

PRESS RELEASE

COMMISSION PROPOSAL ON THE CERTIFICATION OF CARBON REMOVALS LEAVES CRUCIAL QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

BRUSSELS, 30 NOVEMBER 2022 – The Commission’s proposal on the certification of carbon removals touches on important aspects like the need for carbon farming to contribute to multiple sustainability objectives. However, it fails to propose concrete safeguards, does not require a positive impact on all sustainability objectives and leaves crucial issues unanswered.

Jan Plagge, IFOAM Organics Europe’s President, said: “The Commission’s proposal on carbon certification should recognise the efforts of front-runners like organic farmers who are already improving carbon stocks. Soil health is a cornerstone of organic and organic farmers apply practices that enhance soil fertility and increase soil organic carbon stocks. The requirement for additionality* should not disadvantage farmers who are already operating under a certified sustainability scheme like the EU organic label. Organic certification ensures not only a contribution to climate mitigation, but also to climate adaptation, resilience and protection of biodiversity and natural resources.”

Eric Gall, IFOAM Organics Europe’s Policy Manager, adds: “The climate and biodiversity crisis are interconnected and it is crucial that the certification framework ensures that “carbon farming” contributes to biodiversity and ecosystem protection. The legislation needs to be explicit on how to ensure carbon farming contributes to the proposal’s sustainability objectives, other than carbon sequestration. It should outline beneficial farming practices, which should be considered as carbon farming and exclude those that harm biodiversity and should not be eligible to certification. Carbon removals in the land sector should not undermine the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity. Conversely, as they deliver multiple benefits for climate and biodiversity, organic farming and agroecological practices should be considered as eligible carbon farming practices.”

Soil organic carbon stocks are highly reversible and susceptible to changes of agricultural practices, but they are also impacted by climate change the framework needs to ensure that soil organic carbon stocks are maintained and protected in the long run. The long-term nature of soil carbon sequestration and its reversibility require good management practices to be applied on the long-term so that soils do not lose the sequestered carbon to the atmosphere. Making carbon removals part of an agroecological transition would ensure long-term management and conservation of soil carbon stocks, contributing to climate mitigation and at the same time to soil health.

The framework is unclear on financing carbon removals and leaves the door open to voluntary carbon markets. Organic farmers doubt that carbon markets are the right policy tool to provide fair and reliable funding for farmers to improve soil carbon sequestration. Moreover, the framework does not provide any safeguards to prevent land commodification and does not address the risk of land grabbing. Clear social and environmental safeguards are needed to prevent the certification of carbon removals to become a greenwashing tool.

*Additionality is a defining concept of carbon removal projects. To qualify as a genuine carbon removal, the removals achieved by a project need to be 'additional' to what would have happened if the project had not been carried out (e.g., continued as business-as-usual)

Ends.

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Background information

In their [position paper on carbon farming](#), IFOAM Organics Europe urges for a holistic and multi-dimensional approach to carbon farming focussing not only on the amount of carbon stored in soils but also on biodiversity protection and the systemic transition of farming systems towards agroecology.

Organic farming delivers multiple benefits for the climate and biodiversity, including increased carbon sequestration in soils, lower energy input, 30% more on-farm biodiversity and increased resilience of the farming system. These are highlighted in a [document on the benefits of organic farming](#) published by IFOAM Organics Europe.

Transforming how we produce food can make a big difference in mitigating climate change, help farmers to adapt and to become more resilient, and to contribute to biodiversity protection. [Organic farming offers a systemic approach](#) for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and increasing soil carbon sequestration while sustaining healthy soils and protecting biodiversity.

Organic consumes less energy and reduces GHG emissions

- Instead of being dependent on external fossil-fuel intensive fertilizer or pesticide inputs, organic farming relies on establishing closed nutrient cycles and minimizing nitrogen losses. This can reduce global agricultural GHG emissions by around 20%;
- Refraining from synthetic fertilizer use reduces nitrous oxide emissions from soil by 40% per hectare in organic systems;
- Animals in organic systems have access to free range areas, allowed to graze as much as possible and 60% of the feed has to come from the farm or the same region. The reduced number of animals and grassland-based systems reduce emissions and improve carbon stocks in soil;
- Organic agriculture often uses improved manure management such as manure composting which can reduce nitrous oxide and methane emissions from manure by 50% and 70% respectively;
- Organic agriculture has a higher energy efficiency and a lower energy use per hectare. It consumes around 15% less energy per unit produced compared to conventional agriculture.

