

**A RESOURCE MANUAL FOR THE ORGANIC  
FOOD AND FARMING SECTOR**

# ORGANIC ACTION PLANS

**DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION  
AND EVALUATION**

Second edition

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# Foreword to second edition

Political and financial support provided through the European Union and national and regional governments' policies are crucial for creating and further developing a steady market demand, a solid supply base and good operating conditions for stimulating organic food and farming in Europe. These factors have contributed significantly to the growth of the EU organic food market and the expansion of the supply base. In the EU alone, organic farming represented 6.7% of agricultural land in 2016, due to policy support and a strong demand for organic produce amongst EU consumers. Moreover, the EU market doubled in value over the last decade, from €14.5 billion in 2007 to €30.7 billion by 2016.

With current trends indicating that EU demand for organic produce is far outstripping production levels, there are great opportunities to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the organic sector as innovative solutions for the whole agri-food sector. Organic action plans can help organic SMEs and the European agri-food sector to develop in a more holistic way. They do this by providing a framework for integrating different policies into a broader policy picture, and setting common objectives, targets and actions that serve the organic sector's needs and meet public policy goals in a specific country or region.

While in the past organic action plans mainly focused on the supply of organic produce, there is growing interest in developing the whole organic supply chain. Such developments offer attractive prospects for SMEs who wish to make the move to organic, whilst contributing to policy goals for rural employment, economic development, the environment and climate action. This includes the European Development Fund's (ERDF) Investment for Growth and Jobs goal. The rich experience of organic action plan development, implementation and evaluation in Europe can also help to inform the formulation of future policy objectives, targets and policy instruments at EU, national and regional levels.

The first organic action plans were developed at national level and later at EU level. Now, more and more organic action plans are developed at regional level, tailored and adapted to the needs of local policy makers

and stakeholders. This was one of the reasons why the SME Organics project was funded under Interreg Europe financed by the ERDF.

The methodology for developing, implementing and evaluating organic action plans is based on the results of the EU project ORGAP, funded under the sixth EU Framework Research Programme. ORGAP developed a very useful resource manual and toolbox for the development, implementation and evaluation of organic action plans (published by FiBL – Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (Frick, Switzerland) and IFOAM EU (Brussels, Belgium)).

Building on this knowledge the SME Organics project team decided to integrate the experiences in the development of regional organic action plans into an updated version of the manual. In this second edition several sections have been updated and recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders put forward drawing on nearly two decades of research and practice, including the experiences from the first phase of the SME Organics project. We trust that these recommendations can also inform EU Member States' and regions' future Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation. Furthermore, the text is illustrated with many examples taken from the SME Organics project and further afield.

We wish to thank all the people who have contributed to this manual, in particular the editors of this second edition and the members of the SME Organics project team and other experts for sharing their experiences.

We hope that this manual will help stakeholders from both the organic and non-organic sectors, policy makers and administrators to further develop, implement, and evaluate successfully future organic action plans in order to support sustainable development in Europe for years to come.

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March 2018

# Foreword to first edition

In June 2004 the European Commission published the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming. With this Action Plan the Commission intended to assess the situation of organic farming and to lay down the basis for future policy development. At the national level many governments have also developed Action Plans for promoting organic farming. Therefore, it was seen as necessary to consider how such Action Plans could be evaluated successfully.

The European Action Plan was the main reason why the DG Research of the European Commission decided to fund a specific support project, the ORGAP Project No. CT-2005-006591 within the 6th Framework Research programme. This project, with the title *European Action Plan of Organic Food and Farming: Development of criteria and procedures for the evaluation of the EU Action Plan for Organic Agriculture*, started in May 2005 and was completed in April 2008.

Within the project a toolbox was developed to evaluate and monitor the implementation of the European Action Plan in the following areas: information, training and education, research, production, processing, market development, certification, and public expenditures. This toolbox was tested on selected existing national Action Plans and partially also for the European Action Plan, mainly focussing on the implementation processes. In addition, policy recommendations to the European Commission, national authorities and other stakeholders were made.

In order to communicate the recommendations of this project as widely as possible, this practical manual for initiating and evaluating Action Plans has been produced. This manual is intended to serve two functions:

- a) A tool for stakeholder involvement in future Action Plan development and implementation at the EU, national and regional levels
- b) A guide to the use of the ORGAPET, the Evaluation Toolbox of the ORGAP project (included as a CD-ROM with the manual and at [www.orgap.org](http://www.orgap.org)).

The manual was developed as part of the ORGAP project and is largely based on the documents included in the Organic Action Plan Evaluation Toolbox (ORGAPET).

The following institutions contributed to the development of ORGAPET and the manual: Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (Otto Schmid, Bettina Landau, Matthias Stolze, Hanna Stolz); University of Hohenheim (UHO), Stuttgart (Prof. Stephan Dabbert, Christian Eichert); Aberystwyth University (UWA), Wales, United Kingdom (Dr. Nic Lampkin, Ian Jeffreys); Polytechnic University of Marche, Ancona (UNIVPM), Italy (Prof. Raffaele Zanoli, Dr. Daniela Vairo); University of Southern Denmark (USD), Denmark (Dr. Johannes Michelsen).

The IFOAM EU Group (Victor González, Marco Schlüter and Christopher Stopes on behalf of Soil Association, United Kingdom) was responsible for the development of the manual together with the project coordinator FiBL and the assistance of Dr. Nic Lampkin (UWA). The other partners in the project have contributed to the manual, providing information about national Organic Action Plans: Institute of Sustainable Development (ISD) Slovenia (Anamarija Slabe); Institute for Agricultural Economics (VUZE) Czech Republic (Pavla Wollmuthova); Agricultural Economics Research Institute (LEI) Netherlands (Robert Stokkers); Sociedad Española de Agricultura Ecológica (SEAE) Spain (Victor González).

A special thanks goes to Christopher Stopes, who helped to edit the text of this manual. We are also grateful to Ben Millbank and Joy Carey of the Soil Association for the final layout and the graphic design of the manual.

We acknowledge the support of DG Research of the Commission of the European Communities, in particular their scientific officer Dr. Danièle Tissot.

The editors hope that this manual helps to initiate a process of evaluation and progressive development of Organic Action Plans at the European, national and regional level.

**Otto Schmid**  
ORGAP Scientific Project Coordinator  
Frick, Switzerland,  
April 2008

# Introduction

## 1.1 ABOUT THIS MANUAL

### **What are organic action plans and who is this manual for?**

Organic action plans are commonly used in Europe for coordinating public policies and private or voluntary-led initiatives in a framework, at different governance levels – local, national or European, to support the development of the organic sector. They are usually based on a partnership approach between the organic sector, policy makers and other stakeholders, with common objectives and actions for development set out over a defined period of time. This manual serves to inspire the people, organisations and institutions at these different levels involved in, and with an interest in the organic food and farming sector, who may wish to engage in the initiation, review, revision or renewal of organic action plans.

The manual is targeted at all the stakeholders who have participated in the development and implementation of organic action plans – and those who did not:

- Policy administrators
- Politicians
- Members of action plan or policy advisory group
- Organisations and representative bodies
- Farmers and farming businesses
- Food businesses, in particular SMEs

### **The manual is a tool for stakeholder involvement**

The objective of the manual is to provide a tool for stakeholder involvement in future action plan development and implementation and evaluation processes at European Union (EU), national and regional level.

## What does the manual include?

The manual outlines:

- The development of the organic food and farming sector in Europe
- Organic action plans as a component of European, national and regional policies for organic farming
- Planning and implementation of organic action plans
- Involvement of stakeholders in organic action plan development
- Methods and tools for evaluation of organic action plans

The manual draws on key lessons learnt from more than two decades' experience of development, implementation and evaluation of organic action plans throughout Europe. The first edition of this manual was originally prepared as part of the Evaluation of the European Organic Action Plan Project (ORGAP), published in 2008.<sup>1</sup>

This new edition has been revised, updated and further developed as part of a follow-up regional organic action plans project, SME ORGANICS, which runs from 2016 to 2020. It aims to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs within the organic sector, in the context of a growing European organic sector and increasing interest in organic food and farming amongst many policy makers and stakeholders across Europe (see Box 1.1).

The manual is complemented by an on-line Organic Action Plan Evaluation Toolbox (ORGAPET),<sup>2</sup> which includes comprehensive information to support the development and evaluation of organic action plans. Further information about ORGAPET is included in the Annex to this manual. (The toolbox has not been updated as part of the SME ORGANICS project).

## The manual is a guide for all stakeholders, not only those from the organic sector

We recognise that the broader the involvement in the strategic development of the organic sector, the more effective it will be. Local, regional and national government departments, including agriculture and food, as well as other departments such as health and environment, obviously have a legitimate concern and reason to get involved. But we also acknowledge that non-organic farming organisations and food businesses may all have a legitimate and valued interest in the further development of organic food and agriculture too.

The manual is, therefore, an information source of particular interest to those stakeholders involved in organic food and farming, but also for those who may not necessarily see themselves as a part of the 'organic sector' currently.

### Box 1.1 What is SME ORGANICS all about? <sup>2</sup>

 SME ORGANICS, a project supported by the Interreg Europe, explores the use of organic action plans to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs in the organic sector. The project brings together regional governments, development agencies, organic food and farming organisations, enterprise bodies, universities and research institutes, as part of a participatory learning process to exchange and share experiences of best practice for devising organic action plans in seven European regions. SME ORGANICS recognises the potential for regional authorities to support their local organic sectors and aims to facilitate stakeholders in the development of regional organic action plans.

To this end the project explores how organic action plans can be used to support SMEs involved the development of the whole organic value chain, including production, processing and distribution. Supporting the development of the organic sector is of benefit of all stakeholders, not only as a means to increase the availability of organic produce, but also in terms of the related environmental and social benefits associated with organic food and farming. Across Europe there are already many great examples of organic food and farming systems which show how real food for real people can translate into vibrant rural economies and a re-energised food culture through bottom-up and top-down initiatives or a combination of both.

The manual therefore highlights and draws on some of these examples as well as lessons learned from project partners and stakeholders during the first phase of the project.

#### SME ORGANICS: A DYNAMIC LEARNING PROCESS



REGIONAL DIAGNOSIS  
OF ORGANIC SECTOR



PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS  
REGULARLY EXCHANGE



DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL  
ACTION PLANS



IDEAS AND BEST PRACTICES  
SPREAD ACROSS EUROPE

Source: SME ORGANICS, *Using action plans to develop organics*

## 1.2 WHAT IS ORGANIC FARMING?

### Ideas, principles and definition

The ideas and principles behind organic farming have been practised in Europe and internationally for the last 100 years, covering a wide range of different issues including the environment, animal welfare, food quality and health.<sup>3</sup> The concept of sustainability is at the heart of organic production, in the widest sense of the term, encompassing environmental, economic and social spheres. These ideas have been expressed in the Principles of Organic Agriculture – health, ecology, fairness and care (see Box 1.2).

The principles, defined in a participatory and democratic process, by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) – Organics International, outline the basis on which organic farming should grow and develop further – all around the world. The principles consistently serve as a source of inspiration for the organic movement and its continuous development.

#### Box 1.2 IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture <sup>4</sup>



##### The principle of **HEALTH**

Organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible.



##### The principle of **ECOLOGY**

Organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.



##### The principle of **FAIRNESS**

Organic agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.



##### The principle of **CARE**

Organic agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.

Based on these four principles, IFOAM defines organic farming as:

 *a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.*<sup>5</sup>

The term 'organic' specifically is best thought of as referring to a farm as an organism rather than to organic inputs.<sup>6</sup> This considers all the component parts of a farm within an agroecosystem – including the soil minerals, organic matter, micro-organisms, insects, plants, animals and humans – and how they interact to create a coherent and stable whole. The aim of organic farming can therefore be described as:

 *to create integrated, humane, environmentally and economically sustainable agricultural production systems. Maximum reliance is placed on locally or farm-derived, renewable resources and the management of self-regulating ecological and biological processes and interactions in order to provide acceptable levels of crop, livestock and human nutrition, protection from pests and diseases and an appropriate return to the human and other resources employed.*<sup>7</sup>

This understanding also places a strong emphasis on reducing reliance on external inputs (chemical or organic) as far as possible. In many European countries, organic agriculture is also known as ecological or biological agriculture. This reflects the reliance on ecosystem management and working with living organisms, rather than focussing on external inputs.

### **Development of organic standards**

The ideas, principles and definitions that underpin organic food and farming have helped to form and encourage the development of organic standards, first by the organic movement and later by public institutions. This started with the development of private standards such as Biofarm in Switzerland, Nature & Progrès in France, Soil Association in the UK and Demeter in Germany. In 1980 IFOAM (founded in 1974), developed broadly accepted private international standards for organic production.

Subsequently several countries started to develop their own regulations for organic farming in 1980s (Austria, France, Denmark and Spain).

In 1991 the EU established and implemented Council Regulation (EEC) 2092/91, which set out a first common EU-wide standard for organic farming. The adoption of this Regulation formed a legal basis for all organic production in the EU. (see Section 2). Later many other countries in the world developed their own regulations. Guidance to governments was given by the Codex Alimentarius, a common UN Programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), which developed guidelines for organically produced food, first published in 1999.

Organic food and farming, however, is an 'open source' concept which evolved as a social movement for agricultural change, with committed individuals, businesses and producers working together to define standards and develop systems and practice, in order to achieve the organic movement's goals of environmental protection, animal welfare, food quality, health and social justice. The organic concept is also market-led, benefiting from the willingness of committed consumers to pay a premium price, and over time, recognised by policy makers in many countries around the world for its contribution to sustainable food and farming.

Over the years, the organic movement has further developed the principles and rules of organic of organic agriculture beyond the scope of the European Union's legislation through the IFOAM Norms (Basic Standards and Accreditation Criteria)<sup>8</sup> and at national level through private organic standards, which are regularly updated and provide further detail and commitments in specific areas. As organic moves beyond niche markets, the organic movement is working proactively to position the organic approach as a means to transition food and farming systems worldwide towards a more sustainable path based on the organic principles (see Box 1.3).

### Box 1.3 IFOAM EU Vision 2030 and Roadmap towards Organic 3.0<sup>9</sup>

#### VISION 2030

**ORGANIC  
ON EVERY  
TABLE**

**IMPROVE  
INSPIRE  
DELIVER**

**FAIR PLAY  
FAIR PAY**

The European organic movement is committed to securing fair, ecological, healthy and caring food and farming. To this end the movement is working to better enable the uptake of truly sustainable food and farming systems, and of markets based on organic and agroecological principles. This renewed commitment is set out in 'Transforming Food and Farming: An Organic Vision for Europe in 2030', adopted in 2015 by IFOAM EU, as part of the global Organic 3.0 process initiated by IFOAM Organics International. The Vision 2030 has been complemented by 'Transforming Food and Farming - Making It Happen: An Organic Roadmap to Sustainable Food and Farming Systems in Europe', published in 2017, which sets out strategic directions for reaching the Vision, based on three themes:

- **Organic on every table:** The contribution of organic to sustainable food systems is recognised by policy makers and citizens and is matched with a growing land share and supply of organic products
- **Improve - Inspire - Deliver:** Organic food and farming systems are resilient and continuously improving their performance, and they inspire a positive change in our knowledge systems and diets
- **Fair play - Fair pay:** Value and power are fairly distributed among all the operators in the supply chain, and the costs and benefits of food production are accounted for.

