Recommendations on the Vision for Agriculture & Food

IFOAM Organics Europe welcomes the Commission's intentions to publish a Vision for Agriculture and Food during the first 100 days of its new mandate.
IFOAM Organics Europe's President took part in the strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture, and we believe that the Vision for Agriculture and Food should fully reflect the strategic dialogue recommendations.
Aligning EU policies with the strategic dialogue's recommendations and embedding organic support into the broader Vision for Agriculture and Food will accelerate progress toward a sustainable, resilient and competitive European agri-food system, acclaimed globally.
With a market worth 50€ billion in Europe and its 420.000 organic farmers, organic farming's benefits go beyond sustainable and competitive agricultural production; it is an engine and a policy tool to promote rural development, biodiversity preservation, and climate resilience.

Organic and other agroecological practices as a cornerstone of competitive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems, where youth and women play an important role

We welcome Commissioner Hansen's statement that "there are opportunities for environmentally sustainable and economically viable farming, as demonstrated by the organic sector". In the same vein, the strategic dialogue recommendations highlight that organic farming "contributes to biodiversity protection, climate change mitigation, soil health, and water quality while creating profitable opportunities and engaging diverse demographics such as young people and women in agriculture".

The strategic dialogue report clearly recognizes organic agriculture as the leading legally regulated sustainability system and calls upon the European Commission to continue to support organic production.

Supporting organic and other agroecological practices will drive environmental, social and economic benefits, positioning Europe as a global leader in sustainable, resilient and competitive agriculture.

The Ten Years for Agroecology (TYFA) scenario, developed by the Think Tank IDDRI shows that it is possible to adopt agroecology in a prominent way in Europe by 2050 by phasing-out of vegetable protein imports and adopting healthier diets. Despite a drop in production of 35% compared to 2010 (in Kcal), this exhaustive and thorough study shows that such scenario provides healthy food for Europeans while maintaining export capacity, reduces Europe's global food footprint, leads to a 40% reduction in GHG emissions from the agricultural sector, and regains biodiversity while conserving natural resources[1].

1. Organic farming should play a prominent role in a renewed CAP and CMO

IFOAM Organics Europe fully supports the strategic dialogue conclusions that the CAP should move away from untargeted area-based payments and clearly separate the budget for income support (which should be targeted to those farmers who need it the most) from a budget to reward farmers who protect nature.

"Crop rotation or diversification, expansion of cover crops, and conversion to organic farming are the three farming practices that contribute the most to the estimated mitigation potential (overall 78%)"

DG AGRI study estimating the climate change mitigation potential of 19 CAP strategic plans

Recommendation 1 – A socio-economic budget under the CAP: Farmers' incomes should allow them to make a decent living. As such, we recommend that the next CAP include a budget for socio-economic measures as rethinking support proportionally to social and economic criteria, instead of direct payments alone, would allow farmers to make a decent income[2]. This is in line with the strategic dialogue recommendation "the CAP should (...) provid[e] socio-economic support targeted to the farmers who need it most"

Recommendation 2 – Rewarding farmers for ecosystem services: All farmers should be adequately compensated for the ecosystem services they provide, proportionally to the extent of the environmental and social benefits they are responsible for. We welcome Commissioner Hansen's statement declaring that "CAP Strategic Plans provide for substantial support and ambitious targets for the organic sector, and it will be important to maintain support to facilitate conversion as well as maintenance of organic farming". Organic farmers must be recognized and rewarded for the ecosystem services they provide.

- ➔ IFOAM Organics Europe's position on the CAP recommends a 3-stage CAP intervention system which would include a baseline for all farmers meeting environmental requirements, a middle level to support those transitioning to sustainable practices, and a top level recognizing advanced methods like organic farming. This recommendation is in line with the strategic dialogue report which recommends to "determine different levels of ambition for providing ecosystem services".

Recommendation 3 – Prioritizing sustainability in the Just Transition Fund: The strategic dialogue recommends setting up a fund that would support investments for farm transformation as well as reskilling programmes to transition to alternative production systems. IFOAM Organics Europe recommends that this fund allocate a dedicated portion of its resources to support organic and agroecological farming. Additionally, the fund should incentivize the creation of organic enterprises in rural areas and back research and innovation to enhance organic production systems.

Recommendation 4 – Differentiating organic in the CMO for targeted support: The Common Market Organisation (CMO) regulation should explicitly recognize organic producers and require Member States to include organic farming in the tools provided under the CMO, enabling organic operators to activate measures tailored to the organic market. Furthermore, operational programmes should allow for sector-specific initiatives exclusively for organic products, such as organic milk, ensuring that organic producers can access targeted support to address the unique challenges and opportunities of their market.

[1] Poux and Aubert, 2018. Ten Years for Agroecology. Available here.

[2] IFOAM Organics Europe, 2024. A common agricultural policy fit for the future: the vision for the organic movement for the CAP post 2027. Available here.

2. Develop a benchmarking system that builds on existing certification schemes

According to the strategic dialogue recommendations, a harmonized benchmarking system for on-farm sustainability assessments should adopt **a whole-farm approach, using common objectives, principles, and scientifically sound indicators to address all sustainability dimensions, including biodiversity, GHG emissions, pollution, animal welfare, and soil health**.

Recommendation 1 – Adopt comprehensive and transparent methodologies: Ensure that tools used to assess the environmental impact of agri-food products, such as sustainability reporting or food procurement calculations, reflect the complexity of agri-food systems. Avoid reliance on methodologies like the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) or purely Life Cycle Assessment-based approaches, which often overlook key externalities and risks of greenwashing[3].

