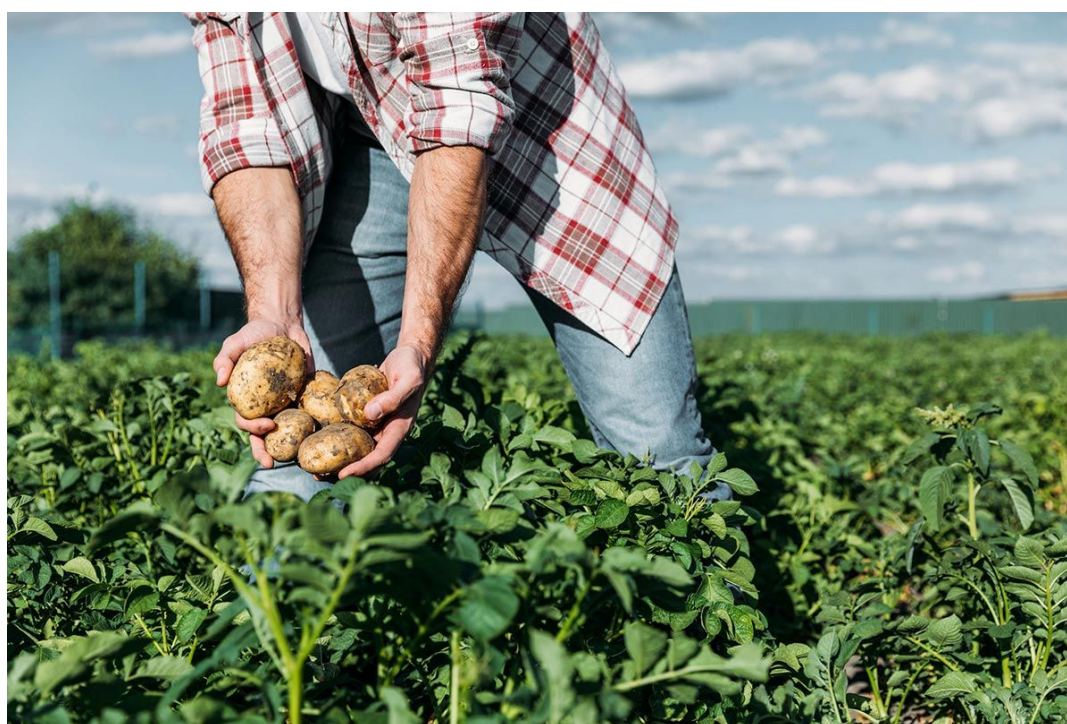


Farm to Fork: the role of organic and digital training activities to reach the objectives

01/03/2021

In May 2020, the European Commission published **the Farm to Fork strategy as a key element of the European Green Deal** (new EU growth strategy for 2050).



Ambitious goals for organic – Farm to Fork strategy

The current agriculture and food system is facing many challenges, including soil degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change etc. The strategy aims to **make the food system healthy, fair and environmentally friendly by 2030** and includes food production, processing, consumption as well as waste prevention (European Commission 2020).

Its goal is to **reduce the environmental footprint of the food system while strengthening its resilience and ensuring food security**. The focus is on the creation of a circular bio-based economy that can act as a blueprint for a global transition towards a more sustainable food system. The strategy sets ambitious targets regarding agricultural production, e.g. to reach at least 25% of the agricultural land managed under organic farming.

At the same time, **organic agriculture can act as a driver to reach other goals of the strategy** – as synthetic pesticides are not allowed in organic farming an increase of organic production can support to reach the goal of a 50% reduction of chemical pesticides as envisioned in the strategy. It is a well-established and clearly defined farming system with a proven positive environmental performance that can act as a role model for sustainable conventional farming.

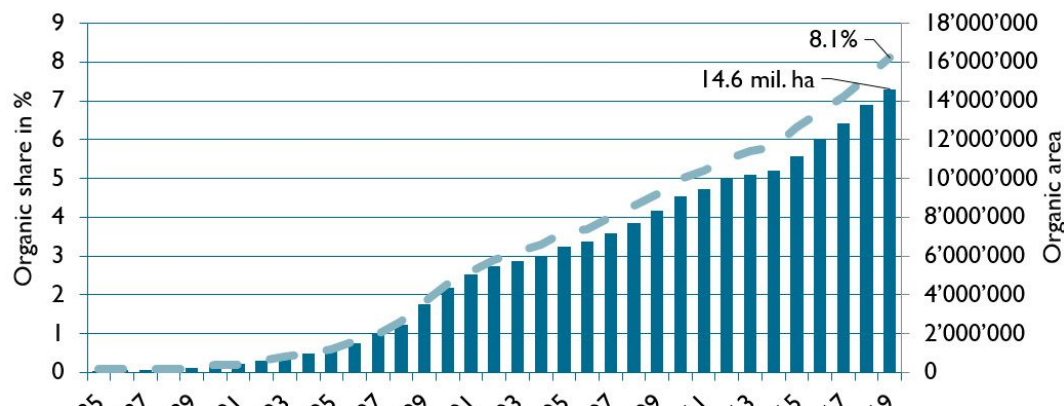
Where do we stand now and where are we heading to?