In its efforts to transform food and farming, the organic movement sees the organic food and farming approach as a proven pathway for achieving an ambitious implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals across Europe and beyond. Moreover, it recognises that the movement must further engage with other food and farming actors and policy makers working both within and beyond the organic sector. Further information about the Organic Vision 2030, including practical examples of how the Roadmap is being put into action by the organic movement and other stakeholders can be found at [EUorganic2030.bio](http://EUorganic2030.bio)

### 1.3 DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIC FOOD AND FARMING IN EUROPE

Current production and market trends serve as an important marker for farmers, SMEs and other businesses to make long-term business decisions in terms of their engagement in the organic sector and should be carefully considered in the development and implementation of an organic action plan.

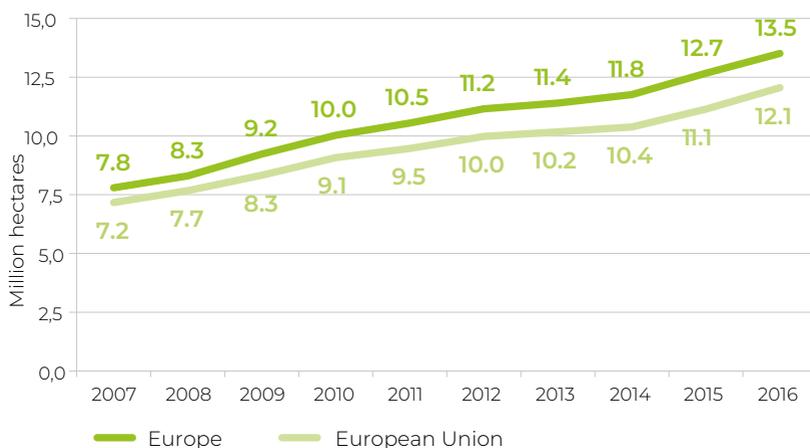
The organic industry is one of the most rapidly expanding sectors of the food industry in many European countries.<sup>10</sup> Figure 1.1 shows that between 2007 and 2016 the EU market for organic products doubled from a retail value of 14.5 billion euro to 30.7 billion euro (from 15.4 billion euro to 33.5 billion euro in Europe). The organic retail market recorded an annual growth rate of 12% between 2015 and 2016 (11.4% in Europe). However, organic retail market shares vary significantly between different European countries both inside and outside the EU.



**Figure 1.1** Growth of organic retail sales in Europe, 2007-2016

Source: FIBL-AMI Surveys 2006-2018, OrganicDataNetwork Surveys 2013-2015

Figure 1.2 shows that the organic farmland area has also expanded rapidly in the EU, from 7.2 million hectares in 2007 to 12.1 million hectares in 2016 million hectares (7.8 million hectares to 13.5 million hectares in Europe). The annual growth rate was 8.2% between 2015 and 2016 (6.7% in Europe). Similarly, to the organic retail market, the organic share of total farmland also varies significantly between different European countries.



**Figure 1.2** Growth of organic farmland area in Europe, 2007-2016

Source: FIBL Survey 2018, based on national data sources and Eurostat

However, the growth of organic farmland in the EU is not increasing at the same pace as the organic retail market. Indeed, while the dynamic growth of the organic market has resulted in more and more importers and retailers engaging in the organic food sector, organic producer growth is not increasingly as rapidly and there is a severe risk that the growing demand for European organic products could end up having to be met through imports if these trends continue.<sup>11</sup>

A sound understanding of these trends, as part of a wider status quo analysis, should be carefully considered in the development and implementation of an organic action plan. At the same time, it is important to remember that European consumers typically see organic food as a healthy, safe and of high quality which are often the main reasons they are willing to pay the higher prices in the organic market. However, they are less strongly motivated by the altruistic concerns of environmental protection, high animal welfare and support for rural society – the so-called ‘public goods’ and consumer expectations delivered by organic food and farming.<sup>12</sup> This highlights the necessity to complement growing consumer demand for organic products with a supportive policy environment that can ensure the long-term development of the organic sector.

# Organic food and farming and public policy

## Recognition of organic food and farming in public policy

Public policies better tailored towards the needs of the organic sector can play an important role in fostering a more supportive environment for producers, SMEs and other organic stakeholders. This can also better enable the organic sector to stimulate wider economic and rural development and achieve environmental, public health and other societal benefits. A huge range of stakeholders – from farmers, SMEs and consumers to policy makers, environmentalists and wider civil society – have developed a growing interest in organic food and farming over the last few decades, with its multiple benefits becoming increasingly recognised by policy makers. Across Europe, at both national and regional level, and in the EU in particular, the organic sector is widely acknowledged as a solution for:

- responding to growing consumer demand for high quality food
- integrating environmental conservation and animal welfare practices into agricultural production
- contributing to the economic development of rural areas

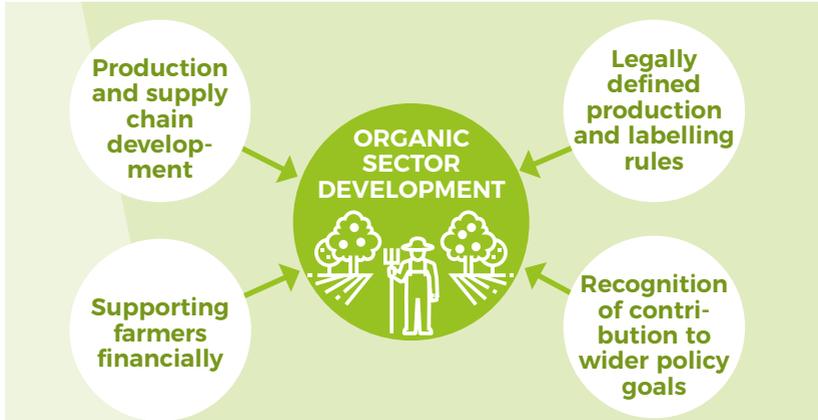
The growing recognition of the importance of organic food and farming has helped to facilitate significant growth, in both the organically farmed area and the market for organic food over recent decades (see Section 1.3) – a trend that seems set to continue.

## EU policy framework for supporting organic sector development

In Europe, the introduction of a legal definition of organic production in the EU in 1990s created an important basis for the establishment of EU policy support for organic food and farming – starting with the agri-environmental and rural development policies and extending into policies related to research, market development and consumer promotion.<sup>13</sup> An overview of the EU policy framework for organic food and farming is outlined below (see Box 2.1). These policies directly

affect EU Member States but may also be of influence developments in other European countries.

**Box 2.1** EU Policy framework for supporting organic sector development



As illustrated above the EU policy framework for supporting organic sector development consists of four main areas:

- **Legally defined production and labelling rules:** Based on the EU organic regulations and a widely recognised common logo
- **Supporting farmers financially:** Compensation is provided for the costs of managing farmland under organic production with benefits for the environment and animal welfare as well as additional environmental and land management actions through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
- **Production and supply chain development:** Measures are available to support training and advice, farm diversification, including processing, supply chain development, consumer promotion, education, technology development, research and extension for organic farming and processing through the CAP and other horizontal policies
- **Recognition of contribution to wider policy goals:** The organic sector can support EU strategies on biodiversity, and soil, Directives on water, sustainable pesticide use, air quality, legislation on climate action, programmes promoting healthy eating and education on sustainable production methods in schools, and green public procurement for food and catering services

Policy support for organic food and farming, coupled with growing demand for organic food amongst European consumers, therefore presents many opportunities for producers and SMEs to generate additional income by adding value to their produce. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the different public support options available to producers, SMEs and other organic stakeholders, at either EU, national or regional level, is essential in the development of an organic action plan. Further information about key elements of the EU Policy framework can be found throughout this section. Individual countries (both inside and outside the EU) may have similar or additional national or regional policies targeting the organic sector.

## 2.1 EU REGULATIONS ON ORGANIC FOOD AND FARMING

Currently the EU regulatory framework for organic food and farming operates mainly through a number of key regulations which cover all parts of organic production (see Box 2.2). Consequently, to use the term 'organic', all businesses must follow specific standards and all products labelled as 'organic' and sold in the EU must be produced in accordance with these regulations. As well as the term 'organic' these regulations embrace other terms such as 'biological' and 'ecological' which are more relevant to some regions of Europe. All such terms for food and feed products sold in the EU are thus protected by law, with regular inspections by approved certification bodies also required.

The EU organic regulations are implemented by governments or government agencies as the designated Competent Authority at Member State level. Standards are also supplemented with additional rules from private organic standard owners, many of which were established prior to 1991. Unlike governments or government agencies, private standard owners can have stricter rules and requirements.<sup>18</sup>

## Box 2.2 Overview of EU's Organic Regulations <sup>14</sup>

 **Council Regulation (EC) 834/2007** sets out the overall objectives and principles for organic production, outlining the basic rules for organic production of crops, livestock, aquaculture and seaweed, and the processing of food and feed products. The regulation also includes criteria for the use of certain products and substances, control and inspection of the supply chain and rules of trade with third countries.<sup>15</sup>

 **Commission Regulations (EC) 889/2008 and (EC) 1235/2008** accompany Council Regulation (EC) 834/2007 and lay out more detailed implementing rules which cover production, processing, packaging, transport, storage, labelling and controls as well as imports.<sup>16</sup>

 **New EU Organic Regulations**  
The current EU Regulations, outlined above, has been under review by the EU since 2012. Specific review objectives included removing obstacles to the development of organic production as well as maintaining and improving consumer confidence in organic products. A new regulation, agreed by the EU Institutions in 2017 which took up many of the recommendations of the organic sector, will in effect repeal the current regulation. It is expected to come into force in 2021 supplemented by a number implementing rules under development at time of press.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2 EU POLICY SUPPORT FOR ORGANIC FOOD AND FARMING

In Europe, the organic food and farming sector is often supported through agricultural and rural development policies. As organic production is a means to transition towards the development of more sustainable food systems, issues such as minimal food processing, distribution and consumption are increasingly being considered as part of the organic approach. In the EU specifically, there are several funds, of relevance to farmers, SMEs and other organic stakeholders that can help to build their capacities and long-term sustainability. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (one of European Structural and Investment Funds - ESI), which forms part the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), has had a significant influence on the development of organic farming in the EU over the years. The other ESI funds are also relevant to the sector more broadly, while EU policies in areas such as market development and consumer promotion and research

and innovation offer instruments that can support organic food and farming development as well.

## European Investment and Structural Funds

The European Investment and Structural Funds (ESI funds) offer support for EU producers, SMEs and other organic stakeholders through different national/regional operational programmes. The ESI funds are part of the EU's Common Strategic Framework (CSF), and aim to support economic development across all Member States in the EU, as part of the Europe 2020 strategy, based on 11 thematic objectives (see Table 2.1). These objectives are translated into investment priorities (in the case of the ERDF, ESF, and the ECF) and Union priorities (in the case of the EAFRD and the EMFF). For the period 2014-2020 the ESI funds account for a budget of 454 billion euro, with national public and private co-financing expected to be about 184 billion euro.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 2.1** Overview of Europe 2020 goals and thematic objectives for 2014-2020

Europe 2020 Goals	Thematic Objectives of the European Structural and Investment Funds
Smart Growth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation;</li> <li>2. Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT;</li> <li>3. Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, of the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and of the fishery and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF);</li> </ol>
Sustainable Growth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors;</li> <li>5. Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management;</li> <li>6. Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency;</li> <li>7. Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures;</li> </ol>
Inclusive Growth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility;</li> <li>9. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination;</li> <li>10. Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning;</li> <li>11. Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration.</li> </ol>

Source: European Commission, 2015

The main fund commonly used by producers, SMEs and other stakeholders, including the organic sector, is the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**<sup>20</sup> which forms part of the CAP. Under the EAFRD, Member States are legally obliged to dedicate at least 30% of their spending to adoption of environmental and climate-friendly practices, including farms under organic conversion and maintenance. Other relevant EAFRD measures are used to support farm diversification, investments and knowledge transfer, and innovation and community-led development in rural areas (see CAP section below).

Other ESI funds which may be of relevance to producers, SMEs and other organic stakeholders include:

- **The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**<sup>21</sup> – which aims to promote balanced development in the different regions of the EU. This includes a focus on innovation and research, the digital agenda, support for SMEs and the low-carbon economy. The fund aims to support all thematic objectives with a specific emphasis on investments related to objectives 1-4.
- **The European Social Fund (ESF)**<sup>22</sup> – which supports employment-related projects throughout Europe focusing on workers, young people and jobseekers. Relevant opportunities may include support for employment training and social farming. The fund places specific emphasis on thematic objectives 8-11, but is also relevant to objectives 1-4.
- **The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)**<sup>23</sup> – which promotes the adoption of sustainable fishing practices, economic diversification and the improvement quality of life in coastal communities. Relevant supports include conversion to organic aquaculture practices as well as processing and marketing
- **The European Cohesion Fund (ECF)**<sup>24</sup> – which funds transport and environment projects in countries where the gross national income (GNI) per inhabitant is less than 90% of the EU average. The fund places a specific emphasis on objectives 4-7 and 11.

Further information about the specific opportunities available through the ESI funds are set out in Member States' national/regional operational programmes. It is possible for Member States to develop multi-fund operational programmes for the ERDF, EDF and the ECF. You can find more details about these programmes by contacting your relevant managing authority. Although all ESI funds can be used to support the organic sector in different ways, for the period 2014-2020, the EAFRD

and the EMFF are the only ESI funds that have a legal basis for investment in organic food and farming..

## Common Agricultural Policy

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the key EU policy that has contributed the most to supporting the development of organic farming in the EU. The CAP largely offers support for direct payments to farmers and measures regulating or supporting agricultural markets. These payments are fully financed by the EU through the **European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF)**.<sup>25</sup> Now that payments are linked to land area and not production, there is very little difference in the impact on organic compared with non-organic producers (although attempts to 'green' these payments in the post-2013 reform have recognised the environmental benefits of organic farming).<sup>26</sup>

The main public investment in organic farming is directed at organic farming payments for conversion and maintenance (Measure 11). These payments are co-financed by the EU through the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**. These payments cover the income forgone and the additional costs of organic production and are offered in 27 out of 28 Member States' EU Rural Development Programmes.<sup>27</sup> As organic production has higher costs than non-organic production, this support is acknowledged to be extremely important financially for new and existing organic farmers who internalise many of the external costs not fully considered in premium prices, e.g. protecting and maintaining water quality, biodiversity (see Box 2.3). However, because organic premium prices are considered in the income forgone calculation, this can result in non-organic producers being paid higher payments for equivalent actions, such as not using fertilisers or pesticides.

