

ORGANIC FARMING

Current situation

Organic farming is one of a number of approaches to sustainable agriculture. It is broadly defined as a holistic production management system which tries to work with nature, promoting biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. In principle, it largely excludes or avoids the use of synthetically-compounded fertilisers, pesticides, growth and yield promoting substances and livestock feed additives.

Currently, the organic industry is one of the most rapidly expanding sectors of the food sector in many European countries. In 2006 the European organic market grew by more than 10 percent, and it was worth approximately 14 billion euro⁷. Consumption of organic food is 4.5 to 5.5% of the total food market in countries such as Denmark and Austria. However, while the organic land area has also expanded rapidly in many new EU member states as well as candidate and potential EU candidate countries with annual growth rates of up to 100%, consumption levels have remained very low in these countries (0.1%). One factor which does influence the sale of organic produce is that it is typically 20 to 30% more expensive than non-organic food.

The area under certified organic production in the EU has increased from less than 0.1% of the total farmed area (UAA) in 1985 to 4% in EU-25 by the end of 2006⁸. In 2005 Austria had the highest share of organic area, with 11% of its farmed area under organic production. Italy had the highest percentage of EU total area under organic agriculture with 18% and from the member states which joined the EU in 2004, the Czech Republic had the highest percentage, with 4% of the total EU area.

Generally speaking organic farming performs better than conventional farming in the area of animal welfare. Organic farming standards are to a large extent devised around the concept that animals should be able to live their lives as naturally as possible meeting their biological and ethological needs. Therefore organic livestock farming includes outdoor keeping for most of the animals' lives and the use of breeds adapted to local conditions.

Organic animal health management is based on a reduction of health problems through the prevention of disease. Adequate diets, suitable breeds, good housing conditions and sound management practices should provide the right environment for animals to maintain good health. When health problems occur, it is preferred to use phytotherapeutic or homeopathic alternatives instead of chemically derived allopathic medication unless a veterinary surgeon believes that a conventional veterinary treatment is necessary to save the animal's life or reduce suffering. Mutilations are not allowed in organic farming, with only a few exceptions.

⁷/Padel, A, Jasinska, A, Rippin, M, Schaack, D and Willer H. (2008) The European Market for Organic Food in 2006. In: Willer, Helga; Yussefi-Menzler, Minou and Sorensen, Neil, Eds. (2008) The World of Organic Agriculture - Statistics and Emerging Trends Earthscan, London.

⁸/http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-07-069/EN/KS-SF-07-069-EN.PDF

Legislation

European Union

In June 2004, the European Commission published a European Action Plan for organic food and farming which aims to enhance the further development of the organic farming sector.

Some of the 21 actions should result in improved welfare for organically raised animals. They include:

- Ensuring the integrity of organic agriculture by reinforcing the standards and maintaining the foreseen end dates of the transitional periods
- Complete and further harmonisation of the standards for organic agriculture by improving the standards relating to animal welfare and considering the need for extending the scope to other areas such as aquaculture
- Establishing an independent expert panel for technical advice
- Improving the performance of the inspection bodies and authorities

Based on this action plan a new legal framework has been established and organic production is now regulated by *Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 of 28 June 2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products* repealing Regulation (EEC) No 2092. This Regulation sets the main rules for organic farming, while *Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 of 5 September 2008* lays down detailed rules for the implementation of the Council Regulation. In the animal production sector, it includes rules for bovine, horses, pigs, sheep, goats and poultry. It covers aspects such as the origin and breeds of the animals, housing conditions and husbandry practices. It provides for access to open air areas and prohibits battery farming. It prohibits routine mutilations including castration and tail docking. When castration is performed it is only allowed under analgesic or anaesthetic.

Under *Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production*, the Commission has adopted detailed rules on organic aquaculture which include provisions concerning farming, transport and slaughter of fish. These are set up in *Commission Regulation (EC) No 710/2009 of 5 August 2009*.

A European organic label has also been introduced in July 2010 to end the confusion due to too many different organic labels.

Under *Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)* Member States can allocate funds to support farmers who want to convert to organic farming.

Future Action

- Member States should ensure that sufficient funding is allocated to support farmers who apply organic farming under axes 1 (under farm assurance schemes) and 2 (under agri-environment) of their rural development programmes, to help them apply organic farming production methods.
- Sufficient funding must also be allocated to the promotion of organic livestock products. This is possible through EU agricultural products promotion programmes and through national and regional rural development programmes.