The latest data for the European Union show that the organic farmland has reached about **14.6 million hectares or a share 8.1%**. This means that in the European Union the organic area share is far higher than in most countries of the world; globally 1.5 % of the farmland is organic (or approximately 72.3 million hectares). However, for the European Union to reach the 25% target, comprehensive policy support for organic is needed across the EU, aiming to increase the supply and demand for organic products.



European Union: growth of organic area and organic share 1985-2019

Source: FiBL-AMI survey 2021, based on national data sources and Eurostat





While **Austria** has already reached the 25% goal in 2019 (more than 26 % of the farmland was organic in that year), other Member States are very close to it and will most likely have reached the goal by 2030, namely **Estonia** (22.3%) and **Sweden** (20.4%).

In total, **there are ten Member States with an organic farmland share of more than 10%**. Table 1 gives an overview of the organic farmland and retail sales and organic share of total by Member State in 2019.

Table 1: Organic farmland and retail sales and organic share of total by Member State in 2019

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Member State	Organic farmland [ha]	Organic share of total farmland [%]	Organic retail sales [Million €]	Organic share of all retail sales [%]
Austria	669,921.00	26.5%	1,920.00	9.3%
Belgium	93,118.60	6.9%	779.40	3.1%
Bulgaria	117,779.00	2.3%	30.00	1.0%
Croatia	108,127.00	7.2%	99.30 (2014)	2.2%
Cyprus	6,240.00	5.0%	1.50 (2010)	
Czech Republic	540,986.21	15.4%	164.40	1.6%
Denmark	285,526.00	10.9%	1,983.00	12.1%
Estonia	220,737.00	22.3%	62.00	3.7%
Finland	306,484.00	13.5%	368.00	2.6%
France	2,241,345.00	7.7%	11,295.00	6.1%
Germany	1,613,785.00	9.7%	11,970.00	5.7%
Greece	528,752.00	8.7%	66.00 (2018)	
Hungary	303,190.00	5.7%	30.00 (2015)	
Ireland	73,952	1.6%	206.40 (2017)	0.7%
Italy	1,993,225.00	15.2%	3,625.00	3.7%
Latvia	289,796.00	14.8%	51.00	1.5%
Lithuania	242,118.00	8.1%	50.50	1.0%
Luxembourg	5,814.00	4.4%	160.00	8.6%
Malta	55.00	0.5%		



Netherlands	68,068.00	3.8%	1,211.30	4.9%
Poland	507,637.00	3.5%	314.13	0.5%
Portugal	293,213.00	8.4%	21.00	0.2%
Romania	395,228.00	3.0%	40.65	
Slovakia	197,565.00	10.3%	4.00	0.2%
Slovenia	49,638.00	10.4%	48.60	1.8%
Spain	2,354,916.00	9.7%	2,133.00 (2018)	2.8%
Sweden	613,964.00	20.4%	2,143.71	7.2%
United Kingdom	459,275.00	2.6%	2,678.95	1.8%
European Union	14,579,907	8.1%	41'453.00	3.2%

Source: Eurostat and national data sources, compiled by FiBL

Organic training goes digital

In order to achieve the necessary **transformation of our food system**, capacity building activities for all organic operators need to be fostered. **One of the main barriers for the expansion of the organic sector is insufficient information, knowledge and skills of the actors involved.** In order to maximize the growth of the sector and to guarantee the long-term positive impact of organic agriculture, knowledge and capacity building, as well as the development of skills particularly focused on organic production are, therefore, crucial.

Regarding the agricultural production, organic farming is a particularly knowledge intensive farming systems and in order to reach the goals of the Farm to Fork strategy especially farmers, those who convert but also existing organic farmers, need to be adequately trained and given access to specialised information, e.g. on organic vegetable production. However, since the Farm to Fork strategy focusing on the food system, in order to achieve the ambitious objectives, **all actors along the value chain, including processors and retailers, are potential target groups for training, education and advisory work.** Training initiatives targeting processors, for instance, should get more attention in the future in order to ensure processing methods that fit the purpose of organic products (Moschitz et al. 2021).



A way to reach the objectives of the Farm to Fork strategy

Moreover, the past year with a global pandemic has highlighted the need for digitally available training materials that can be accessed remotely. This also allows to increase the outreach. An example of such digital training materials is the ongoing **Erasmus+ project StartupBio**. It tackles the above-mentioned issues by offering digital training materials to newcomers to organic farming in four Mediterranean countries. Addressed to new farmers as well as farmers in conversion based in **Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece** the project developed e-learning courses (basic and advanced) on the principles of organic production focusing on the specifics in the Mediterranean. Therefore, we call the attention on the strong potential that digital trainings have for supporting the transition of our food system. We believe that the use of these technologies is the most efficient pathway to address the knowledge gaps and support the achievement of the Farm to Fork objectives and hence we call for its support and further development.

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