Organic sequesters and stores more carbon

Many common practices in organic farming, such as crop rotations including legumes or reduced tillage, help to improve soil quality and fertility and contribute significantly to increased carbon sequestration of additional 450 kg C/ha per year compared to land under conventional management.

Organic protects species and habitat diversity

By prohibiting synthetic fertilizers and pesticides and using biodiversity-enhancing practices, such as diverse crop rotations with legumes, landscape elements or reduced tillage, lead to on average 30% more species and 50% more individuals in organically managed areas.

Organic supports ecosystem functions

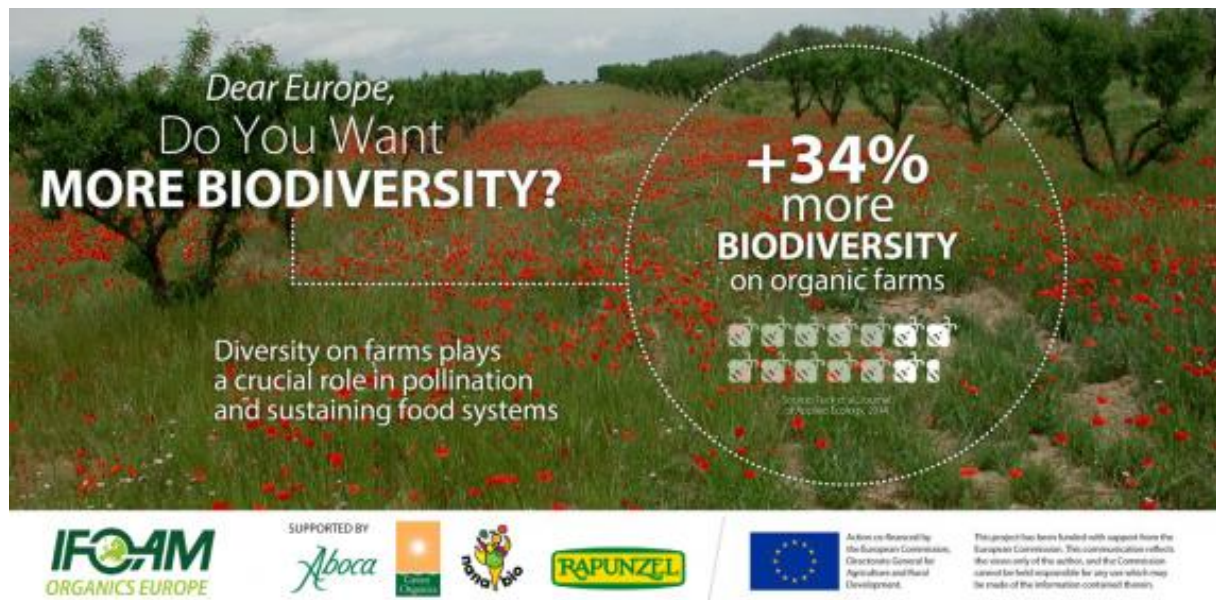
Organic farming promotes soil health and reduces soil erosion by 22%. It protects water bodies by reducing nitrate leaching by 28-39%. Organic also has a positive impact on crop pollination and it increases natural pest control.

Organic increases the resilience of farming systems

The improved soil structure in organic farming reduces erosion, supports plant health and makes organic more resilient to changing weather conditions. Organic farming does not rely on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, which makes the organic system less dependent to external inputs. The enhanced biodiversity in organic systems favours stable yields during drought periods and adaptation to future environmental conditions.

Useful links

- [IFOAM Organics Europe's position paper on carbon farming](#)
- [Organic agriculture and its benefits for climate and biodiversity](#)
- [Plant health care in organic farming](#)
- [What we do on biodiversity, soil & water](#) and [climate change](#)



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IFOAM Organics Europe is the European umbrella organisation for organic food and farming. With almost 200 members in 34 European countries, our work spans the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors organisations, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies. In 2022, IFOAM Organics Europe is turning 20, IFOAM Organics International 50 and IFOAM Asia 10. [Celebrate the Year of Organics with us!](#)