European Green Deal: Commission presents actions to boost organic productio

The Commission presented an Action Plan for the development of organic production**. Its overall aim is to boost the production and consumption of organic products, to reach 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030, as well as to increase organic aquaculture significantly.**

Organic production comes with a number of important benefits: organic fields have around 30% more biodiversity, organically farmed animals enjoy a higher degree of animal welfare and take less antibiotics, organic farmers have higher incomes and are more resilient, and consumers know exactly what they are getting thanks to the EU organic logo. The Action Plan is in line with the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies.

The Action Plan is designed to provide the already fast growing organic sector the right tools to achieve the 25% target. It puts forward 23 actions structured around 3 axes – **boosting consumption**, **increasing production**, and **further improving the sustainability of the sector** – to ensure a balanced growth of the sector.

The Commission encourages Member States to develop national organic action plans to increase their national share of organic farming. There are significant differences between Member States regarding the share of agricultural land currently under organic farming, ranging from 0.5% to over 25%. The national organic action plans will complement the national CAP strategic plans, by setting out measures that go beyond agriculture and what is offered under the CAP.

Promote consumption

Growing consumption of organic products will be crucial to encourage farmers to convert to organic farming and thus increase their profitability and resilience. To this end, the Action Plan puts forward several concrete actions aimed at **boosting demand**, **maintaining consumer trust** and **bringing organic food closer to citizens**. This includes: **informing** and **communicating** about organic production, **promoting** the consumption of organic products, **stimulating** a greater use of organics in public canteens through public procurement and **increasing** the distribution of organic products under the EU Actions also aim, for example, at **preventing fraud**, **increasing consumers'**

trust and **improving traceability** of organic products. The private sector can also play a significant role by, for example, rewarding employees with ‘bio-cheques' they can use to purchase organic food.

Increase production

Presently, about 8.5% of EU's agricultural area is farmed organically, and the trends show that with the present growth rate, the EU will reach 15-18% by 2030. This Action Plan provides the toolkit to make an extra push and reach 25%. While the Action Plan largely focuses on the “pull effect” of the demand side, the Common Agricultural Policy will remain a key tool for supporting the conversion. Currently, around 1.8% (€7.5 billion) of CAP is used to support organic farming.
The future CAP will include eco-schemes which will be backed by a budget of €38 – 58 billion, for the period 2023 – 2027, depending on the outcome of the CAP negotiations. The eco-schemes can be deployed to boost organic farming.

Beyond the CAP, key tools include **organisation of information events** and **networking** for sharing best practices, **certification** for groups of farmers rather than for individuals, **research and innovation**, use of **blockchain** and other technologies to improve traceability increasing market transparency, reinforcing **local and small-scale processing**, supporting the **organisation of the food chain** and **improving animal nutrition**.

To raise awareness on organic production, the Commission will organise an annual EU **‘Organic day'** as well as **awards** in the organic food chain, to recognise excellence at all steps of the organic food chain. The Commission will also encourage the development of organic tourism networks through **‘biodistricts'**. 'Biodistricts' are areas where farmers, citizens, tourist operators, associations and public authorities work together towards the sustainable management of local resources, based on organic principles and practices.

The Action Plan also notes that organic aquaculture production remains a relatively new sector but has a significant potential for growth. The upcoming new EU guidelines on the sustainable development of EU aquaculture, will encourage Member States and stakeholders to support the increase in organic production in this sector.

Improve sustainability

Finally, it also aims to further improve organic farming's performance in terms of sustainability. To achieve this, actions will focus on **improving animal welfare**, **ensuring the availability of organic seeds**, **reducing the sector's carbon footprint**, and **minimising the use of plastics, water and energy**.

The Commission also intends to increase the share of research and innovation (R&I) and dedicate at least 30% of the budget for research and innovation actions in the field of agriculture, forestry

and rural areas to topics specific to or relevant for the organic sector.

The Commission will closely monitor progress through a yearly follow-up with representatives of the European Parliament, Member States and stakeholders, through bi-annual progress reports and a mid-term review.

Members of the College said

Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal, Frans **Timmermans**, said: “Agriculture is one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss, and biodiversity loss is a major threat to agriculture. We urgently need to restore balance in our relationship with nature. This is not something farmers face alone, it involves the whole food chain. With this Action Plan, we aim to boost demand for organic farming, help consumers make informed choices, and support European farmers in their transition. The more land we dedicate to organic farming, the better the protection of biodiversity in that land and in surrounding areas.”

Agriculture Commissioner, Janusz **Wojciechowski**, said: “The organic sector is recognised for its sustainable practices and use of resources, giving its central role in achieving the Green Deal objectives. To achieve the 25% of organic farming target, we need to ensure that demand drives the growth of the sector while taking into account the significant differences between each Member State's organic sectors. The organic Action Plan provides tools and ideas to accompany a balanced growth of the sector. The development will be supported by the Common Agricultural Policy, research and innovation as well as close cooperation with key actors at EU, national and local level.”

Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus **Sinkevi?ius**, said: “Organic farming provides many benefits to the environment, contributing to healthy soils, reducing pollution of air and water, and improving biodiversity. At the same time, with demand growing faster than production over the last decade, the organic sector brings economic benefits to its players. The new Organic farming Action Plan will be a crucial instrument to set the path to achieve the targets of 25% of agricultural area under organic farming and of significant increase of organic aquaculture enshrined in the Biodiversity and the Farm to Fork Strategies. In addition to that, the new Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture to be adopted by the Commission soon, will promote organic aquaculture further.”