

PRESS RELEASE

## NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS BENEFITS OF ORGANIC FARMING FOR BIODIVERSITY

BRUSSELS, 19 JULY 2021 – [A new report by IFOAM Organics Europe](#) highlights the contribution of organic farming to protecting Europe’s biodiversity. The report recommends Member States to fully use Eco-schemes and agro-environmental measures in their CAP Strategic Plans to maximise the contribution of organic farmers to the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the new CAP.

Lead author Nic Lampkin, from Organic Policy, Business and Research Consultancy, states: “Member States should explicitly recognise the opportunities for biodiversity conservation and enhancement underpinned by organic farming in their CAP Strategic Plans, rural development programmes and national organic action plans. And the Commission should recognise that organic farming does deliver biodiversity benefits in the context of Eco-schemes, but also conduct a comprehensive assessment during the design of CAP Strategic Plans of how national governments will support biodiversity objectives through organic payments and additional AECM payments.”

Bruce Pearce, from Fearann Consulting, adds: “There is now a substantial body of research evidence that demonstrates the positive impacts of organic farming on biodiversity in Europe. The biodiversity benefits delivered by organic farming are a consequence both of the practices prohibited under organic regulations, such as the use of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers, herbicides and most pesticides and fungicides, as well as the agroecological practices adopted by organic farmers to solve production issues without them. The EU has set an ambitious target for the expansion of organic farming to 25% of agricultural land area by 2030 as part of its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies intended to deliver on the EU Green Deal. Achieving this will also contribute to the pesticide, fertiliser and antibiotic reduction targets, and to the nature restoration targets.”

Eric Gall, IFOAM Organics Europe’s Policy Manager, states: “By supporting organic farming in their CAP Strategic Plans, Member States have a powerful tool to ensure that their national agriculture policy will start to address the collapse of our biodiversity, which has been a reality in the European countryside for decades. Conventional farmers should be incentivised to transition to organic farming, and organic farmers should be properly rewarded for the public goods they deliver by producing quality food while protecting nature. Increased support to organic farming is a smart public policy tool to ensure that the next CAP will contribute to the EU Green Deal and to the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies targets on biodiversity and nature protection, but also pesticide, fertiliser and antibiotic reduction.”

*Ends.*

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## Main findings

[Organic farming and biodiversity - Policy options](#) had four key objectives:

- Review the evidence on the biodiversity impacts of organic farming in Europe;
- Analyse how organic farming practices, including the avoidance of most agrochemical inputs, contributes to these impacts;
- Review how European policies to support organic farming and the environment have been used;
- Consider and make recommendations on how future CAP and EU policies could be used to expand organic farming and enhance its biodiversity impacts.

There is now a substantial body of research evidence that demonstrates the positive impacts of organic farming on biodiversity in Europe. While most studies have been conducted in the context of temperate, arable systems, there are an increasing number of studies relating to grassland, horticulture and Mediterranean olive and other systems that also support the general conclusions that:

- Organic farming increases both the abundance and species richness of biodiversity across a range of habitats and farming types, when compared with similar, non-organic systems;
- In arable farming, plant species biodiversity is enhanced both within field (in the crops) and in field margins, with 20-95% more species and up to 150% greater abundance recorded in organic systems, with the greatest differences recorded within fields;
- Soil microbial diversity, insects and bird populations are also positively influenced by organic management. In arable contexts, insect species numbers have been reported at 23% higher, and pollinators 30% higher, on average across a number of studies;
- For grassland, studies have shown more limited benefits for plant and soil microbial biodiversity in permanent grassland, where non-organic management tends also to be less intensive;
- Temporary grassland, normally grass/clover leys or lucerne, may be dominated by a limited range of sown species, but will have more unsown species, and the use of flowering legumes can benefit pollinators if managed appropriately – the contribution of organic matter in the rotation also has positive impacts on soil microbial diversity and earthworms;
- In horticulture greater diversity is found within fields as for cultivated arable crops, but also in the understoreys of fruit production systems, with insectivorous bird species also benefitting;
- Relatively few studies have been conducted in Mediterranean olive and vine systems, with some showing benefits, but landscape effects also being important.

The results generally support the EU Organic Action Plan statement that organic farming delivers 30% more biodiversity on average. The biodiversity benefits delivered by organic farming are a consequence both of the practices prohibited under organic regulations, such as the use of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers, herbicides and most pesticides and fungicides, as well as the agroecological practices adopted by organic farmers to solve production issues without them.

The complete avoidance or substantial reduction in the use of agrochemical inputs in organic farming contributes to biodiversity by avoiding or reducing the:

- Direct toxic impacts of herbicides and pesticides on non-target organisms;
- Indirect impacts of herbicide and pesticide use on food sources and habitat for insects, birds and other organisms;
- Impacts of surplus nutrient use on soil ecosystems, including organic matter loss and soil acidification due to nitrogen use and mycorrhizal decline due to phosphate use;
- Impacts on aquatic ecosystems from nitrate leaching and phosphate losses from agricultural land;
- Impacts on sensitive habitats and low nitrogen tolerance species from nitrogen depositions, including ammonia from livestock systems;
- Impacts on insects colonising animal faeces as a result of the use of certain anthelmintics;
- Climate change impacts on biodiversity associated with emissions from agricultural input use and manufacture, as well as loss of soil carbon.

By completely avoiding the use of most of these inputs, the benefits go significantly beyond those that might be expected from a 10-20% improvement in input use efficiency within conventional systems. However, yields

are also reduced as a consequence of the input use reductions, so that benefits per unit output may be lower than per unit of land used.

However, the benefits are not only derived from avoided practices and inputs. Key biodiversity-enhancing practices used include the use of:

- Mixed farming systems integrating crops, trees and livestock;
- More diverse and complex rotations and cropping systems;
- Leguminous crops for biological nitrogen fixation, supporting pollinators if managed appropriately;
- Heterogenous genetic materials (variety mixtures, populations, landraces) using genetic diversity to support pest and disease control;
- Sown refuges and other landscape elements for natural predators (passive biological pest control);
- Smaller field sizes, contributing to a more complex landscape mosaic;
- Trees and hedges with complex understoreys for shelter, erosion control and fertility management;
- Alternation of sowing times of crops for weed control, benefiting farmland birds;
- Organic matter, leys and green manures for fertility building, providing energy-rich carbon sources to help maintain soil ecosystems;
- Reduced tillage and soil cultivation depths to protect soils;
- Diverse species mixtures including legumes, herbs and novel forages for grassland;
- Land-based livestock production systems with grazing and reduced stocking rates supporting biodiversity in grassland.

While none of the practices adopted are unique to organic farmers, the combination of many biodiversity-enhancing practices in a systems-based approach allows for synergies to be exploited with the potential for greater impacts. Organic farming practices and the related biodiversity benefits illustrate how a land sharing approach can be used constructively, as an alternative to a complete separation of intensive, land sparing but low-biodiversity agricultural production from land prioritised for nature.

The EU has set an ambitious target for the expansion of organic farming to 25% of agricultural land area by 2030 as part of its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies intended to deliver on the EU Green Deal. Achieving this will also contribute to the pesticide, fertiliser and antibiotic reduction targets, and to the nature restoration targets.

[Organic farming and biodiversity - Policy options](#) is available on [www.organicseurope.bio/library](http://www.organicseurope.bio/library) and [read.organicseurope.bio](http://read.organicseurope.bio).

IFOAM Organics Europe represents almost 200 member organisations in the EU-27, the EU accession countries and EFTA. Member organisations span the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors organisations, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders, and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies.