Recommendation 2 – Aligning emission pricing mechanisms with a sustainable future: IFOAM Organics Europe recommends that emission pricing mechanisms prioritize support for farming systems that prevent intensification, enhance biodiversity, and contribute to climate mitigation. Moreover, strategic plans under the NRL should ensure dedicated funding for organic and agroecological practices.

Recommendation 3 – Develop a holistic benchmarking system: Create a unified system for sustainability benchmarking that aligns with the strategic dialogue recommendations, enables meaningful comparisons across products, sectors, and regions while capturing the full environmental and social impacts of agricultural practices, using a whole farm approach. **Organic certification can be used as a proxy for sustainability benchmarking**, providing a basis with well-established reporting criteria and structures, without increasing burden on farmers.

3. Support awareness and market development for sustainable products

Farmers need a market that fairly remunerates them for their products. Importantly, farmers who engage in ambitious sustainable production systems that deliver many benefits need a stable market and cannot solely depend on the changing strategies and priorities of the food industry and retailers. It is in line with the recommendations of the Strategic Dialogue that transitioning to sustainable farming systems must pay off for farmers and environmental sustainability should reconciled with a fair income. Increasing consumer trust and awareness through targeted education campaigns, transparent labelling, and enhanced public procurement of organic foods is key. As the Strategic Dialogue states, it is essential to "make the healthy and sustainable choice the easy one".

Recommendation 1 – Raise awareness of the agri-food system: Initiate an EU-wide awareness campaign highlighting the positive and negative impacts of the agri-food system, and spotlighting those practices that achieve sustainability, resilience and competitiveness, such as organic farming.

Recommendation 2 – Organic within sustainable public procurement: Expand organic market access and availability and ensuring a balanced development of supply and demand through sustainable public procurement that includes minimum quota for products from organic agriculture. This is in line with the strategic dialogue recommendation "The revised EU Public Procurement should enshrine a "best value" approach (…) including minimum standards for organic products".

Recommendation 3 – Shared responsibility for sustainable agrifood products: Farmers' efforts to adopt more sustainable practices need to be properly rewarded by public policies (such as the CAP) but also by the market (and not only by consumers). In this vein, operators between the farm and the fork should be responsible for

[3] IFOAM Organics Europe, 2022. Zooming in on the limitations of the PEF methodology for agri-food products. Available here.

sourcing a mandatory share of sustainable products. The burden of the transition of the agriculture sector should not be borne solely by farmers, and by consumers willing to pay more to buy organic products, but by the whole food production chain.

Recommendation 4 – Safeguarding non-GMO and organic integrity: Protect the market of non-GMO products, such as organic. Ensure that traceability is upheld in the context of new genomic techniques (NGTs), that organic products may not use such techniques, and that the burden of ensuring that organic products do not contain NGTs falls on those that are using such techniques.

4. Make the agriculture sector more resilient to climate change by supporting the contributions of organic to climate neutrality and independence from inputs

As per the strategic dialogue recommendations, "urgent, ambitious, and feasible action is needed at all levels to guarantee that the sector operates within planetary boundaries and contributes to the protection and restoration of the climate, ecosystems, and natural resources".

Organic farming offers a systemic approach to carbon farming, by contributing significantly to soil carbon sequestration and higher soil organic carbon stocks compared to conventionally managed soils, and by delivering benefits for soil health, water quality and biodiversity protection.

"Compared to conventional farming, organic farming has positive environmental and climate impacts (…): positive effects have been found for biodiversity, carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions, energy use, eutrophication, nutrients loss and soil biological quality"

DG AGRI's 2023 agricultural market brief "organic farming in the EU" - here

Recommendation 1 – Reducing synthetic inputs and promoting biocontrol: The strategic dialogue recommendations advise "to reduce external inputs as mineral fertilisers and pesticides" (…) as well as develop and use biocontrol". Therefore, there is a need to:

(1) Support practices that show it is possible to farm without the use of synthetic inputs – practices such as those used in organic farming can benefit the conventional sector;
(2) Support research into alternatives to synthetic inputs;
(3) Create a legal framework on biocontrol that makes it easier to use natural substances.

Recommendation 2 – Use indicators that measure the *real* risk incurred from pesticide use: The HRI-1 indicator currently used to calculate the use and risk of pesticides, is heavily based on the volume of inputs used, rather than on their risk, and thus shows the same risk for the same quantity of a nerve agent as for baking soda[4], despite the clear differences between these two substances. Therefore, there is a need to review the use of the HRI-1 indicator to promote an indicator that better reflects the real risk of substances.

5. Support farming practices that prevent water pollution within the water resilience strategy

According to the most recent European Environmental Agency (EEA) report, Member States report agriculture as being the most significant pressure impacting both surface and groundwater[5]. As organic farming does not use synthetic inputs and limits nitrogen pollution, it drastically reduces groundwater and surface water pollution compared to farming practices that use synthetic inputs.

Recommendation 1 – Organic practices promoted for water resilience: The water resilience strategy and subsequent legislative initiatives shall recognise and support the important role that organic practice have in reducing water pollution.

Recommendation 2 – Farmers' training to optimise water use: An area-specific training about how to optimise water use should be available for all farmers.

[4] Global 2000, 2022. HRI-1: a risk indicator to promote toxic pesticides? Available here.
[5] EEA, 2024. Europe's state of water 2024: the need for improved water resilience. Available here.