### Box 2.3 Why are organic farming and public goods payments necessary?<sup>28</sup>

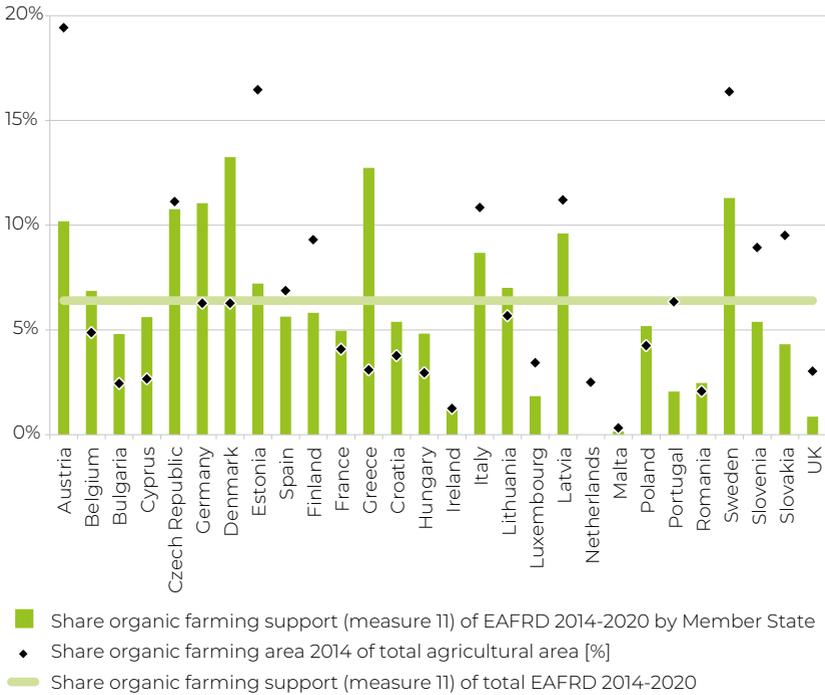
 The positive benefits of organic farming, such as environmental delivery, are often seen as one of the key reasons why organic farmers are supported financially and why consumers are willing to pay a premium for organic produce. However, it is questionable whether organic consumers should be expected to subsidise such benefits for other citizens at no extra cost (the free-rider problem), and organic premium prices do not always fully remunerate the true costs of production.

Indeed, the justification for financially supporting organic farming is not simply driven by vested interests of specific groups: it is supported by a significant proportion of society that wish to reach common environmental and societal goals (often referred to as public goods) which are consistent with more sustainable food production. While there are very few pure public goods, benefits such as agricultural landscapes, biodiversity, water and air quality, soil functionality, carbon storage and climate stability, rural viability, and animal health and welfare, are considered to be public goods to varying degrees, as many consumers cannot generally be persuaded to pay for them, because they can still enjoy these benefits even if they don't pay for them. This reality demonstrates that markets alone are often not sufficient to ensure that all farms deliver a full suite of positive environmental and socio-economic outcomes expected from society.

Therefore, if markets fail to fully reward these public goods, it is up to public policy to intervene to support such goods by using financial incentives. As a whole-farm systems approach with well-developed standards, backed by legally binding requirements in the EU and proven track record internationally, public support for organic farming can deliver a wide range of benefits compared to other production methods. For example, in the area of the environment, payments for converting or maintaining farmland under organic production are multi-objective measures that offer a more cost-effective solution for sustainable agriculture than single-objective agri-environmental measures. This is because organic farming results in more synergies and addresses trade-offs with other environmental actions, and has lower transaction costs compared to individual interventions. These efficiencies are further complemented by greater market returns.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the EU's co-financing contribution to organic farming payments under the CAP compared to the total area of farmland under organic production in the different EU Member States. The figures demonstrate that while the majority of Member States offer organic farming payment, the prioritisation of public investment in organic farming varies significantly from Member State to Member State.

Evidence shows that to ensure the sustainable development of the sector 'supply-push' measures such as organic farming payment must be complemented by 'demand-pull' measures to support and encourage market development as part of an overall policy mix.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 2.1** Share of EAFRD for organic farming support compared to the total organic farmland area in 2014

Source: Stolze et al., 2016<sup>30</sup>

In addition to organic farming payments, Rural Development Programmes offer broader based support for both organic farmers and SMEs using other measures such as investments in infrastructure and processing, training and marketing, land management and innovation (see Table 2.2).

The uptake of these measures provides many opportunities for organic farmers and SMEs to build capacities and their long-term sustainability. In recent years there has been movement by some EU Member States to emphasise the need to balance supply-push measures with more market-focused demand-pull measures. Evaluations have also recognised the need for measures such as research, training and advice to be included as well. These are critical to improve the performance and competitiveness of systems as well as the quality of outputs at both production and market levels. However, similarly, to support measures offered for the period 2014-2020, experience from the previous Rural Development Programme period 2007-2013 shows

that Member States' use of these other measures for farmers, SMEs and other organic stakeholders can vary considerably.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 2.2** Overview of Rural Development Programme measures in addition to organic farming payments

Code	Rural Development Programme measure
1	Knowledge transfer and information actions
2	Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services
3	Quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs
4	Investments in physical assets
6	Farm and business development
9	Setting up of producer groups and organisations
10	Agri-environment-climate
12	Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive payments
13	Payments to areas facing natural or other specific constraints
14	Animal welfare
16	Cooperation (including the setting up of EIP-AGRI operational groups)
19	Support for LEADER local development (CLLD – community-led local development)

Source: Stolze et al., 2016<sup>32</sup>

## Market development and consumer promotion support

In addition to some rural development measures support for market development and consumer promotion is primarily also offered through the CAP's Common Organisation of Markets (CMO) in Agricultural Products framework.<sup>34</sup> It mainly covers market intervention measures and rules on marketing and producer organisations. Of particular interest to organic farmers, SMEs and other stakeholders are the schemes and programmes that promote organic products and supply chain development. These include:

- **Funding for the promotion of EU farm products**, which is available for private sector information and promotion initiatives designed to promote and raise awareness of agricultural products in EU Member States as well as countries outside the EU. Depending on the type of

programme, applications can be made by a European organisation, a combination of organisations from the same country or from different EU countries. EU co-financing contributions are usually 50%, with at least 20% coming from the applicant and the remainder from the Member State, depending on the specific programme.

- **Funding for fruit and vegetables producer organisations**, which is available to recognised Producer Organisations (PO) in the fruit and vegetable sector to finance operational programmes. The overall aim is to increase the competitiveness of farmers and growers in the supply chain. Operational programmes must place over a 3- to 5-year period and meet specific objectives as part of the funding requirements. Within these objectives specific reference is made to organic farming as a method of production respecting the environment. EU funding contributions can be up to 50% for operational programmes.

The EU also has other market development and promotion schemes as well as guidelines for the agri-food sector targeted at Member States which may be of interest to organic farmers, SMEs and other stakeholders. These include:

- **EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme**,<sup>35</sup> which aims to support the distribution of fruit, vegetables and milk in schools throughout the EU to encourage an increase in consumption and to promote the benefits of healthy eating amongst children. Under the EU school scheme Member States may apply for funding on an annual basis and are required to draw up a strategy, either at national or regional level, which sets out their priorities for the implementation of the scheme every six years. The scheme also encourages the sourcing of organic products and the promotion of organic farming.
- **EU voluntary Green Public Procurement (GPP) guidelines for food and catering services**,<sup>36</sup> which aim to encourage public authorities in Member States to draw up procurement criteria that can help reduce the environmental impact of the goods and services they purchase. Within the EU's GPP guidelines the procurement of organic food with minimum sourcing requirements is strongly encouraged. Public authorities and the organic sector have also developed standards for organic mass catering through national legislation and private standards in many European countries.

## Research and innovation support

Over the years the EU and individual European countries have invested in agricultural research, with the amount devoted specifically to organic food and farming systems increasing slowly, but progressively, since the 1990s.

### Horizon 2020

In the EU, 43 million euro is dedicated specifically to organic food and farming projects under Horizon 2020 – the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.<sup>i</sup> Many other projects, funded under Horizon 2020, are required to benefit both organic and conventional food and farming. This means, the EU is an increasingly important investor in organic research, and hence in the development of the sector.

The three key priorities for Horizon 2020 are excellent science, industrial leadership and societal challenges for the period 2014-2020. For each of these priorities, the Commission develops work programmes with the actions to be financed, the amount allocated to each action and indicative timetables. Of most importance to the agri-food sector is the societal challenge priority, in particular Societal Challenge 2: 'Food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine and maritime and inland water research and the bio-economy'.

### European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability

The European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) was launched by the Commission in 2012 to foster a competitive and sustainable agriculture and forestry sector. EIP-AGRI has an EU level component and a national component. The EU level component is funded through Horizon 2020. The national (or regional) components are the Operational Groups funded by the EU Rural Development Programmes of Member States and regions. Operational Groups seek to guide and direct investments in innovation action that can support the transition towards sustainable agriculture and agroecological production systems. The EIP-AGRI and its Operational Groups are therefore key instruments for supporting innovation initiatives within the organic sector to bridge the gap between research and practice.<sup>38</sup>

## ERA-Net CORE Organic

Transnational funding is also offered through CORE Organic, which is one of the European Research Area Network schemes set up to develop and strengthen the coordination of national and regional research programmes. The CORE Organic consortium is made up of 21 funding bodies from 19 participating European countries. Now in its fourth iteration, it is the only transnational funding structure dealing 100% with organic research. Its aim is to gather into a critical mass the often small and scattered organic research community, to deliver better research more efficiently. The most recent call for proposals was launched in 2016. CORE Organic is now exploring the possibility of launching a new call in 2019.<sup>39</sup>

### **Box 2.4** TP Organics - European Technology Platform for organic food & farming<sup>40</sup>

Adequately funded research and innovation is fundamental to the further development of the organic sector and the transition to sustainable food and farming systems. Indeed, the EU and many European countries are big investors in agricultural research. TP Organics, the European Technology Platform for organic food and farming, was established in 2007 to ensure that organic food and farming is prioritised in European research and innovation agendas. The platform is one of the 40 European Technology Platforms (ETPs) officially recognised by the European Commission. It unites companies, farmers, consumers, civil society organisations and researchers active in the organic value chain from production, input and supply, to food processing, marketing and consumption across Europe. Its mission is to strengthen research and innovation for organics and other agroecological approaches that contribute to sustainable food and farming systems. TP Organics does this by identifying organic and agroecological research priorities and communicating them to policy makers in Europe and beyond. It also informs its members about funding opportunities for research and innovation and promotes knowledge exchange between farmers, companies and researchers.

Recognition of organic food and farming in public policy has developed significantly over recent decades, particularly within the EU. However, as outlined above, the level of interest in organic food and farming amongst policy makers does vary significantly between different European countries. Therefore, it is important for organic stakeholders to work in partnership with EU, national and regional policy makers and administrators to ensure full use is made of all relevant support measures in the development and implementation of an organic action plan.

# Organic action plans – What are they about?

## 3.1 WHY ORGANIC ACTION PLANS?

Organic action plans provide a framework for integrating policies and measures in order to encourage organic sector development. Action plans serve as a strategic instrument for governments and the sector as a whole to achieve policy goals. This is particularly important where multiple policy goals such as organic sector growth and development, economic, market and rural development and environment, public health and societal benefits need to be considered. Action plans can help create synergies and avoid contradictory policies whilst also ensuring that different measures are complementary. Furthermore, action plans allow specific bottlenecks to be better addressed and they enable broad stakeholder involvement in policy formulation. They depend on effective and inclusive forums to develop a strategic vision.<sup>41</sup>

Organic action plans can be implemented at different governance levels – from the EU level down to national, and regional organic action plans, and all these must also be coherent with a more global view – the dictum ‘think global, act local’ is relevant in this context. Plans are often initiated by governments but may also be industry-led and facilitated by government; they may be top-down (i.e. government policy driven), bottom-up (i.e. driven by relevant stakeholders) or mixed (i.e. a combination of both top-down and bottom-up). Sections 4-7 outline the key phases of action plan development, including agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation, and as summarised in Annex 1 of this manual.

### **Using action plans to exploit the potential of organic food and farming**

For policy makers, organic food and farming provides the potential to contribute to a broad list of policy goals, such as minimising the negative environmental impacts of agriculture, the provision of safe high-quality food, strengthening the competitiveness of European

agriculture, enhancing rural development and reducing expenditure on agriculture in the long term.<sup>42</sup> Thus, organic action plans could play a strategic role in the move towards more sustainable food systems.

At the same time, as outlined in Section 1, the organic food and farming concept was not developed by policy makers and technical experts responding to a specific policy need. Unlike many agri-environmental and rural development policies it has evolved as a social movement for agricultural change and is market-driven. The increasing demand for organic food highlights its potential as a viable business opportunity for agri-food stakeholders. But it remains important to recognise that that the organic status of the product is derived from the way the food is produced on the farm.

Organic farming is neither exclusively one type of environmental or social movement, nor is it simply a form of land management that follows a specific set of standards. Rather, organic food and farming incorporates both of these while providing the basis for an economically sustainable livelihood for farmers, SMEs and other organic stakeholders.

### **Considering the multiple policy goals of an organic action plan**

It should be acknowledged that governments are unlikely to support organic sector development, or the development of an organic action plan, purely for its own sake, and the views on the policy goals to be achieved may differ between government and organic sector stakeholders.

For policy makers, the challenge is to support a multi-functional organic food and farming systems approach, which can satisfy the varied goals and priorities of a diverse range of interest groups, and to do this in a 'public-private' partnership with SMEs and civil society organisations. Government policy and market mechanisms must work together to meet the dual role of organic food and farming, both in delivering public goods and in meeting consumer demand for high quality food. To make organic action plans a success, they need to take into account the complexity and multiple objectives of the organic approach and provide evidence as to how organic sector development can help achieve these wider policy goals. Organic farmers, SMEs and other stakeholders must also consider the development of an organic action

### Box 3.1 Multi-sector approach of the French Organic Action Plan <sup>43</sup>

Launched in 2013, the French Organic Action Plan (*Programme Ambition Bio*) positions organic agriculture as a core element of the French government's agroecological policy programme, to build upon an already well-developed organic sector.

Development was led by the Ministry of Agriculture with support from other ministries such as the Ministry of Social Economy and Consumption, the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy, and the Ministry of National Education, acknowledging the contribution that organic food and farming makes to other policy areas. The plan was developed through stakeholder consultation based on experience from the previous action plan, including the National Research Council for organic agriculture.

The overall aim of the plan was to double the percentage of farmland under organic management by the end of 2017. The plan includes a range of policy initiatives under six axes:

- ▶ Developing organic production
- ▶ Sector specific development
- ▶ Increasing consumption
- ▶ Strengthening research dissemination and innovation
- ▶ Supporting training, education and career development
- ▶ Improvements to the regulatory framework

While the action plan clearly states the aim to double the percentage of land under organic management, it is also explicit in emphasising the role that organic farming can have in contributing to other forms of agricultural production, and as part of a wider agroecological programme. The plan also explores the possibility of the contribution that practices such as agroforestry can make to organic farming.

plan in the context of wider EU, national and regional policy goals related to organic sector growth and development, economic, market and rural development, and environment, public health and societal benefits (see Box 3.1).

