Press release: “Organic and agroecological farming are the best guarantee for long-term food security”, says new TP Organics Policy Brief

Brussels, 5 September 2023 – At today’s high-level expert webinar "**Safeguarding long-term food security**", TP Organics, the European Technology Platform for Research & Innovation into Organics and Agroecology, officially presented its new Policy Brief on food security and organic and agroecological farming. The Russian war against Ukraine has put food security in the centre of the political debate. But to achieve long-term food security, we need to rethink our food production systems, making them less reliant on external inputs (fossil fuels, synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, imported feed, etc.) and more resilient, as outlined in the EU’s Farm to Fork Strategy. Despite enough food being produced worldwide, food security can be threatened by some intensive farming practices, unequal food distribution and income inequality, combined with inflation/increase in food and energy costs.

First expert Dr Helmut Burtscher-Schaden, Pesticides and Chemistry Campaigner at GLOBAL 2000 (Friends of the Earth, Austria), is a prominent figure of the European movement to replace the carcinogenic herbicide glyphosate with environmentally-friendly alternatives and is deputy representative of the European Citizens Initiative “Save Bees and Farmers”. He pointed out misleading narratives of the agro-industrial lobby around the toxicity of pesticides in conventional and organic agriculture against the backdrop of the Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products (SUR) proposed by the European Commission and the EU Organic Action Plan. “In the face of the current crisis, there is no alternative to reducing pesticide use and restoring biodiversity. The phase-out of the use of synthetic pesticides is backed by European citizens themselves. Co-legislators should heed to the Commission's call to find swift and ambitious agreements on their legislative proposals that will translate the citizens’ ambition into law." Burtscher-Schaden adds: "The most harmful pesticides must be banned in the first place. To do this, we need a meaningful risk indicator replacing the current counterproductive indicator HRI 1."

Second expert Felix Wäckers, Director R&D at Biobest Group and part of the TP Organics Steering Committee brought in the evidence that rarely gets published that pesticides may even reduce productivity: "There are two mechanisms at play here: One being that the use of pesticides can aggravate pest problems by eliminating arthropod predators that normally control pests. The fact that this can actually compromise yield is something I recorded in a trial at a commercial onion grower last year. The grower used his usual four chemical treatments against thrips in his crop, except for a corner where I asked him not to use pesticides. At the end of the season, the thrips damage got out of hand in the chemically treated part, while the untreated part remained green and had 15% higher yield.” He expects to publish these results soon.

The foresight study “European Pesticide-Free Agriculture in 2050” shows that organic and agroecological practices reduce farmers' dependency on pesticides and preserve crop productivity and farm profitability while supporting the prevention of pest and disease impact. Study lead Olivier Mora, Foresight Coordinator at French Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, INRAE: “Our scenarios and simulation results show that a European transition towards chemical pesticide-free agriculture is possible and achievable. It will require strong involvement from all the actors of the food chain, beyond cropping systems, changes all along the food supply chains and food markets, and a coherent set of European public policies

on agriculture, food, health, environment and trade to support the transition. Such scenarios are not just a sectoral issue but a societal choice and a global environmental choice."

To make an agroecological Europe a reality, we need to address food waste and consumption/diets. The policy brief and the three accompanying infographics clearly show that **sustainable food security requires system change** and a paradigm shift away from the narrow "feed the world" narrative towards diverse, circular and holistic agroecological systems. Organic farming shows that it is possible to produce sufficient nutritious food while preserving biodiversity, storing carbon in soils, and making our food production more resilient to the increasing impacts of climate change. Organic and agroecological methods have even been shown to be more resilient to extreme climate conditions, due to soil organic matter restoration and drought resilience.

Luca Colombo, Secretary General at FIRAB and TP Organics Advisory Board Member, calls for enlarging the narrow focus on yields only to embrace a greater food system perspective and to adopt new and more functional approaches to food security that include sustainability and agency as additional dimensions, as suggested by the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

The policy brief puts forward five main recommendations for EU food security:

- Put in place a strong SUR, Nature Restoration Law, and Soil Monitoring Law;
- Increase support for organic to make 25% organic farmland in Europe a reality;
- Reduce food waste and loss;
- Consume less but better animal products;
- Include sustainability and agency in the definition of food security, involve all actors and implement true cost accounting.

