



European Commission
Directorate-General for Agriculture

Newsletter

ISSN 1560-1862

Public debate on action plan to boost organic farming

Organic production could provide many farmers with a means to a better livelihood if the right conditions are in place. The European Union (EU) could help create such conditions. Many different ideas were put forward during the 'European hearing on organic food and farming — Towards a European action plan', which saw the participation of over 100 stakeholder organisations and representatives from Member States, on 22 January 2004 in Brussels. The action plan will now be finalised and put to the Council and European Parliament.

Demand for and supply of organic produce has grown over recent years but the average market share for organic products remains small (about 2 % in the EU, though the share of organic vegetables is at 5–10 %). In some regions the market and production are still growing but in others development has slowed. Producing organically carries additional costs compared to 'conventional' farming and, in the absence of really strong consumer demand, it is still not clear whether organic farming in the EU will occupy more than a niche in future. However, there is already a consensus that more could be done at EU level to provide a framework for development of the sector.

Organic farming is much discussed by both the general public and the agricultural industry. Anxious as much as possible to be in command of the facts, the Commission used the hearing to broaden its understanding of the organic sector. The occasion offered an opportunity for practitioners, including experts in the agricultural, environmental and consumer fields, to offer their practical experiences as well as views about how the future should develop. The results of earlier consultations were aired and discussed at the hearing, which addressed such important questions as:

- how to boost trade and consumption of organic products in the EU;
- how to ensure that demand for organic products can be transmitted through the retail trade back to producers;
- what means are necessary to facilitate production and processing;
- how to ensure traceability and organic authenticity to reassure consumers;
- the linked issue of supporting the coexistence of organic farming and GMOs.

Addressing the hearing, Commissioner Fischler drew attention to the risks of supply and demand getting out of balance and highlighted several areas where

improvements are needed: a better understanding of consumer demand and other factors (including establishing better data about organic production); improving information and assurances to consumers; encouraging use of the new opportunities offered by the 2003 CAP reform, including those under rural development policy.

Measures discussed at the hearing and during earlier consultations include:

- defining the objectives of organic farming in order to render its public service explicit and contribute to transparency and consumer confidence;
- facilitating distribution channels with emphasis on local markets and direct sales (short chains);
- recognising the role of organic farming within the CAP, particularly with regard to its market orientation and the provision of public goods in terms of protection of the environment and animal welfare;
- improving consumer awareness of the EU organic logo and other organic information;
- ensuring more harmonised standards, and enforcement of them, in order to build consumer confidence in organic foods;
- promoting the development of organic production internationally, for example through equivalent standards and inspection;
- developing new standards to add to those existing, for example to cover better the welfare of animals, though without over-burdening producers;
- targeting research into the further development and refinement of organic farming;
- improving coordination between Member States in dealing with the coexistence of organic and conventional agriculture with regard to GMO production.

The Commission began developing the action plan in 2002. Several Council conclusions and conferences have emphasised the important contribution organic farming can make towards sustainable development. The Commission will now finalise its proposed action plan rapidly and present it in the form of a communication to the European Council and Parliament.

Further details on the hearing can be found at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/events/organic/index_en.htm

Adoption of the 2004 annual plan for distribution of food aid

On 10 December 2003, the Commission adopted the 2004 annual plan for aid to be distributed to the most deprived persons in the Community. This annual plan allows for the free distribution of food from the intervention stocks by charitable organisations acting on behalf of deprived persons in the European Union. It is in this way that some of the established NGOs such as, for example, the Red Cross or the food banks, obtain a substantial part of their supplies.

The 2004 annual plan, with its budget of EUR 175 million, therefore makes available 281 000 tonnes of cereals (other than rice), 99 227 tonnes of rice, 21 616 tonnes of butter, 17 295 tonnes of milk powder and 53 tonnes of beef and veal. Furthermore, a complementary budget has also been foreseen to enable the participation of the new Member States from May 2004 onwards. Details of the quantities of products donated by those Member States participating in this programme can be found in the table below.

(tonnes)

Member State	Product				
	Cereals	Rice (paddy rice)	Butter	Milk powder	Beef and veal (carcass equivalent)
Belgium	7 000	2 000	600		
Denmark					53
Greece	26 000	15 630		1 500	
Spain	70 000	24 520	6 430		
France	58 000	27 077		15 200	
Ireland			60		
Italy	90 000	15 000	12 248		
Portugal	15 000	15 000	2 278		
Finland	15 000			595	
Total	281 000	99 227	21 616	17 295	53

Annual distribution plan for 2004

Quantity of each type of product to be withdrawn from Community intervention stocks for distribution in each Member State

News in brief

New Agriculture DG publication: 'The horticulture sector in the EU'

A factsheet on the horticulture sector in the EU is the latest publication from the Agriculture DG. The aim of the 'Factsheet' series is to inform the agricultural and wider public about the importance of different areas of farming and how the CAP plays a role in their future. This latest factsheet covers the myriad of products coming under the term horticulture — fruits from guavas to strawberries, vegetables as diverse as cabbages and chillies, flowers and plants, and, not forgetting, various types of nuts. There is a wealth of detail about trade flows as well as descriptions of the marketing standards and support systems that help to make horticulture a thriving sector.

The factsheet pays particular attention to the way the CAP applies in the sector, where the emphasis is increasingly market-oriented, encouraging better product quality and marketing standards, with the full involvement of producers themselves. There are separate sections featuring bananas and ornamental plants, as these productions have very specific characteristics, support systems and trade arrangements.

The factsheet shows that the fruit and vegetable sector alone accounts for approximately 15 % of the value of EU agricultural production and occupies 4 % of the agricultural area. The EU is the world's second largest exporter, and biggest importer, of fruit and vegetables. Fruit and vegetable production is particularly important in the Mediterranean region, where it represents about 25 % of total agricultural output.

The factsheet is available in all 11 EU languages in paper form ⁽¹⁾ and on the Agriculture DG website ⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Catalogue No: KF-53-03-071-EN-C

⁽²⁾ http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/publi/fact/index_en.htm



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Text finalised on 7 February 2004