Action plans should pay due attention to synergies and conflicts between objectives, and the different emphases that will be placed on these policy goals by different stakeholders, from both within and

outside the organic sector. The priorities, and hence the initiatives outlined in organic action plans will depend on the policy goals to be achieved, the analysis of the issues that need to be addressed and the specification of clear objectives. To be most effective this would be done by integrating all relevant stakeholders and identifying specific needs through a systematic status quo analysis to identify the requirements of different groups. This process should consider the challenges and areas for development, specific to the country or region where the plan is being developed. More detailed guidance on this process is available in Section 4 of this manual.

### **Balance of supply-push and demand-pull measures**

Land and farm management policies in favour of organic farming may have the provision of public goods as a main aim. However, the resulting increase in supply may risk distorting the market if demand is limited. As outlined in Section 2, evaluations have shown that while supply-push measures can be an incentive for farmers to convert to organic production, to be more effective they should be as part of a mix of supportive measures, so as to allow for better targeted support that addresses the whole organic supply chain including SMEs.<sup>44</sup>

The risk that an over-emphasis on supply-side support may lead to oversupply and price decreases may be exacerbated by administrative and financial constraints affecting the opening and closing of schemes, leading to supply imbalances and disrupting investments in infrastructure by SMEs and other organic stakeholders. There is a need to ensure that such policy support provides a stable context allowing the market to develop without disruptive influences. Otherwise, policies can end up being less effective if recipients do not have the confidence that support is for the long term and reliable.

The overall objective is to balance supply-push and demand-pull initiatives to achieve sustainable development of organic agriculture in support of environmental and rural development goals that are tailored to local situations, without undermining markets. However, supportive policies are intended to change the status quo, and temporary imbalances are inevitable. Short-term increases in supply beyond current market capacity can also provide an opportunity for future market development. The policy emphasis should therefore ensure that long-term imbalances do not occur. This demands an integrated approach to policy and is the intention of formulating organic action plans.

The range of approaches in different action plans illustrate the specific problems and the political pressures inherent in achieving this integrated approach. Some organic action plans have a more overtly market focus, while others give a higher weighting to environmental and other ‘public good’ issues. Therefore, the balance between supply-push and demand-pull measures needs to take account of the needs and objectives of individual situations during the planning phase outlined in Section 4.

### Scope of organic action plans

Organic action plans have typically included targets for the proportion of agricultural land to be managed organically within a set time period, and in some cases for the proportion of the food market to be organic.<sup>45</sup> In addition, to this, action plans focus upon a combination of the following areas:

- Direct support for environmental and land management
- Producer advice, training and education
- Public procurement initiatives
- Consumer education and promotion
- Market development and infrastructure support
- Research and innovation for organic farming
- Support related to inspection and certification

The more well-developed plans contain evaluations of the current situation and effectiveness of previous action plans, and procedures for monitoring impacts. They also make specific recommendations for implementation, including measures to ameliorate conflicts between different policies.

### Meeting the needs of stakeholders

A key element of many action plans is the active involvement and integration of stakeholders in a partnership approach to policy development, implementation and evaluation.

Stakeholders in the organic sector – whether organic farmers, processing or marketing businesses, certification bodies or organisations – will judge the success of an organic action plan on the basis of whether they consider it to provide support appropriate to their specific needs.

Stakeholders outside the organic sector will also judge the organic action plan. Their judgement will be influenced by the extent of development the sector and the impact that this has on their non-organic interests.

Consequently, with such diverse requirements any organic action plan is a political compromise that aims to encourage the development and implementation of policies that are consistent with the concept of a multi-functional organic food and farming system. The organic action plan should simultaneously meet the multiple objectives for agricultural sustainability and the production of high quality food in a way that builds on the capacity of the whole organic sector taking account of any relevant conditions prevailing in the non-organic or mainstream food sector. For further information about stakeholder involvement see Section 5.

## 3.2 EUROPEAN ORGANIC ACTION PLANS

Since 2000, two organic action plans have been developed at EU level. In June 2004, the European Commission published the first European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming. The Plan was informed by a three-year consultation process with sector experts and stakeholders, as well as Commission, European Parliament and Member State representatives. It included 21 action points under four central themes covering organic regulation and standards through to promotion campaigns, research and rural development policy.<sup>46</sup>

This plan was followed by the Action Plan for the Future of Organic Production in the European Union, which was published in 2014. It covers the period up to 2020 and features 18 actions aimed at addressing three priority areas:

- Competitiveness of organic producers in the EU
- Consumer confidence in organic food and farming
- Trade and export opportunities

The action plan is aligned to the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 strategy for smart sustainable and inclusive growth, the Environment Action Programme to 2020, as well as the Common Agricultural Policy and other relevant EU policies.<sup>47</sup>

Both plans build on the application of EU policy instruments, such as EU Rural Development Programmes, to support the development of the organic sector within Member States, as well as including the European organic regulatory framework. However, the European action plans do not include quantitative, time-bound targets in relation to delivery of actions, nor a dedicated budget. These action plans tend to be focused on actions that can be delivered by the European Commission, rather than providing a framework for the development of action plans at national or regional level.

### 3.3 OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIC ACTION PLANS

In the majority of EU-28 and EFTA countries organic action plans are organised on a national basis. Similarly, to the plans being undertaken by partners within the SME ORGANICS project some countries organise plans on a regional basis. The examples described in Box 3.2, for instance, show how, at a national level, concrete measures have been adapted to the regional context. A 2015 report<sup>48</sup> surveying 31 countries found 12 countries with a national plan and 5 with regional plans. Regional plans were found in countries where some responsibility for agricultural and rural development policy lies with the regional governments, and therefore the initiative to develop a plan has been taken at that level. In 19 countries, there was at that time no national plan. However, in several countries recent initiatives have been undertaken and/or there were ongoing discussions about potential new plans.

As part of the 2015 report an in-depth analysis of six national and regional organic action plans was undertaken by IFOAM EU and partners (Andalusia (Spain), Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, France and Scotland). The analysis built upon a previous analysis undertaken as part of the ORGAP project.<sup>50</sup> It revealed a range of different priorities with regard to focus areas and approaches to development, implementation and evaluation of action plans. The plans also differ with regard to the development of the current support for organic food and farming, as well as the organic sector as a whole within a country or region.

Some organic action plans were developed on the basis of top-down initiatives (Czech Republic, Germany). Others were developed on the

### Box 3.2 Regionalisation of organic action plan development <sup>49</sup>

A number of European countries including Belgium, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the UK have developed organic action plans at regional level. Action plans are only present at the regional level in Belgium, Switzerland and the UK, while Germany and Spain have both regional and national organic action plans. In Germany, for instance, a national strategy for organic farming entitled 'Organic Farming – Looking Forwards: Towards Greater Sustainability in Germany' (*Zukunftsstrategie ökologischer Landbau - Impulse für mehr Nachhaltigkeit in Deutschland*) was adopted in 2017 with the headline target of reaching 20% of land under organic management (see Box 4.2).

In the same year, 9 of the 16 states (*Länder*) in Germany had regional action plans with action points and funding aimed at providing new and targeted growth incentives for local organic production. For example, the regional Organic Action Plan for the State of Lower Saxony – which supplies a large proportion of Germany's organic eggs and apples – has focused on expanding production, with the aim of doubling the number of organic operators by 2025, in order to meet the demand of regional and local organic food. The plan includes pilot projects to help strengthen organic value chains, by increasing processing, training in organic farming, research and knowledge transfer. The plan also seeks to emphasise the opportunities for regional economic development within the organic sector.

Similarly to national plans, regional organic action plans include a range of measures such as initiatives focused upon production, marketing, research, education and knowledge transfer. The development of plans at regional level more often than not reflects the fact that the responsibilities and competencies for food, agriculture and rural development lie with the regional or provincial governments of certain countries in Europe. At the same time regional action plans allow for objectives and action points and priority areas to better reflect the development needs of a specific region or territory and may also allow the overarching goals of a national organic action plan to be adapted and tailored to the regional or local context.

basis of a mixed approach which integrated sector-led, bottom-up initiatives (Denmark, France, Andalusia, Scotland). In Scotland, for example, the development of the plan was undertaken by a sector group, with government funding. In the main, the case studies revealed high levels of stakeholder participation in the development of action plans, often from the beginning of the process through the creation

of an expert/advisory group with organic sector representation. Plans from the Czech Republic, France, Denmark and Scotland included a procedure for monitoring or evaluation integrated within the plan, and in the Czech Republic this included monitoring by a committee advising the Ministry of Agriculture. Quantitative targets – often in the form of land area under organic management – were present in plans for the Czech Republic, Denmark, France and Germany, but were not included in those for Scotland or Andalusia. An overview of the case studies is provided in Table 3.1.

Organic action plans respond to governmental policy goals and a status quo analysis of the organic sector development in each country or region, which might be quite different. As a consequence, the action plans reviewed vary with regard to the elaboration process, targets, objectives and the emphasis of measures on certain areas. This is due to quite different political and socio-economic conditions for the organic sector in each of these regions.

**Table 3.1** Overview of selected national and regional organic action plans in Europe

Country/region	CZ	DK	FR	DE	AND	SCO
Start of plan development	2010	2013	2013	2015	2007	2015
Implementation period	2011-15	2015-18	2013-17	2016-2020	2007-13	2016-20
Approach (bottom-up; top-down; mixed)	Top-down	Top-down (mixed)	Mixed	Top-down	Mixed	Mixed
Stakeholder participation	High	High	Medium	High	High	High
Includes monitoring and evaluation	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Quantitative targets	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

AND – Andalusia (Spain); CZ – Czech Republic; DE – Germany; DK – Denmark; FR – France; SCO – Scotland

Source: Schmid et al., 2015<sup>51</sup>

Action plans may not always be taken through to completion, due to political changes at government level or other factors. The 'ownership' context of the plan, and the role of the organic sector in leading delivery, may need to be considered from the outset to provide insurance against such eventualities.

### **Specific policies for different areas**

Based on analyses of organic action plans at EU, national and regional level, Table 3.2 illustrates the broad range of focus areas under which a plan can fall and demonstrates a key challenge for those involved in the development and implementation of organic action plans – setting realistic priorities for development. As outlined above, the policies adopted within any organic action plan will vary according to the country or region for which it is being developed, and the level of governance at which it is developed. Information on how priorities for action identified in a status quo analysis can be translated into concrete measures within action plans can be found in Section 4.

**Table 3.2** Areas addressed by organic action plans – overview of different action plan policies

Focus area	Organic action plan policies
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer awareness campaigns</li> <li>• Strengthening labelling and control</li> <li>• Market and production data</li> </ul>
Training and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producer education and training</li> <li>• Education and training for market actors</li> <li>• Curriculum development for basic and higher education</li> <li>• Organic advisory services for farmers and food businesses</li> </ul>
Research, innovation and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve efficiency of production systems</li> <li>• Facilitate networks for research and knowledge transfer</li> <li>• Farm benchmarking</li> <li>• Analysis of the impact of organic (climate change, biodiversity, energy, water, public health)</li> </ul>
Producer support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support measures for conversion and maintenance</li> <li>• Rural development and other investment support</li> <li>• Encourage producer cooperation</li> <li>• Improving economic performance of organic farm and food businesses</li> <li>• Support for less developed sectors to meet consumer demand</li> </ul>
Processing support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in processing facilities</li> <li>• Innovation and development for processing</li> <li>• Infrastructure development for improved processing and supply chains</li> </ul>
Market development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion and support of key market channels</li> <li>• Improve marketing efficiency</li> <li>• Encourage product diversification</li> <li>• Public procurement development with organic food</li> </ul>
Certification, inspection and regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extension of standards to cover new areas</li> <li>• Enhancement and development of standards</li> <li>• Improved efficiency of certification and inspection systems</li> </ul>
Institutional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and promotion of stakeholder organisations and initiatives</li> <li>• Sector-wide coordination</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Policy and strategy development</li> </ul>
Action plan administration and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action plan monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>• Participation and contribution of advisory committees and expert groups</li> </ul>

Source: Based on Schmid et al., 2008<sup>52</sup> and Schmid et al., 2015<sup>53</sup>

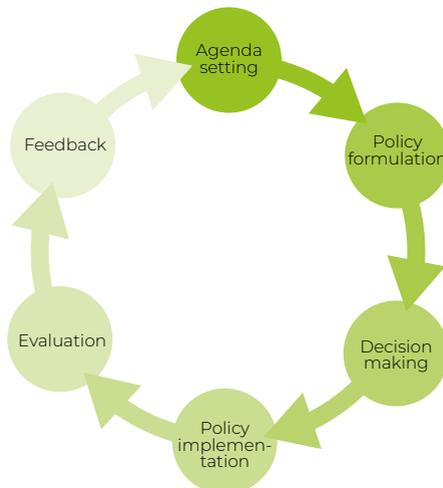
# 4

## Planning organic action plans

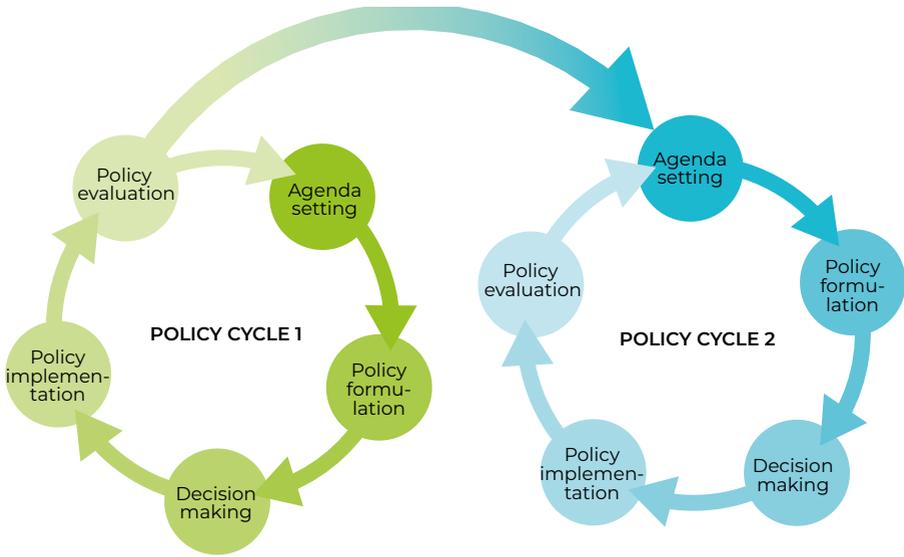
### 4.1 POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Organic action plans aim to define a range of policy measures in support of the development of the organic sector, to meet the needs of the sector and policy makers, reflecting the broader interests of society and citizens. Action plans can be developed at different levels of governance, including regional, national or European, and should aim to carefully consider the needs of the whole supply chain and how the policy environment supports such development.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, policy development involves a series of linked stages, from design of the policy or setting the agenda, via policy formulation, decision making and implementation to evaluation, following a 'policy cycle'. This is a theoretical model: in reality the stages do not necessarily appear in an orderly sequence. In practice, the policy-making process is iterative, with one policy cycle informing the next in a continuous process of learning (Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4.1** Policy cycle – stages in policy development <sup>54</sup>



**Figure 4.2** Learning through development of policy cycles <sup>56</sup>

The ideal is that the policy cycle should involve learning processes by which policy makers and organic sector stakeholders develop policies that are ever more effective in achieving the policy goals. Although all stages may be intermingled, an awareness of the policy cycle can help inform actors in the policy process as to where to direct their attention and efforts.

