, while developing the rural economy, adding value in the production area;
61. recommends therefore that the Member States and LRAs include specific measures for operators involved in processing and marketing organic food, in order to facilitate harmonious development of production and to create an enabling environment for short supply chains in all regions. Accordingly, it suggests:
 - encouraging small-scale agro-industries linked to the farm;
 - increasing mobile processing facilities for small farms (slaughterhouses, processing plants, mills, etc.) and encouraging shared use of processing facilities at local level, to overcome legal barriers created by health and safety and animal health standards;
 - encouraging the involvement of agro-cooperatives in the marketing and transformation of organic products, including participation in food public procurement;
62. highlights the importance of economic organisation, efficient market regulation tools and financing of producer organisations to reach the 25% target. For instance, producers should be given a minimum price which exceeds the average production price for organic farming, in order to provide them with a stable minimum income. In the event of a market imbalance where growth in demand fails to absorb the growth in supply, the Commission should be empowered to activate the special public intervention mechanism for organic products;
63. notes that increasing unfair competition from non-EU organic products could weaken the sector and recommends that the European Commission guarantee fair, balanced and transparent trade; requiring reciprocity in the obligations and rules for organic production of products imported into the EU to ensure equal treatment and effective protection of European consumers. For the same reasons, the aforementioned should also apply to aquaculture in order to extend environmental protection and sustainable management of oceans and seas to non-EU countries;
64. recommends the European Commission to support the launch of a common EU platform that would facilitate the import-export possibilities of local, organic farmers, by developing services for EU digital/e-sales and offering support for logistics and successful partnerships in this area;
65. recommends that the Member States introduce a bonus-malus system as part of the eco-schemes of the new CAP, as set out in its previous opinion on Agroecology;
66. notes that the new EU Organic Regulation will apply from 1 January 2022 and bring major changes to certain sectors of organic production. To ensure successful implementation, a

balance between harmonisation at EU level and adaptation at regional level is crucial, without derogating from the organic principles;

67. as a result, calls on the Commission to monitor the impact of the new regulation, in order to respond effectively to any difficulties caused by the application of the new rules;
68. recognises the high interest and potential of organic conversion in the livestock sector;
69. welcomes the Commission's intention of reinforcing organic aquaculture. The sector is faced with fierce competition from non-EU countries, since the EU imports almost 80% of fish consumed in the internal market³;
70. thus, recommends that the Commission ensure adequate support and increase R&I funding for the EU organic agriculture, aquaculture and livestock sectors, in order to cope with the lack of proper inputs, namely certified organic seeds, organic protein and Vitamin B feed, and reduce dependency on imports;
71. welcomes the Commission's proposal to increase R&I funding dedicated to organic farming under Horizon Europe and stresses in particular the importance of dedicating separate calls and budgets for organic production.

Brussels, 2 December 2021

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Apostolos Tzitzikostas

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Petr Blížkovský

³ Copa-Cogeca views on *An action plan or the development of organic production*.

II. PROCEDURE

Title	EU action plan for organic farming
Reference(s)	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Action Plan for the future of Organic Production in the European Union, COM(2021) 141 final
Legal basis	Article 307(4) TFEU
Procedural basis	Rule 41(a) of the Rules of Procedure
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	
Date of President's decision	7 April 2021
Commission responsible	Commission for Natural Resources
Rapporteur	Uroš BREŽAN (SI/GREENS)
Analysis	June 2021
Discussed in commission	27 September 2021
Date adopted by commission	27 September 2021
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	majority
Date adopted in plenary	2 December 2021
Previous Committee opinions	CoR (2014/4832) opinion on the organic production package
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	N/A