

ROADMAP

Roadmaps aim to inform citizens and stakeholders about the Commission's work in order to allow them to provide feedback and to participate effectively in future consultation activities. Citizens and stakeholders are in particular invited to provide views on the Commission's understanding of the problem and possible solutions and to make available any relevant information that they may have.

TITLE OF THE INITIATIVE	Action Plan for the development of EU organic production
LEAD DG – RESPONSIBLE UNIT	AGRI B4 - Organics
LIKELY TYPE OF INITIATIVE	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions
INDICATIVE PLANNING	Q1 2021
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/organic-farming_en

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A. Context, Problem definition and Subsidiarity Check

Context

Through the Farm to Fork and the Biodiversity strategies, published in May 2020, the Commission has committed to reach at least 25% of the EU’s agricultural land under organic farming by 2030 and a significant increase in organic aquaculture, both to improve the sustainability of the food system and to revert biodiversity loss. To meet this target, the Commission proposed setting up an action plan to accompany the sector in this route, helping Member States to stimulate both supply and demand for organic products and to ensure consumer trust. Organic farming has seen for many years a dynamic growth of surfaces and consumption. However, organic surfaces still represent only 8% of the total utilised agricultural area in the EU. Therefore it is necessary to prepare a clear action plan with a proper follow-up to allow reaching the target while maintaining the economic viability of the sector.

Problem the initiative aims to tackle

The EU can lead the transition towards a sustainable food system in the next decade and the fight against biodiversity loss. The organic sector can make an important contribution. Therefore, the Commission has set a target of at least 25% of agricultural land under organic farming in 2030 and has committed to present an action plan for the organic sector, to accompany the sector reaching this ambition.

Organics occupied in 2018 less than 8% of the utilised agricultural area in the EU. Consequently, surfaces will have to more than triple in less than a decade, while the share of organic farming greatly varies among EU Member States, ranging from less than 3% in IE, BG, RO and MT, to more than 20% in AT, EE and SE. The action plan should, therefore, contribute to the increase of the surfaces taking into account such differences and help to unlock the potential in areas of the EU, creating a sustainable food system, benefitting farmers and consumers across the board. At the same time, the action plan should aim at improving biodiversity in rural areas to the benefit of the environment and the citizens.

An unbalanced development of organic production could hamper its profitability. The action plan must work as a lever to stimulate both the supply and the demand side. Consumption of organic products is also unevenly distributed across the Union. The action plan should tackle this issue and possible obstacles. In this context, it is primordial to engage public administrations to lead the change and better use instruments at their disposal to promote a higher uptake and consumption of organic production.

Organic farming must respect a set of clear rules and undergo a thorough certification system. The action plan will provide an opportunity for the sector to go beyond the mere set of rules, and poise as a real example of sustainable agriculture, for example, in the efficient use of natural resources.

Basis for EU intervention (legal basis and subsidiarity check)

This action plan aims to deliver on the commitments made in the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies. Organic production is regulated at EU level which has created a common market for organic products. An EU action plan is necessary to drive the change beyond a regulatory process and trigger significant action in order to realise the EU target of 25% organic agricultural land. An EU-wide action plan will provide a common enabling framework to foster initiatives taken by Member States, regional or local authorities to tackle problems specific to their territory.

B. What does the initiative aim to achieve and how

The aim of this initiative is to accompany the sector in its growth and to respond to the mandate of the Farm to Fork and the Biodiversity strategies to achieve at least 25% of European agricultural surfaces under organic farming by 2030.

The action plan aims to help Member States stimulate both supply and demand of organic products, ensure consumer's trust through promotion activities and green public procurement, and respond to the challenges in reaching the target.

First, a growing consumption is paramount to encourage farmers to shift to organics, ensuring higher availability and accessibility of organic produce, also at the processing and retail level. Second, further production incentives are needed to meet the above-mentioned target. Finally, the action plan aims at further improving the contribution of the organic sector to climate neutrality, environmental protection and biodiversity preservation. In addition to the tools available under the current and future Common Agricultural Policy, essential enabling instruments for reaching the target are training, research & innovation, and increasing the share of organic processed food.

The action plan will complement the new legal framework for organic agriculture (Regulation (EU) 2018/848).

The full engagement and the accountability of all EU institutions, Member States and stakeholders in the development of the actions, is of utmost importance not only for the development of the action plan itself but also to give solid grounds for the future of the sector. For this reason, a close monitoring of the implementation and assessment of progress is necessary.

C. Better regulation

Consultation of citizens and stakeholders

A comprehensive consultation strategy will be carried out at different levels to collect and analyse the opinion and the ideas of citizens, civil society, Member States authorities and concerned sectoral organisations on actions to be developed. In order to secure the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, the targeted consultation will include:

- competent authorities of the EU Member States responsible for organic production;
- business and professional organisations having activities at EU level in the organic sector (producers, retailers, processors);
- EU citizens and consumers organisations;
- Civil society organisations active at EU level in organic farming;
- European institutions;
- international intergovernmental organisations active in organic farming related issues;
- non-EU countries.

The consultation process will include the following actions :

- a 12-week questionnaire-based, online public consultation, translated into 24 languages giving any interested party the possibility to contribute. It will be available on the Commission's 'Have Your say' Portal' and will be launched in September.
- targeted consultation activities tailored for particular stakeholders' groups.
- targeted consultation of Member States competent authorities.

A synopsis report, summarising the results of all consultation activities, will accompany the Communication and will be published on the website of the Commission, including on the dedicated page for organics: https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/farming/organic-farming/future-organics_en.

Possible follow-up initiatives resulting from this Communication, with significant expected impacts will be subject to an impact assessment, in line with the better regulation guidelines.

Evidence base and data collection

There is a broad range of experience and data on which the initiative can be built, including from regular consultation with national authorities and stakeholders. The Public Consultation will allow gathering further information on the nature and size of the problems highlighted above and on the suitability of the proposed approach.

There is an extensive evidence and data gathered through different assessments, evaluations, studies, and analysis as well as market and economic reports prepared by the Commission itself but also by numerous public and private stakeholders. Data collected are, among others, the following: Eurostat statistics, data from Agri-food Data Portal, EU Agricultural Markets Briefs on organic farming, as well as a Commission study on ‘The distribution of the added value of the organic food chain’.

Furthermore, there are dedicated studies and briefings prepared by the other EU institutions, like for example: ‘Human health implications of organic food and organic agriculture’ or ‘Organic food: Helping EU consumers make an informed choice’ prepared by the European Parliament.

In addition, there is a great number of research institutes that constantly provide new analysis on the organic sector (for example Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL) as well as stakeholders publishing targeted factsheets, reports and studies (for example IFOAM Organics Europe or EOCC).

Finally the review of the current action plan: ‘The EU action plan for the future of organics’ published in March 2014 for the period up to 2020 will also contribute to the process.