A key element in the development of any action plan is to obtain a status quo analysis of the current situation of the organic sector, its development needs and potential solutions, including an assessment of the current policy environment and regional context. Then appropriate policy measures need to be identified based on sound reasoning concerning how policies might influence the issues needing to be addressed. Finally, actions need to be prioritised taking account of needs, opportunities for action and the available resources.

Regarding decision making, there is likely to be a trade-off between stakeholder acceptance and ambiguity of policies. When decision makers aim for consensus amongst all stakeholders, then the organic

action plan (and the policy measures it includes) will have to be ambiguous in order to be accepted by the various interests. In contrast, when policy makers aim for clear policies, this may lead to conflict with and limited acceptance of the organic action plan from certain groups of stakeholders. Action plans, by definition, involve ambiguity as they combine several purposes or aims, for example environmental, market, rural development or societal aims.<sup>55</sup>

## 4.2 DEFINING ORGANIC SECTOR DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND POTENTIAL

The basis for any organic action plan is a definition of the various development needs of the organic sector. They may originate from the perspectives of both policy makers (e.g. environmental protection/enhancement, rural development, food safety) and intended beneficiaries (e.g. organic farmers, food businesses and citizens).

A reasonable starting point for identifying these needs is to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the organic sector and the opportunities and threats that impact on the current state and future development of the sector – i.e. to make a SWOT analysis.<sup>57</sup> Strengths (and weaknesses) are those current features of the organic sector that distinguish it positively (or negatively) from other sectors in the economy (such as non-organic agriculture), or from organic sectors in other countries, and provide the basis for future development of the sector. Opportunities (and threats) are future developments (policy, economic, etc.) outside the direct influence of those developing the organic sector but likely to influence the sector. A SWOT analysis can help to generate ideas, issues to be addressed and suitable policy actions. It may be helpful in some cases to make SWOT analyses for individual sub-sectors and then to combine the results into an overall position.

SWOT analyses were undertaken by each of the partners within the SME ORGANICS project. Table 4.1 illustrates this process with examples from the canton of Aargau, in northern Switzerland, assessing the organic sector and its policy needs within the context of the local organic processing industry.

**Table 4.1** SWOT analysis of organic processing sector in Aargau, Switzerland

<b>Strengths</b>	High flexibility due to small structures Highly innovative Good quality products
<b>Weaknesses</b>	High costs due to small structures Low budgets No platform for knowledge exchange
<b>Opportunities</b>	Strong demand for regional organic products High quality produce available
<b>Threats</b>	Competition from imported products Procurement of specialist inputs Certification and other compliance

A reasonable criterion for selecting policy measures for an organic action plan is that they should respond to the needs – as defined by the weaknesses (internal to the sector) and the threats (external to the sector). Similarly, it is reasonable that the action plan attempts at the same time to build on success and exploit potential opportunities – as defined by the strengths (internal to the sector) and the opportunities (external to the sector).

The motivations behind and the mechanisms of the policy instruments included in the organic action plan might relate to:

- **The social processes to be influenced**, e.g. the processes by which organic food and farming is expected to be able to grow within the food and farming sector as a whole
- **The impact of distinct policy instruments on outcomes**, e.g. a certain level of financial support will increase the organic food and farming sector
- **The definition of development or improvement**, e.g. subsidies paid to farmers for environmental protection reducing environmental degradation rather than optimising organic food supplies; incentives for innovative SMEs investing and engaging in organic food processing and marketing

An example of how a SWOT analysis has been used to develop organic action plan policy measures, concrete actions and targets in Scotland is provided in Box 4.1.

**Box 4.1** Strengthens and weaknesses analysis for the Scottish Organic Action Plan <sup>58</sup>

Scotland's organic action plan, 'Organic Ambitions: An Action Plan for organic food and farming in Scotland 2016-2020', was developed following an organic sector-led consultation strengthens and weaknesses analysis of the sector led by the Scottish Organic Forum with support from the Scottish Government. A core aim of Scotland's OAP was to strengthen the potential of organic farming to conserve and enhance the natural capital of Scotland, alongside developments in the market, supply chains, research, knowledge, farmer support and organic procurement.

Weaknesses	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to land</li> <li>• Challenges involved in certification of rented land</li> <li>• Lack of organic sector market intelligence</li> <li>• Lack of public awareness of organic production systems</li> <li>• Geographical isolation and under-developed infrastructure within organic supply chain</li> <li>• Input and certification costs</li> <li>• Lack of interaction between organic sector and research providers</li> <li>• Skills shortage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness of organic food and farming through alignment with core educational strategies</li> <li>• Increase farm income through diversification</li> <li>• Increase public procurement of organic</li> <li>• Dialogue with NGOs and community food initiatives</li> <li>• Secure increased organic product listings among retailers</li> <li>• Modification of certification process and costs</li> </ul>

The Scottish OAP 2016-2020 was launched in 2016 and funded by the Scottish Government as part of its Food Marketing and Organic Advisory Activity. The OAP set out 16 actions across four central themes – Knowledge, Strength, Skills and Resilience – with outcomes identified for both Scotland as a whole, as well as the Scottish organic sector.

The four themes were developed from consultation with stakeholders including producers, the public and private sectors, NGOs and members of the public, to identify the key challenges to the development of Scottish organic food and farming. Desired outcomes for the organic sector include:

- Sector-wide marketing strategy resulting in growth in regional, national and international organic sales and supported by increased awareness and confidence in the value of Scottish organic produce
- More resilient organic supply chains supported by market intelligence, enhanced economies of scale and strengthening of infrastructure, such as organic processing facilities
- Supporting training and advice in organic farming
- Increased research and knowledge exchange in organic production
- Recognition and financial reward for organic producers (e.g. through the Scottish EU Rural Development Programme)

## Consideration of different social, cultural and institutional contexts

Similar organic action plan measures will operate differently in different contexts. What might work in one context (such as Member States with a long experience of organic development and investment) might not work in another context (such as Member States with a shorter history of organic development and investment). Hence it is important to carefully consider the social and institutional preconditions under which the organic action plan will operate. These conditions may include the particular features of the organisation of the food market, farmers and food processing firms, agriculture policy priorities in relation to specific policy areas and/or governance levels (EU, national, regional), for example policies relating to food, environment, health, industrial development or consumer expectations.

Table 4.2 provides an example of how different priorities for development of the organic sector can be translated into desired outcomes (outputs, results and impacts).

### 4.3 DEFINING POLICY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

When the organic sector development needs relevant to policy makers and the beneficiaries have been defined, it is then possible to define the specific objectives of the action plan.<sup>59</sup> It is assumed that the process of defining objectives is aimed at meeting sector needs, although in reality the policy process may include 'hidden agendas', or it may be difficult to establish clear and systematic connections between the objectives and the measures to achieve them. This is part of the ambiguity of policy processes. However, formulating clear and open objectives is a useful start to devising suitable actions and measures and as a basis for evaluations.<sup>60</sup>

**Table 4.2** Organic action plan – priorities for development and desired outcomes

Priority for development	Desired outcome examples
Organic food and farming sector development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased consumer demand for organic food</li> <li>• Regional, national and export supply chains strengthened to meet demand</li> <li>• Increased public awareness of the benefits of organic production</li> <li>• Reduced barriers to entry into organic farming sector</li> <li>• More organic food in mass catering (including public and private procurement)</li> <li>• Competitive and innovative organic food sector through partnerships, research support and knowledge exchange</li> </ul>
Economic, food market/ consumption and rural development objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved profitability of organic farming</li> <li>• Agricultural prices that meet the true cost of production to producer, reflecting 'externalised' environmental and social costs</li> <li>• Protecting farm livelihoods and supporting rural economies</li> <li>• Creating employment and opportunities for skills training</li> </ul>
Environmental, public health and other societal/public benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced biodiversity, increased natural capital resulting in more resilient farm ecosystems</li> <li>• Promoting transition to a low-carbon economy and resource efficiency</li> <li>• Meeting demand for high quality food, delivering for the environment and high animal welfare</li> <li>• Promoting health through improved diet and food awareness</li> </ul>

Aims and objectives can be considered in a hierarchical context, where the top-level aims represent the overall aspirations and vision for the programme, but may be less clearly defined, with strategic objectives and action points (operational objectives) providing more specific details on targets and activities. To navigate the hierarchy, one can either start at the top and ask the question 'how?' with the answer representing the next level down objective, or start at the bottom and ask the question 'why?' with the answer representing the next level up objective (see Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3** Hierarchy of objectives

Top-level aims	Economic/market growth and rural development	Environment, public health and societal benefits
<p>How? ↓</p> <p>↑ Why?</p>	<p><i>Measured by: impacts, e.g., increase in employment, GDP, reduction in pollution, increase in biodiversity, etc.</i></p>	
Strategic objectives	Increase profitability and competitiveness of organic sector by x% (or value target)	Increase land area under organic management by y% (or area target)
<p>How? ↓</p> <p>↑ Why?</p>	<p><i>Measured by: results, e.g., change in profitability of organic businesses, increase in turnover, change in area of organic land, etc.</i></p>	
Actions points / operational objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of organic products</li> <li>• Investment in processing and market capacities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial support for conversion and maintenance</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in research and innovation</li> <li>• Investment in training and advice</li> </ul>	
<p><i>Measured by: outputs, e.g., area supported, number/value of projects funded, number of beneficiaries supported, etc.</i></p>		

### Top-level aims: Overall aims at sector, economic and societal levels

The overall aims of an organic action plan and the specific objectives of each individual policy measure should be agreed at the outset. When defining overall objectives for an action plan, it is helpful to place them in the context of wider (non-organic) policy objectives, thus demonstrating how organic sector development can contribute to general economic policy goals related to food and agriculture as well as wider social, environmental and health policy goals.

From the experience of previous organic action plans, at least three types of top level objectives or aims should be considered:

- **Organic sector development:** Focus on the development (growth, competitiveness and sustainability) of the organic sector, including SMEs, reflecting the goals of sector stakeholders, but potentially also contributing to the delivery of broader policy objectives
- **Economic and rural development:** Focus on broader agriculture, food and economic policy goals, including meeting consumer demand for organic food, where the expectation is that growth and improvement of the organic sector will make a positive contribution, e.g. creation of employment, economic growth and regenerating rural communities
- **Environmental, public health and other societal benefits:** Focus on delivery of public goods as a result of organic land management and organic food consumption

From a policy maker's perspective, the development of the organic sector is more a means to an end in pursuit of economic and societal level aims, not an end, whereas organic sector stakeholders are more likely (but not exclusively) to see the development of the organic sector as an end in itself. Reconciling the interests of different stakeholder groups is central to the development of organic action plans.

## Strategic objectives and targets

Organic action plans can include a multitude of objectives, and the process of agreeing objectives will inevitably involve compromise between the varying and sometimes competing interests of stakeholders, according to their needs, their internal strengths/weaknesses and the external opportunities/threats.

During a series of EU national workshops at Member State level (in the ORGAP project), participating stakeholders were asked to comment on the relevance of a set of generic objectives based on their experiences of policies in different European countries. From these workshops, the following strategic objectives were formulated.<sup>59</sup> While these may be useful as a guide, each organic action plan may require objectives that are specific to the particular context, while the individual action points will in almost all cases be unique to a specific action plan.

 **Examples of strategic objectives:**

1. a) Maintaining and enhancing the technical and financial performance of organic farms and related food-sector businesses  
b) Maintaining and enhancing the technical performance and financial viability of organic processing, marketing and related food-sector businesses
2. Increasing the scale of the organic sector (e.g. retail sales value, land under organic management, number of businesses and quantity of products available and sold in the marketplace)
3. a) Meeting consumer demands for choice and quality of safe and affordable food, fibre and other agricultural products  
b) Maintaining and enhancing consumer awareness and trust in organic food, fibre and other agricultural products
4. Better regulation, i.e. improving transparency of organic farming regulation, ensuring a common level playing field in the marketplace (harmonisation), integrating 'public good' standards (social, environmental, etc.) and reducing bureaucracy
5. Maintaining and enhancing the integrity of organic principles and organic food
6. Promoting and developing understanding of the concept and potential of organic food and farming in society based on sound evidence
7. Promoting the sustainable use of natural resources
8. Maintaining and enhancing the environment (including biodiversity, pollution and climate change issues)
9. Maintaining and enhancing animal health and welfare
10. a) Maintaining and enhancing the social, employment and economic wellbeing of rural communities  
b) Preserving threatened traditional and authentic craft skills and food production and processing systems with their associated local cultures
11. Maintaining and enhancing the competitiveness of European agriculture
12. Promoting public health, food safety and food security

These strategic objectives can be made SMART (see below) by including a target level, or increase/decrease, to be achieved and a date by which this should be achieved.

The strategic objectives should clearly correspond with the overall aims of the action plan.

Box 4.2 provides an example of the aims and strategic objectives of the German Organic Action Plan: 'Organic Farming – Looking Forwards' published in 2017.

**Box 4.2** Aims and strategic objectives of the German Organic Action Plan <sup>60</sup>

The German national organic action plan 'Organic Farming – Looking Forwards: Towards Greater Sustainability in Germany' (*Zukunftsstrategie ökologischer Landbau - Impulse für mehr Nachhaltigkeit in Deutschland*) was developed on the back of significant increases in organically managed land and the market for organic products since 2000. The plan demonstrated the Federal Government's recognition of organic farming as having the potential to address a range of biodiversity, emissions, water, resource scarcity and social issues. The plan also recognised the benefits of the adoption of some organic practices within non-organic farming systems.

The objectives defined illustrate how action plans can adopt different approaches to reflect local conditions.

The main aim of the plan was to overcome resource policy challenges in the agricultural sector and to stimulate development of the organic sector with the aim of achieving 20% of land under organic management.

Five priority areas (strategic objectives) were defined:

- Develop a coherent, future-focused legal framework within EU organic legislation
- Simplify entry into organic farming with an emphasis on improved training, advice and information
- Greater efficiency and performance of organic production through research and development and effective knowledge transfer
- Increase demand for organic goods
- Provide appropriate financial reward for environmental services

## Action points / operational objectives

Action points are the specific tasks or output-oriented, operational objectives designed to help achieve the strategic objectives and aims. They may be closely related to a specific policy measure that can assist delivery. For example, if the strategic objective is to increase the land area under organic management, the action point might be to implement a conversion support scheme to encourage 100 or 1000 farmers to convert to organic production within five years. This would be closely linked to the organic conversion and maintenance support mechanisms of the rural development programme. A strategic objective to increase consumption of organic products by 10% annually might be supported by an action to implement a promotion campaign to inform consumers about how to identify organic products, their benefits, and where to find them.

