



## WATER

Ensuring the good ecological status of surface waters and the sufficient availability of clean water remains a challenge in many EU member states, despite policy efforts<sup>1</sup>. The agricultural sector accounts for around 24% of total water abstraction in the EU, rising by up to 80% in some regions<sup>2</sup>, which can lead to the loss of wetland habitats. The size of the Spanish wetland *Las Tablas de Daimiel*, for example, has been reduced by up to 60% due to the expansion of subsidised irrigation in the area<sup>3</sup>. The use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers is deteriorating water quality and raising the costs for society. The removal of agricultural contaminants from drinking water, for example, cost the UK €190 million, in the accounting year 2007, while the social costs of damage to rivers, lakes and estuaries stand at €150 million<sup>4</sup>. Organic farming, however, can offer solutions to many of the negative effects that agriculture places on water.

### ORGANIC FARMING PROTECTS AND ENHANCES WATER

**Water quality:** Organic farmers do not use harmful synthetic pesticides and fertilisers<sup>5</sup>. Moreover crop rotations help to improve soil fertility and nutrient efficiency. Farm comparisons show that nitrate leaching rates per hectare are lower on organic than on conventional fields by 57%<sup>6</sup>.

**Performance under water stress:** Organic farming increases soil organic matter and water holding capacity<sup>7</sup>. Scientific studies show that organic crops can perform better under severe drought conditions, than conventional crops<sup>8</sup> increasing a farmer's resilience to cope with extreme weather events.

### CAP RURAL DEVELOPMENT MEASURES FOR SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT

New rural development measures<sup>9</sup>, in combination with **organic farming** (Article 30), offer targeted solutions for sustainable water stewardship. Relevant measures include:

#### **Knowledge transfer and advisory services** (Articles 15-16)

Options tailored specifically towards organic farmers to increase understanding and technical expertise on water management, including advice on organic farming conversion to safeguard water bodies.

#### **Investments in physical assets** (Article 18)

Conversion related investments such as farm building upgrades and support for more advanced water techniques such as the purchase of specialised equipment after conversion.

#### **Natura 2000/Water Framework Directive payment** (Article 31)

Application of water protection and restoration measures to support the implementation of relevant programming measures under river basin management plans (RBMPs).

#### **Leader** (Articles 42-45)

Support for the development of bottom up community-led projects, including organic farmers and rural dwellers, such as the protection of drinking water supply through organic land management.

## DENMARK: POLICY SUPPORT FOR ORGANIC FARMING

The development of organic farming is a key tool in Denmark's water quality protection and green growth strategies. In 2010 total organic sales accounted for €791 million, with up to 2677 organic producers in Denmark.<sup>10</sup> The Danish Rural Development Programme (2007-2013) has prioritised organic food and farming to support marketing, food exhibitions, consumer awareness, investments in farm improvements and product development. It also supports training and education for the conversion of public kitchens to organic, free "conversion checks"

as well as advice for conventional farmers, conversion and maintenance for organic production. Furthermore the Danish Organic Action Plan 2020<sup>11</sup> launched in June 2012 aims to double the land area that is managed organically from 7 to 12% and ensure that up to 60% of food served in public canteens is organic (currently 15%). Moreover Denmark allocated ca. €3 million for organic crops breeding for the period 2012 to 2015 and will invest a further ca. €15 million in organic research between 2013 and 2016<sup>12</sup>.

## FRANCE: A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY

Since 2007, the *Fédération Nationale d'Agriculture Biologique* (FNAB) has coordinated a multi-stakeholder working group on water and organic agriculture at national level<sup>13</sup>. The aim is to develop organic farming to help contribute to the good ecological status of water resources and to reduce water pollution from pesticides and nitrates. The working group has developed 'water and organic actions' such as farmers exchange groups, advisory services and demonstration farms as well as financial incentives in 12 pilot sites. In the pilot site of Avesnois, 91 farms have undergone a check for conversion to organic farming on a voluntary basis. Approximately 28 farms totalling 2,508 hectares have converted to organic

farming. In the water catchment areas of Saint-Aubin and Sars-Poterie, which is part of Avesnois, 6 farms totalling 209 hectares have converted to organic. As a result the total utilised agricultural area now under organic land management in these areas has increased from 1% to 5%<sup>14</sup>.



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