The EU Action plan on Organic Agriculture

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The European Parliament adopted by 611 votes to 14, with 5 abstentions, a resolution on an EU action plan for organic agriculture.

In 2019, the EU's total agricultural area under organic farming grew to 13.8 million hectares. It currently accounts for 8.5 % of the EU's total utilised agricultural area and the value of the EU's organic market more than doubled between 2010 and 2019. The retail sales of organic products increased from EUR 18 billion to EUR 41 billion in the period 2009-2019.

General comments

Parliament welcomed the Commission communication on an action plan for the development of organic production, the objective of increasing the EU's agricultural area under organic farming by 2030 through the development of supply and demand, and the Commission's recognition of organic farming as one of the main components on the EU's path towards more sustainable food systems. It considered that the **development of organic farming**, which delivers many positive externalities and benefits for climate change mitigation, biodiversity and soil protection, and will contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the farm to fork and biodiversity strategies.

Parliament is of the opinion that legislation and the OAPs must provide sufficient room for flexibility to take into account the differences in the nature and conditions of organic agriculture in the Member States. It urged the Commission to pay particular attention to supporting the

Member States which are lagging behind. The measures and instruments proposed in this respect should be based on thorough analyses and impact assessments.

In addition, the CAP budget should also properly reward organic farmers for the specific public goods that they deliver through the protection of the environment and of natural resources.

According to Members, for an EU action plan to succeed, it must stimulate and mobilise the Member States, as well as regional and local authorities. Member States are encouraged to establish their own national strategies for organic farming and to develop their own national and/or regional OAPs, in coordination with the National Strategic Plans. All stakeholders should be involved in a consultative process in the design and implementation of National Strategic Plans.

Organic production offers better economic returns to farmers but often involves higher production costs. Higher consumer prices may be a barrier to expansion but are currently necessary to support the organic sector. In this context, the resolution stressed the need to address the issue of **affordability** and accessibility of organic products.

Stimulating demand and ensuring consumer trust

Parliament supported the Commission in further promoting and sharing information about the **EU organic logo** among consumers, including through school schemes promoting the consumption of fruit, vegetables and milk, as well as in other institutions such as nursing homes. It also supports the promotion of local organic logos which exist in several Member States and offer the same guarantees as the EU organic logo.

Members expressed concern about **misleading labels, packaging and advertising** that makes it difficult for consumers to distinguish conventional products from organic products. They stated that frequent independent controls are the basis for consumers' trust in organic products. They await the Commission's future initiatives aimed at better guiding consumers in their choice of food through **labelling, promotion and information campaigns**, based on sound, independent and operational scientific foundations.

The resolution highlighted the importance of improving transparency in the organic food supply chain and of **better traceability** in all production and distribution processes in line with the demands from European consumers to have more information on the origin and production methods of the foodstuffs they consume.

Stressing the role of local, regional and national authorities in raising public awareness of all types of sustainable farming methods, Members suggested **promoting farmers' markets at local and regional level** to bridge the gap between producers and consumers.

Members also believe that positive and **trade promoting actions** are needed to further promote EU organic products at international level.

Incentives and reinforcing the entire value chain

Members considered that, in order to fulfil the ambitions of the National Strategic Plans, an **adequate CAP budget**, as well as compatibility with other European funds or programmes, is essential to create incentives to encourage farmers to convert to and maintain organic farming practices.

Noting the potential of short, **local, seasonal and smart food supply chains**, Parliament called on Member States to allocate sufficient resources to investments that facilitate the development of short food supply chains, for example by increasing the number of mobile slaughterhouses or on-farm processing facilities.

Stressing the need for clear contractual conditions and fair recognition of the work of organic farmers, Members recommended promoting tools such as **supply chain contracts**.

The Commission is urged to ensure greater deployment of **digital technologies**, such as precision farming and blockchain in organic farming to combat fraud and illegal production methods.

Improving sustainability

Members stressed the need for **research and innovation** to encourage the conversion to organic agriculture and to further develop robust farming systems and increase tolerance to drought, pests and disease. They encouraged a science-based approach regarding soil fertility and the need to develop, accept and incentivise innovations in novel plant nutrient sources in organic farming.

The Commission is called on to ensure that sufficient financial resources are allocated to research into organic seeds and animal breeding.

Lastly, the resolution called on the Commission to conduct comprehensive studies and analyses of the impact that an increase in organic farming would have in terms of both climate change and food security in the European Union.