It is important when defining action points to be clear about:

- The target beneficiaries/areas of activity and linkage to the strategic objectives
- The planned level of outputs (e.g. number of agreements, scale of projects)
- By when this should be achieved
- The budget and staff resources available for implementation
- The policy instruments that might be used to deliver this
- The ownership of the action (who controls when it starts or finishes)
- The delivery agent for the action (if different from the owner)

Well-defined strategic objectives and action points should be SMART; that means they should be:

- **Specific:** Objectives should be precise and concrete enough not to be open to varying interpretations
- **Measurable:** Objectives should define a desired future state in measurable terms, so that it is possible to verify whether the objective has been achieved or not. Such objectives are either quantified or based on a combination of description and scoring scales.
- **Achievable:** Objectives and targets should be ambitious whilst realistically achievable, given available resources
- **Relevant:** Objectives should be directly linked to the issues they seek to address.
- **Time-dependent:** Objectives and target levels remain vague if they are not related to a fixed date or time period.

## 4.4 DECISION MAKING: SELECTING, INTEGRATING AND PRIORITISING RELEVANT MEASURES

Effective decision making is critical during the formulation of an organic action plan. The decisions required concern the content (aims, objectives and action points), resource availability and prioritisation, implementation (processes and organisation), desired outcomes and methods of evaluation. It is often the case that the policy measures and implementation take place in the absence of any visible basis in policy decision making (at either official or political levels, and regardless of stakeholder need). Effective decision making requires planning, participation and transparency (openness).

### 4.4.1 Deciding on policy instruments and action points

Section 4.3 of this manual outlines issues relating to the specification of action plan aims and objectives, which should reflect the needs of stakeholders (including both beneficiaries and policy makers).

Clarity of aims and objectives is an important first stage. The final content of an organic action plan will be the result of political decisions that will have been made subject to the prevailing political agenda, the range of policy options introduced, the general history of the policy area (how problems and solutions were perceived in the past), the level of political conflict in the area and how conflict has been dealt with in the past.

For example, the key policy driver for an organic action plan may be 'environment led' (public good/supply push), or it may be 'market led' (demand pull), where the main drivers are consumer demand and market signals. Effective action plans should look to achieve a balance of 'supply push' and 'demand pull' measures, while also demonstrating the role that an action plan can play in contributing to wider policy goals.

#### **Initial perception can become fixed**

The initial perception of problems and solutions tends to define the future perception; therefore, if the environment has always been seen as the driver, then it will stay that way – making it more difficult to re-orientate to a market driver later – and vice versa.

In each case, the policy instruments selected, action points prioritised and the effects on beneficiaries will be different. The nature of stakeholders targeted may also be different, with a possible focus on public (government and non-government), or on both public and private stakeholders. A focus on the 'public' avoids the risk of policy capture by private interests but may limit the impact on the market and consumer demand, and may be more vulnerable to budgetary constraints.

### Content needs to be logical

Once the aims and objectives have been determined, the second stage is to decide on the individual action points and policy instruments to be included. The danger at this stage is that a very long 'shopping list' of possible actions can be identified, which needs to be coherently structured and prioritised. Logical analysis<sup>61</sup> provides a means of doing this.

The first step is to identify possible actions/policy instruments that might be used to achieve the objectives, by extending the hierarchical objectives structure outlined in section 4.3.<sup>62</sup> At this stage it might be possible to eliminate any redundant actions/instruments that do not contribute anything to the aims and objectives. Equally importantly, it will be possible to identify aims and objectives that are not supported by any actions.

The second step is to consider whether the policy instruments chosen are the most effective possible,<sup>63</sup> and whether there might be any unintended consequences (for example conflicts or contradictions between instruments), or unnecessary duplication. The aim should be to get the maximum effect for the (always limited) resources available and to avoid wasting resources.

For example, will financial support for farmers converting result in over-production, resulting in lower prices that ultimately reduce the incomes of, rather than help, the target beneficiaries? Alternatively, will limiting support to producers who market their products as organic reduce the potential to get environmental benefits from organic land management? Could the eligibility conditions for one instrument result in other instruments being impossible to utilise? Will better framework conditions for SMEs contributing also lead to more investment and innovation in the organic food sector?

## Assessing synergies and conflicts with a cross-impact matrix

The potential synergies and conflicts between individual action points and policy instruments can be assessed with a cross-impact matrix,<sup>64</sup> using a scoring system ranging from ++ for very positive to -- for very negative. Normally, only the lower half of the matrix would be completed. Where serious potential conflicts are identified, changes to the proposed actions will be required, while actions involving significant synergies may be preferred in the prioritisation stage. An example is given in Box 4.3 for the European Organic Action Plan 2014.

**Box 4.3** Cross-impact matrix for the European Organic Action Plan 2014-2020<sup>67</sup>

<b>Action Plan for the future of Organic Production in the European Union</b>	<b>ACTION 1:</b> Publish an informative document setting out the rules applicable to organic production, processing and trade	<b>ACTION 2:</b> Include organic farming as a specific theme in the forthcoming call for proposals for support for information measures	<b>ACTION 3:</b> Raise awareness of the possibilities for information and promotion activities in internal market and third countries
<b>ACTION 1:</b> Publish an informative document setting out the rules applicable to organic production, processing and trade		0	+
<b>ACTION 2:</b> Include organic farming as a specific theme in the forthcoming call for proposals for support for information measures	+		+
<b>ACTION 3:</b> Raise awareness of the possibilities for information and promotion activities in internal market and third countries	0	0	

Positive = +, Negative = -, Neutral = 0

## 4.4.2 Priorities for action – allocating resources

Once the list of possible actions has been simplified and checked for completeness and logical coherence, prioritisation is essential as resources will not be unlimited.<sup>68</sup>

Several methods may help the process of prioritisation, such as non-secret voting (choosing options according to resources), budget allocation exercises (distributing limited budgets) and anonymous electronic voting techniques.

### **Non-secret voting for policy priorities**

Voting can help in the selection of options. A non-secret system of voting allows participants to behave in a strategic way, since intermediate results are visible to all involved in the voting. This can allow stakeholders to change their choices if they notice that a policy goal has not been voted for, or to strengthen a group decision.

Voting using electronic systems can also be used where all participants are allocated a remote control linked to an appropriate computer software program. A variation of Nominal Group Technique<sup>67</sup> might also be used to achieve consensus on priorities through an iterative process requiring outlying participants to explain their preferences.

### **Budget allocation (priority evaluator technique)**

Budget exercises allow for the distribution of a certain budget to different spending options in a group decision process. As the group making the decisions may not be the group that actually allocates and spends resources, a national budget might be used, with each participant indicating how it should be spent, taking account of the extent to which each activity might be supported. For example, respondents could be offered five 'goods' in three different quantities (say 1, 2 and 3 units) at certain prices. The method allows the trade-offs by moving from one level of each attribute to another to be identified, with the respondent choosing the best package, given a fixed budget to spend. The exercise can be repeated for each individual with different relative prices until the desired result is achieved.<sup>68</sup>

# Involving stakeholders

## The case for stakeholder involvement

The process of defining the development needs of the organic sector, along with the associated policy goals and objectives, involves a broad range of stakeholders including politicians, policy makers, expert groups, associations of organic farmers, NGOs, businesses and individuals. All of these stakeholder groups are interested in the development of the organic sector. However, not all of these stakeholders will be directly involved in the organic sector.<sup>69</sup> Some stakeholders will possibly oppose the development of the organic sector or place it as a low priority, but may be important 'gatekeepers' to policy or implementation. It is thus important for politicians and policy makers to find effective ways to engage with those stakeholders considered relevant for defining and prioritising developmental needs and policy objectives. This may contribute to ensuring that the policy measures are effectively met.

The selection of stakeholders to involve may refer to the principles of good governance outlined by the European Commission. Their objective is to 'open up policy making to make it more inclusive and accountable'.<sup>70</sup>

## 5.1 IDENTIFYING RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

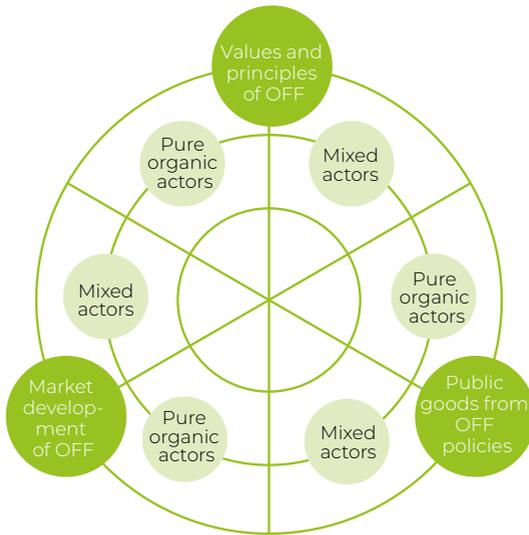
The identification of relevant stakeholders to involve in organic action plans may rest on the recognition of the dual societal role for organic:

- As a response to consumer demand and hence governed by market rules
- As a supplier of public goods (environmental goods, rural development, improved animal welfare, wider societal and health policy goals)

The dual role of organic food and farming led the first EU organic action plan to concentrate on policy measures that emphasise three key perspectives of organic food and farming:

- **Organic values perspective**, which implies the definition of the basic principles of organic food and farming
- **Market perspective**, which is seen as the main driver of the development
- **Public goods perspective**, which is seen as the main reason for promoting organic food and farming by means of public support

Each of these perspectives involves separate groups of stakeholders as illustrated in Figure 5.1.



**Figure 5.1** Stakeholder perspectives in organic action plans <sup>73</sup>

*OFF = Organic Food and Farming*

Proposals regarding the organic values perspective cannot be substantiated or implemented without involving at least some of the stakeholders who are the legitimate bearers of these values such as associations of organic agriculture or organic farmers. But even with regard to the market or public goods perspectives it may be relevant to involve stakeholders that possess or have access to information or

influence relevant to any of the stages of the policy cycle leading to the development of an organic action plan (the design, policy formulation, decision making, implementation and evaluation).

## Which stakeholders to involve?

When deciding on which stakeholders to involve in any stage of the policy process it may be worth initially identifying all stakeholders considered relevant to the issue and to clarify for each of them which perspective they represent as a first priority. Relevant stakeholders may include purely organic stakeholders, or those engaged in broader environmental and public health policy (such as environmental NGOs), as well as stakeholders not engaged in organic activities or from the non-organic agri-food sector. Examples include:

- Government departments
- Public representative bodies
- NGOs
- Private businesses and associations – for profit
- Private businesses and associations – not for profit
- Research institutes and advisory bodies

Each of these groups and each member of the groups may have legitimate interests in the organic action plan and may help in development of the plan. It is possible, however, to distinguish between group members that are more (directly or indirectly) affected by the organic action plan policy measures than others. Although it is worth involving a comprehensive range of stakeholders it is necessary to give priority to those affected the most.

An additional distinction can be drawn between those actors considered central to organic food and farming (like organic farmers), actors at the interface (like firms delivering inputs) and a third group that are considered part of the external or peripheral environment that establish the framework of conditions for organic food and farming such as non-organic parts of public administration. This analysis of stakeholders' centrality with regard to the action plan in question, or its components, provides a good basis for selecting stakeholders to involve at any stage of the policy cycle, but the selection of stakeholders may also be based on an assessment of the resources that various stakeholders have at their disposal in terms of information, legitimacy and influence.

There is a risk that the policy process may be delayed if too many stakeholders are involved; consequently, policy makers should ensure that those most likely to contribute to reaching a result, for instance in terms of political power or positive attitude and interest, are selected.

### **Stakeholder involvement needs good preparation, sufficient time and suitable methods**

The mechanism behind stakeholder involvement involves the exchange of 'goods' such as information, legitimacy and influence between policy makers and other stakeholders. The exchange is based on reciprocity, and therefore stakeholders with nothing to contribute cannot be expected to be involved. There is no certain outcome of stakeholder involvement since it will depend on how political conflicts between different stakeholder groups are handled, in addition to the general political interest in organic farming.

Stakeholder involvement thus demands careful preparations and sufficient time, for example, for preparing the consultation at any stage of the policy process and of appropriate methods used to initiate and promote participation.

## **5.2 PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES FOR STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT**

Involvement may be understood and implemented in many different ways, including the provision of information, facilitating opportunities to comment on proposals, and empowering stakeholders to implement their own choices and concepts.

Analysis of previous action plans and policy programmes for organic agriculture showed that in some cases involvement was limited to certain stages of the process only.<sup>74</sup> Involvement could be on a permanent basis or a temporary/ad hoc basis e.g. through the establishment of an expert group or an advisory committee for organic food and farming, or through expert and stakeholder consultations held during the development of an organic action plan (See Box 5.1).

### Box 5.1 Stakeholder involvement in Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France <sup>77</sup>

 A wide range of stakeholders were involved in the development of a regional organic action plan for the French region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine. Stakeholder involvement was driven by INTERBIO Nouvelle-Aquitaine, a regional organic sector association, bringing together representatives of organic farmers, processors, craftsmen and distributors, cooperative groups, and associated organisations such as public training institutions and consular chambers. In addition to working with its members, INTERBIO sought to engage directly with policy makers and administrators in the region. This included representatives from the regional administration and council as well as the regional office of the national Ministry for Agriculture, Agri-food, and Forestry.

Stakeholders were formally involved through a series of workshops, which took place once or twice every 6 months, as well by correspondence between meetings. Throughout the process efforts were made to ensure that stakeholder involvement was managed in a participatory way, with people who took part in SME Organics project field visits required to make reports about relevant best practice examples observed. Stakeholders then discussed specific aspects of these examples, including what could be adapted to the Nouvelle-Aquitaine context. Stakeholders were also involved in identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the organic sector in order to determine the focus areas, objectives and actions that could be part of the plan. Although it was not always straightforward a strong emphasis was placed on reaching consensus on the plan's priorities to secure buy-in from all relevant stakeholders.

The interest of organic stakeholders and policy makers in developing a plan were also stimulated by a parallel initiative to advance a regional pact for organic farming (*Pacte d'ambition régionale pour l'Agriculture Biologique 2017-2020*) in the region. The plan was therefore seen as complementary to the overall strategy set out in the Pacte, which was formally adopted by the region in July 2017.

Ad hoc involvement is likely to be relevant in cases where only limited resources or little information are available to public administrations as well as to the main interest groups and practitioners, whether organic farmers or organic businesses.

## Using different participatory methods

Stakeholder involvement is more likely to become successful if it uses several methods and runs throughout the policy cycle of an organic action plan (agenda setting, policy formulation, decision making, policy implementation and policy evaluation). Table 5.1 outlines different approaches and suggests the appropriate timing for stakeholder involvement. Successful stakeholder involvement depends on exchange of communication, i.e. on achieving a two-way communication flow.