Ends.

Contact details

TP Organics

Maria Gernert, TP Organics Coordinator, maria.gernert@tporganics.eu

Background information

To further develop the organic sector and to make the European agri-food system at large more sustainable and resilient, **TP Organics, the European Technology Platform for Research & Innovation into Organics and Agroecology** hosted by IFOAM Organics Europe, advocates for a substantial increase in research funding dedicated to organic and agroecological approaches. TP Organics unites large companies, small & medium enterprises, researchers, farmers, consumers, and civil society organisations active in the organic value chain from production, input and supply to food processing, marketing and consumption. Organic and agroecology make crops - and yields - more stable and resilient to pests, environmental variability, and climate change, including increasingly frequent droughts, water shortages and new pathogens, thus reducing the need for inputs. This scientific evidence has not yet reached a sufficient level of awareness, neither among policymakers nor among the public. Simultaneously, there is a gap in the knowledge exchange between farmers, researchers and policymakers. For this reason, TP Organics, supported by the European Climate Foundation, is implementing different

communication and dissemination activities throughout 2023, which include the policy brief and launch webinar as well as the Organic Innovation Days on 25-26 October. This dissemination of evidence aims to strengthen the link between organic farming and food security and to advance the needed transformation of the European agri-food system towards agroecological practices that are beneficial for both the climate and biodiversity.

EU Policy context

With the adoption of the EU Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies in May 2020, the EU wants to move towards a food system that is less dependent on external toxic inputs and has endorsed ambitious 2030 targets to reduce:

- the use of chemical pesticides and the use of more hazardous pesticides by 50%,
- the use of fertilisers by at least 20% and nutrient losses by at least 50%, while ensuring that there is no deterioration in soil fertility.

The key role of the organic sector to achieve these objectives has been acknowledged through the specific target on 25% organic agricultural land by 2030, supported by the new EU Organic Action Plan. The European Commission has launched several legislative initiatives to implement the ambition of these strategies, with the revision of the Sustainable Use of pesticides Directive (SUD) as a main lever to achieve the targets on pesticide reduction, and has adopted a proposal for a new Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products (SUR) in June 2022. The European Parliament is expected to vote on its position on the SUR in September or October (AGRI and ENVI Committees) and October or November 2023 (Plenary). Once the Council has adopted a position, trilogue negotiations can start. The Commission's additional impact assessment clearly showed that reducing the use of chemical pesticides will not threaten our food production. Instead, it is necessary to implement sustainable pest management to protect human health, soils, ecosystems and biodiversity.

INRAE foresight study "European Pesticide-Free Agriculture in 2050"

Given their negative impacts on the environment, biodiversity and human health, the use of pesticides is a major issue for the sustainability of agriculture and food systems. Launched by INRAE at the request of the priority research programme "Growing and protecting crops differently" (PPR-CPA), the aim of the "European chemical pesticide-free agriculture in 2050" foresight study is to open up a research, policy and public debate on the possibility of building a chemical pesticide-free agriculture in the future, considering that it could be a major lever for improving the sustainability of European food systems. The study combines a scenario planning approach to imagine scenarios of European chemical pesticide-free food and agriculture, a back-casting approach at European level and in four European regions, and a simulation approach based on a biomass balance model to assess the impacts of these scenarios on production, trade, land use and GHG emissions.

- The first scenario explores the development of robotics and bio-inputs and the related changes in global food chains.
- The second scenario explores the mobilisation of holobionts and microbiomes at all stages of European food chains.
- The third scenario explores landscape management and the relocation of food chains.

Model simulations of the scenarios suggest that it is possible to develop such agriculture in Europe while maintaining, or even improving, the European trade balance in calories, and

reducing GHG emissions from European agriculture. Find more info and access the deliverables here.