**Table 5.1** How and when to involve stakeholders?

<b>HOW?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership of groups or committees involved in the organic sector</li> <li>• Systematic accessing of networks</li> <li>• Active data gathering and surveying</li> <li>• Electronic and written sources – ‘what are they/we thinking?’</li> <li>• Involvement in events</li> <li>• Links with advisory bodies</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Thematic seminars</li> <li>• Electronic consultation and on-line forums</li> <li>• Direct interviews</li> <li>• Participation in research and extension</li> </ul>
<b>WHEN?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early identification of impact goals and indicators</li> <li>• Development and formulation of policy as well as decision making</li> <li>• Implementation</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> </ul>

The degree to which participatory methods realise their potential depends on how they are used and the context in which they are employed. There is not one set of techniques to be mechanically applied in all contexts for all participants. Rather a diverse range of possible techniques should be deployed, and these should be flexibly adapted to particular situations and needs.

In applying participatory approaches, particularly in workshops or steering group contexts, a key issue is to ensure active as opposed to passive participation. A wide range of different specific methods can be applied, which cannot be described in detail in this manual. Some of these methods are well known, such as brain-storming, rapid appraisal, focus groups, etc. One of the less known techniques, that of lateral thinking, is described as an example in Box 5.2.<sup>76</sup>

### **Box 5.2** Lateral thinking method – creativity by provocation

In order to translate objectives into policy goals, it might be useful to use unconventional techniques, such as the lateral thinking method. Lateral thinking<sup>77</sup> can help change our concepts and perceptions and generate new ideas. Since concepts, perceptions and ideas are involved in every activity that requires thinking, every person needs some lateral thinking skills. Creative ideas may not emerge spontaneously; formal and systematic techniques of lateral thinking may help to escape the restrictive effects of judgment.

Provocation involves a ‘jump’ from established patterns of thinking and experience, and thus can open up a whole new avenue of thinking.

For example, the provocative statement could be ‘food scandals in the organic sector’:

- ▶ **Consequences:** consumers would not buy organic products since it would be much safer to buy non-organic products. More organic products would pass through the non-organic channel. Organic products would be cheaper and organic shops would close.
- ▶ **Circumstances:** farmers’ associations would ask for effective controls in order to guarantee organic quality to consumers; public information and promotion campaigns for the certification system and organic product quality would increase. Farmers would transform their farm so that consumers not only buy organic products, but also eat regional and traditional products or take farm holidays.
- ▶ **Solution:** policy goals, developed to deal with the provocative statement ‘food scandals in the organic sector’.

## Implementing organic action plans

Successful implementation of an organic action plan depends on the right policies, defined to meet clear objectives that reflect the needs of the organic sector as well as policy makers. Clarity, openness and transparency of decisions and objectives foster successful implementation. Ambiguous objectives or hidden agendas, which might be the result of conflicts (or tacit misunderstandings) during prioritisation and decision making, may hamper implementation. Successful implementation also depends to a large extent on stakeholders' involvement – involving the public agencies and their employees and the target groups of the various measures included in the organic action plan. Farmers and food businesses, in particular SMEs (which in most cases have very few time resources), need to be motivated by the opportunities provided for in the policy measures.

Implementation therefore often requires the engagement of both target beneficiaries and the officials that are implementing or administering the programme. For example, front office staff dealing directly with beneficiaries may not be sufficiently engaged in the process to promote or prioritise the actions that have been decided by officials involved in the policy design or at a higher level. Different types of officials may also lack understanding of the specific issues that led to the formulation of the action plan in the first place. Institutional or departmental structures may also work against implementation, if the scope of the action plan crosses departmental boundaries. Officials may only consider their specific individual or departmental area of responsibility, thus losing the synergistic benefits of integration that the action plan was designed to achieve. Therefore the opportunities and challenges for delivering outcomes in a more integrated way through multi-departmental approaches should be carefully considered as part of the implementation planning.<sup>80</sup>

**Box 6.1** Government-led elaboration and implementation of the Finnish Organic Action Plan <sup>81</sup>

▶ An increase in both organic and local production was identified as one of the strategic objectives of Finnish agricultural policy. To move forward on its objective the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry established and led a cross-ministerial steering group to elaborate the government's development programmes for the organic and local food sectors. Part of this work culminated in 'MORE ORGANIC! Government development programme for the organic product sector and objectives to 2020' (*Lisää luomua! Hallituksen luomualan kehittämishjelma ja luomualan kehittämisen tavoitteet vuoteen 2020*).

Based on an assessment of the current state and development needs of the Finnish organic food chain a number of priority areas were identified, with the programme built on three overarching objectives to be reached by 2020:

- ▶ Increasing the area of farmland under organic arable production by 20%
- ▶ Increasing the range of domestic organic products needed to meet demand in different markets
- ▶ Improving access to organic food for trade and institutional kitchens with the aim of reaching 20% of organic food in public catering by 2020

For each of the objectives a series of measures or action points were drawn up and to support the implementation of the programme links were made to relevant EU and national programmes and budgets such as measures available under Finnish EU Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and the EU promotional policy for EU farm products to 2020. The programme also made reference to strategies of the Finnish government such as the National Food Strategy and Team Finland export promotion concept. The organic sector was widely consulted through the Finnish Organic Food Association (*Pro Luomu*), an association for the cooperation of actors in the organic sector. Responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of each action point was assigned to specific Ministries. The original steering group also took on the task of monitoring the realisation of objectives until the end of the government's term, by which time monitoring would be a regular part of each Ministry's activities.

## Comprehension, capability and willingness of the beneficiaries are decisive

If the support and opportunities made available through the specific action points in the organic action plan are not exploited by intended beneficiaries, then the plan will fail at implementation. There are three characteristics of the beneficiaries of the organic action plan that define the extent to which they will take advantage of the policy measures included in the plan:

- **Comprehension** – the policy measures should be understandable by the beneficiary
- **Capability** – the beneficiary should be able to take advantage of the measures, which must be relevant to them
- **Willingness** – the beneficiary should be ready to take up the concrete opportunities

The policy makers responsible for the development of the organic action plan may enhance all three aspects by:

- **Influencing** senior officials to provide resources appropriate to the specific actions points in the plan
- **Encouraging** junior officials responsible for implementation to maximise uptake relative to available resources

## Public-private partnership is important for success of action plans

While the implementation phase may primarily involve government departments at national or regional level delivering the policy measures, organic action plans may be developed and implemented through either a 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' approach or a combination of both. More often, delivery will involve a partnership between public and private interests, possibly working with NGOs and public interest bodies. Thus, the implementation of a policy or an action plan is initiated through interaction between a diversity of public and private organisations and individuals. Successful implementation depends on getting stakeholders involved in the delivery of an organic action plan (see Box 6.2).

## Behaviour of different groups determines success

There are three types of behaviour which will determine the success of the organic action plan during the implementation phase.

- **Organisational and inter-organisational:** This involves interaction between organisations of distinct policy sectors such as environmental and agriculture ministries or departments and regional/local governments, or within one policy sector such as various agencies of the ministry of agriculture. This type of interaction may be shaped by bureaucratic power games concerning financial 'survival' or expansion of the organisations involved, and the implementation of any policy decision may be influenced positively or negatively by these power games.
- **Front office staff:** This is the behaviour of so-called 'street level administrators', i.e. the people in direct contact with target groups, often supporting or processing project applications. The behaviour of front office staff may be influenced by their individual preferences and working conditions as well as by intentions of policy decisions/programmes to be implemented.
- **Beneficiaries:** This aspect concerns the behaviour of the target group. Their actions may be more or less in line with the aims of the policy decision/programme and their reactions to policy decisions/programmes may depend very much on their reliance on policy support and the types of incentives involved. Their behaviour is particularly important where the action plan is industry-led, in a public-private partnership approach, and both sides require a common understanding of the way forward.

**Box 6.2** Public-private partnerships for promoting domestic demand for organic food in the Danish Organic Action Plan <sup>82</sup>

 Denmark has a track record of taking a collaborative approach to organic sector development, demonstrated by successive governments' work with Organic Denmark – a national association of organic companies, farmers and consumers. Over the years Organic Denmark has worked in partnership with the government on programmes designed to have the dual impact of supporting the organic sector as well as delivering on wider policy objectives.

Under the 'Organic Action Plan for Denmark: Working together for more organics' (*Økologiplan. Danmark Sammen om mere økologi*) for the period to 2020, public procurement of organic products was identified as a major way of simultaneously encouraging demand and supply. Efforts by Organic Denmark helped to secure a national goal of achieving 60% of organic food in public kitchens by 2020. In order to promote domestic demand, resources are allocated to promoting organic sales, encouraging the use and purchase of organic produce in the public sector and promoting organic brands with a range of measures offered and collaboration between different actors across the public procurement supply chain strongly encouraged.

This includes the Smart Food Purchases initiative, which seeks to encourage increased purchasing of organic through the major supplier for the public sector, and the setting of targets for increased purchase of organic food by local and regional administrations through the Partnership for Public Green Purchasing (POGI). Financing was also awarded to Organic Denmark and other organisations to support organic conversion and education in public kitchens as well as collaborative projects between organic farmers, food companies and wholesalers who are part of Organic Denmark in order to expand organic supply to public canteens.

The plan also aims to double organic land area from 2007 levels by 2020, complementing efforts to increase demand for organic products which stimulate conversion to organic farming. More broadly the government also encourages groups of producers, companies and other organisations to submit applications for projects focused on market development, consumer awareness and training and educational programmes for farmers and the organic food sector.

## Early assessment of potential risks and problems associated with implementation

In order to provide an early assessment of potential risks and problems associated with the implementation of an action plan, an adapted version of the Failure Mode and Effect Analysis (FMEA) process could be used, combining internal and external expertise.

FMEA is an engineering technique used to define, identify and eliminate known and/or potential failures, problems, errors and so on from the system, design, process, and/or service before they reach the customer. This can be usefully applied to help ensure successful implementation of organic action plans. It involves:

- Generating a list of potential implementation problems that may arise
- Identifying a logical cause-effect explanation for the potential failure
- For each failure mode, estimating the Risk Priority Number (RPN), which refers to the likelihood of the failure occurring and being detected, and the severity of its impact
- Ranking the most relevant problem areas using the RPN
- Providing for problem follow-up and corrective action

This method could also be used for evaluation purposes (see Section 7).<sup>83</sup>

## 6.1 INCLUDING MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF ORGANIC ACTION PLANS FROM THE OUTSET

Monitoring and evaluation is too often seen as an annoying administrative burden involving the collection of large amounts of data for little purpose. However, evaluation plays a fundamental part in improving understanding of the issues that are being addressed and in designing better policies. Its role can therefore be formative (developmental) as well as summative (judgemental). This can be particularly helpful in the design (e.g. status quo analyses) and implementation phases of an action plan, allowing for better targeting of measures from the outset, and for fine tuning and early remedial action as implementation progresses.<sup>84</sup>

Evaluation takes place in order to improve programmes, not to undertake evaluations for their own sake. Programme managers need to think of evaluation as a resource: a source of feedback, a tool for improving performance, an early warning of problems (and solutions) and a way of systematising knowledge. Closely aligning evaluations to the relevant stages of the policy cycle will make them most effective – if the relevant window of opportunity is lost, the evaluation becomes only of historical interest.

The goals and views of different interest groups, not just those commissioning the evaluation, need to be taken into consideration. If a major stakeholder interest is ignored, this is likely to weaken an evaluation, either because it will be poorly designed and/or because its results will lack credibility. Involving policy makers and those responsible for programmes will ensure they take results seriously. Equally, the intended beneficiaries should be actively involved in the evaluation process, incorporating their criteria and judgements into an evaluation and accepting that their experience and benefits are the justification for programme interventions.

Despite this, there are few examples of formal evaluations of organic action plans. When they have been undertaken, evaluations were often planned only some time after the programme had been implemented. This often means that the opportunity to define key indicators and collect data from the start of the programme is lost, and the basis on which an evaluation can be made and conclusions drawn is limited.

Evaluations should therefore be fully integrated into programme planning and implementation from the outset, including the early definition of key indicators and the allocation of resources to monitoring uptake and collection of statistical data.<sup>85</sup>

## 6.2 MANAGING COMMUNICATION

### **Communication during the whole policy cycle**

The development and implementation of an organic action plan requires the involvement of stakeholders from within and outside the organic sector. Thus, a clear communication strategy is essential. Communication is necessary at six stages:

### Box 6.3 Presenting the key elements of an organic action plan

With the launch of an organic action plan it is important that all stakeholders involved, including beneficiaries, are fully aware of the final organic action plan concept. The presentation of the plan should be fully accessible to all relevant stakeholders and must not be too long or detailed, otherwise it will be difficult for all people to be able to engage and understand it. While there is no one way to develop the final organic action plan document there are some common elements which can be presented. These include:

- ▶ A foreword, which is usually written by a key person with significant standing within the organic or the wider food and farming sector. The foreword could, for example, be written by an Agriculture Minister or a champion within the organic sector who can give some political weight or gravitas to the document.
- ▶ An executive summary to present the key highlights and most important parts of the action plan. The summary should showcase the main themes of each section of the plan rather than detailing every single action point.
- ▶ A description of the current situation or status quo of the organic sector in the country or region, to highlight the key issues facing organics in the context of wider agri-food industry in the area. In some cases, this description might be supplemented by the results of an evaluation of a previous action plan identifying what has been achieved and what is needed for future plans.
- ▶ A Mission statement or Vision outlining what the action plan is trying to achieve overall in terms of its goals and overarching themes and how they are reflected in the strategic objectives.
- ▶ An overview of the aims, strategic objectives and action points of the plan organised across relevant themes, including the relevant policy instrument that will be used. The overview could be presented in tabular form to highlight the different parts in brief and straightforward ways. It could also summarise the milestones to be achieved, the group responsible for each action, the resources allocated, the monitoring and evaluation and the expected outcomes.
- ▶ An acknowledgement of the stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the action plan, to highlight the participatory nature of the plan
- ▶ An overview of the plan's follow-up and outlook in terms of how the people involved or with a stake in the plan's implementation and development will be kept updated on the plan's progress as well as the procedures for monitoring and evaluation.

- **At the initiation phase of the organic action plan process** to ensure that all stakeholders know about the organic action plan so that they can get involved if they wish, and to show some potential benefits for businesses, in particular SMEs
- **During the development** to maximise participation, particularly to keep informed those stakeholders who are not actively involved in the development of the plan
- **At the launch** when the concept of an organic action plan is finalised, and the measures are launched, so that the beneficiaries can be made aware of the opportunities available through the policy measures included in the plan
- **During the implementation** advisory boards or steering groups used to control the implementation of the organic action plan should also include representatives of relevant stakeholder groups; these may convey the information concerning the plan back to other stakeholders
- **During evaluation** to enable feedback on the successes and failures of the policy measures from interested stakeholders and beneficiaries
- **After the evaluation** to disseminate the findings of the evaluation to all stakeholders and the public in general

If there is little or no communication about the existence of an organic action plan, then there will be inadequate involvement and poor implementation of the measures. As a consequence, it is not sufficient to merely announce the launch of an action plan: it is important to carry on with a clear communication strategy.

### Sufficient resources for communication measures

Since communication is so essential for the acceptance and success of the organic action plan, sufficient resources should be allocated to communication throughout the policy design and formulation, decision making, implementation and evaluation phases of the action plan policy cycle. Some of the measures will be more readily communicated (for example the availability of payments to encourage conversion, or the grants for research and development). Others may present

more of a challenge, particularly where the organic action plan policy measure relates to a larger programme which is available as part of the national or EU agricultural policy. This could include for example the investment support for organic businesses under a national Rural Development Plan (see Box 6.4).

**Box 6.4** Communicating the development and implementation of the German Organic Action Plan

The previous and latest German organic action plans (see Box 4.2) have demonstrated how good communication about different programmes can be achieved, particularly through online media, as well as using targeted workshops and communication events.



Ökolandbau.de is focused on the target audiences for the communications programme, including producers, processors, traders, caterers, consumers, children, and teachers. It contains comprehensive information on actions, initiatives, the benefits of organic farming and statistical data.



BÖLN is focused on the research programme to support the development of organic and (more recently) other forms of sustainable agriculture. It contains full details of projects that have been undertaken, new calls for proposals and other initiatives. More information available at: [www.bundesprogramm.de](http://www.bundesprogramm.de)



For the development of the new organic action plan from 2017, about 140 experts and stakeholders were involved in conferences and workshops. A website was also set up by the Thünen Institut and is regularly updated with news from events and is used as the main vehicle for documenting the process. More information available at: [www.thuenen.de](http://www.thuenen.de)

## 6.3 DEVELOPMENT OF ACTION PLANS IN REGIONS OR COUNTRIES THAT HAVE UNDER-DEVELOPED ORGANIC SECTORS

In regions with under-developed organic sectors, there are some issues in relation to the organic action plan development which have to be taken more specifically into account.

In such regions, government representatives, as well as stakeholders, both from within and outside the organic sector, may have less capacity (staff and financial resources as well as knowledge and information) necessary for participation in the process of setting up an action plan. Another issue may be a lower level of experience and tradition in active stakeholder involvement.

Experiences has shown that it may be difficult to ensure a satisfactory level of involvement of NGOs, in spite of the fact that these stakeholders are usually very interested in development of an organic action plan. It is therefore desirable to give sufficient emphasis to the following questions and issues in the preparation of an organic action plan:

- What is the personnel-related and financial capacity of relevant NGOs? If necessary, ensure targeted financial support for key NGO stakeholders to enable their active participation (this could be in the form of a project, or similar).
- How well informed are stakeholders about the development of an organic action plan and associated relevant issues, and what is the level of their knowledge? If necessary, organise training on key issues (also possible through another well-informed expert NGO)
- If there are no or very few specifically organic associations representing consumers, farmers, etc., identify other NGOs with shared interests relevant to the action plan
- Ensure involvement and co-operation of relevant government departments. As for NGOs, seminars and/or training can be organised to improve the level of knowledge of relevant people

- Where there is a problem of staff capacity, adequate prioritisation of the action plan at the level of government is very helpful. A bigger challenge may be to achieve effective coordination between different ministries and their specific sectors.

Further issues which may need special attention, during both the initiation and the evaluation phases of an organic action plan are the following:

- Development of domestic demand for organic products should preferably not lag behind production. In many such regions, an initial large increase in organic production is related to export since the domestic market is underdeveloped. Even in regions where export is relatively limited, the market demand for organic products is still weak.
- Appropriate encouragement of co-operation between producers, SMEs and other organic stakeholders in relation to marketing
- Strengthening the capacities of organic farming associations, especially if their weakness is apparent.

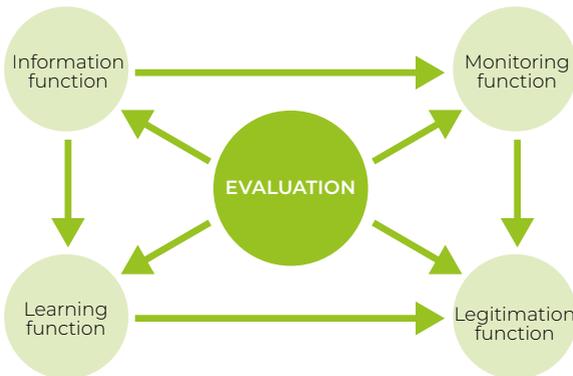
# Evaluating organic action plans

## 7.1 PRINCIPLES OF EVALUATION

Organic action plan evaluation is a vital part of the policy cycle and a helpful tool for development of future plans.<sup>86</sup> The aims of programme evaluation are illustrated in Figure 7.1. Evaluations may be used to:

- Improve the planning of a programme or single measures (*ex-ante* evaluation, before starting the plan)
- Monitor implementation processes (ongoing evaluation, during implementation phase)
- Assess effectiveness and sustainability (*ex-post* evaluation, after termination of the plan)

A classical *ex-post* evaluation involves retrospective assessment of the merit, worth and value of the policy measures in terms of the outcome of the organic action plan. Ideally, monitoring and evaluation are included from the outset.



**Figure 7.1** Aims of programme evaluation <sup>87</sup>

## Purpose of evaluation

Evaluation can have two purposes: either formative (developmental) or summative (judgemental). The formative evaluation is process-orientated, constructive and communication-promoting. The summative evaluation is result-oriented, concluding and accounting. Evaluations may also be conducted at different stages in the policy cycle, with different emphases on the formative or summative roles (see Box 7.1).

### Box 7.1 Types of evaluation for different stages of the policy cycle

#### **EX-ANTE**

##### **before the implementation of the policy or programme**

Outcomes of this formative evaluation should be included in the organic action plan. An evaluation could be undertaken to categorise policy options, identifying which option is best aligned to stakeholder goals and objectives. At this stage, policy shortcomings can be identified and addressed. This analysis may draw on *ex-post* evaluations of previous policy.

#### **MID-TERM**

##### **(formative or summative) to improve implementation of organic action plans during the implementation phase**

This assesses the ongoing relevance of the policy or programme and highlights changes in the general economic and social context affecting the policy. It draws on the *ex-ante* evaluation of the policy and *ex-post* evaluations of previous policies.

#### **EX-POST**

##### **(summative) to inform future policy and programme development**

Undertaken after the organic action plan has finished, thus allowing for the outcomes to become evident. An *ex-post* evaluation may inform the *ex-ante* evaluation of the next policy cycle.

#### **ONGOING EVALUATIONS**

##### ***ex-ante* - mid-term - *ex-post* evaluations**

Successive policy cycles should, if managed well, be integrated so as to minimise overlap and repetition of evaluation and data collection. New programmes and policies should be developed according to the performance of recent policies and programmes.

Except in the *ex-ante* case, evaluations may permit observation of operational processes and the identification of programme problems, such as:

- Acceptability of measures to stakeholders
- Conflicts of interest
- Availability of qualified personnel for implementation of measures
- Effectiveness of communication and co-ordination with target group
- Whether innovations in the programme meet programme objectives

Policy evaluation involves the assessment of a programme according to specific criteria, in order to make judgements about the value of the programme according to the goals of the stakeholders, including policy makers, beneficiaries and third parties. In this sense, evaluation takes place in order to improve programmes – it is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

### Stakeholder expectations of evaluation

Different stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, industry professionals, managers, consumers of organic food and citizens) have different expectations of evaluation. If a major stakeholder interest is ignored, this is likely to weaken an evaluation, either because it will be poorly designed, and/or its results will lack credibility. Involving policy makers and those responsible for programmes in evaluation will ensure they take results seriously. Particular prominence needs to be given to the active participation of intended beneficiaries of the action plan, consistent with the logic of bottom-up, participative and decentralised approaches.<sup>88</sup>

Within the political process, it may be the case that some stakeholders do not place importance on evaluation. Stakeholders may think they would know the results anyway, so would view it as a waste of resources. It might also be that stakeholders involved in or benefiting from the programme might be interested in avoiding the additional public interest and transparency of the programme often associated with well performed evaluations. However, in most cases the commissioning agency or institution is a public agency and public interest in transparency and openness should override any partial interest.

## **Integrate evaluation into the development of the organic action plan**

As argued in the previous section, evaluation should be integrated into action plans from the outset. This means careful planning of the evaluation,<sup>89</sup> identification of key objectives and indicators, and the implementation of a monitoring programme from the start to ensure that the data is available when needed. Data dredging – that is collecting anything that might possibly be useful at a future date – is nearly always inefficient. By being clear about assumptions at an early stage, by drawing on available theory about likely impacts of actions and being clear about the type of evaluation that is needed, evaluations can be more focused and offer a greater benefit for the resources expended.

## **Consideration of the policy context of an evaluation**

The policy context is an important framework within which evaluations need to be located. Of course, policies change or are being constantly restated in different terms and with subtly changing priorities. In some cases, even major changes in policy priorities may occur during the lifetime of an organic action plan. These may either be due to changed conditions (e.g. changes in demand for organic products) or due to changed political majorities, or both. Thus, it is always necessary to keep one eye on policy debates and decisions in order to ensure that evaluations are sensitised to policy priorities. The broader criteria that need to be designed into evaluations usually derive from the wider policy framework.

Organic action plan and organic food and farming policy evaluations need to take account also of the complex systems and multiple objectives inherent in the complexity of organic systems, with due attention to synergies and conflicts between objectives, and the different emphases that will be placed on these by different stakeholders.

Implementing evaluations from scratch can however be challenging and time consuming, particularly where information is limited and monitoring systems are lacking. In the absence of any existing framework, even small steps can help – the evaluation does not need to match the perfect ideal.

## 7.2 CONDUCTING AN EVALUATION

This section outlines the practical steps that need to be taken to initiate and manage an evaluation. Planning an evaluation of an organic action plan must take account of the timing of an evaluation and the types of evaluation questions. These may cover:

- Programme process
- Programme outcomes
- Attributing outcomes to the measures
- Links between programme and process
- Explanation of link between measures and outcomes

### What is needed for a successful evaluation?

A successful evaluation of an organic action plan should be carefully prepared. The following key questions might be useful:

- What is the purpose (aims, objectives, desired outcomes) of the evaluation?
- Is the scope defined as specifically as possible (e.g. the nature of the programme and the period to be evaluated)?
- Is an evaluation planned from the outset, with an appropriate monitoring programme and baseline data in place?
- When and at what the stage of the policy cycle is the evaluation to be carried out (ex-ante, mid-term, ex-post)?
- What type of evaluation is needed (formative – to assist future planning; summative – to evaluate past actions; or both)?
- Who is the agency/organisation who will commission the evaluation and who will conduct the evaluation (consultants, stakeholders, others)?
- What is the appropriate timescale (schedule) over which the evaluation should be conducted?
- How and by whom can the results of the evaluation be used (dissemination, management and decision making)?
- Have any relevant evaluations or reviews previously been conducted?
- Will the evaluation meet the quality assurance guidelines (e.g. SEVAL, MEANS or other)?
- Have clearly defined terms of reference for the evaluation been defined?<sup>90</sup>

## Steps in preparing an evaluation

A number of clearly defined steps are required in preparing for an evaluation; these are outlined in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1** Steps in preparing an evaluation <sup>91</sup>

Type	A Formative	B	C Summative	D
<b>Timing with respect to action plan implementation</b>	<b>Before (ex-ante)</b>	<b>Mid-term</b>	<b>Mid-term</b>	<b>After (ex-post)</b>
<b>Who commissions the evaluations?</b>	Action plan groups, administrations	Action plan groups, administrations	Action plan groups, administrations	Administrations, researchers, auditors
<b>Deciding on the evaluation</b>				
<b>Defining the scope</b>	What will be evaluated? Define: geographical, temporal and funding limits and interactions with the ongoing policy cycle			
<b>Specifying the motives</b>	e.g. identifying relevant policy goals and/or measures; improving programme relevance and coherence; identifying baseline/status quo	e.g. proposing reallocation of resources, modifications to (fine tuning of) measures	e.g. preliminary evaluation of outputs, results, impacts; trend analysis	e.g. validating best practice; determining cost effectiveness; basis for future policy choices
<b>Planning the participation of the main partners in a steering group</b>	Include: policy-makers; beneficiary representatives, researchers, other affected stakeholders etc.	Include: as A and managers of measures, implementation officials and others working with beneficiaries (e.g. consultants)	Include: as B	Include: spokespersons of concerned groups (stakeholders – those affected and affecting)

Type	A Formative	B	C Summative	D
<b>Drawing up terms of reference</b>				
Asking partners to express their expectations; selecting evaluative questions and judgement criteria	Rationale, relevance and coherence	Coherence effectiveness and efficiency	Coherence effectiveness and efficiency	Effectiveness and efficiency of results and impacts
Recalling the regulatory framework and describing the programme	Programme proposal	Review and amend programme	Describe the programme as it was applied	As C
Listing available knowledge	Including evaluations of previous programmes	Including ex-ante evaluations	Including ex-ante evaluations	Including mid-term evaluations
Checking feasibility of evaluation methods and questions	Checking the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and utility of the evaluation			
Defining rules of conduct, schedule and budget	Including constraints on the scheduling of the evaluation, especially regarding the decision-making schedule			
<b>Launching the evaluation</b>				
Defining skills requirements for the evaluation team selection	Often a mixed team with specific knowledge of the programme area and evaluations independent of the commissioner			
Planning evaluation work, particularly quality control measures	Define and implement quality assurance process			

## Steps in performing an evaluation

There are three clear steps in performing an evaluation, presented in Table 7.2.

- Examining the logic of the plan;
- Examining the effects of the plan;
- Formulating, validating and utilising the conclusions.

**Table 7.2** Steps in performing an evaluation <sup>92</sup>

Type	A Formative	B	C Summative	D
<b>Timing with respect to action plan implementation</b>	<b>Before (ex-ante)</b>	<b>Mid-term</b>	<b>Mid-term</b>	<b>After (ex-post)</b>
<b>Examining the logic of the programme <sup>93</sup></b>				
Analysing the strategy and assessing its relevance, including clarity and coherence of objectives	Highly important	Is strategy still relevant in light of changing context? Are objectives understood by managers and operators?	Is implementation consistent with original strategy?	What objectives were actually followed and how do they differ from planned strategy?
Examining coherence between objectives, resources and action points (measures)	Assessment necessary for forward planning	Need to ensure continued compatibility to avoid implementation failure		Does coherence explain success/failure of programme?
Identifying results and expected impacts	Projections, target-setting, cross-impacts matrix	Are projections, targets still appropriate?	How does actual uptake compare with targets?	How well have results and impacts been achieved?
Examining quality of the monitoring system	Are proposed indicators appropriate? Does baseline data exist?	Is monitoring system capturing usable data?		Is data capable of assessing effects?

Type	A Formative	B	C Summative	D
<b>Examining programme effects<sup>94</sup></b>				
Selecting and using existing information	To define baseline situation (status quo analysis)	To review progress and redirect resources, including monitoring data		To provide basic assessment of uptake, outputs, results and context
Carrying out additional surveys	To define status quo situation	May be needed where data not available from monitoring system		Provides more in-depth knowledge of specific results and impacts
Estimating results and impacts	Extrapolation from impacts of similar interventions	More in-depth analysis of specific result and impact mechanisms		Integrating full range of data sources, including research, and expert judgement
<b>Formulating, validating and utilising the conclusions<sup>95</sup></b>				
Interpreting results of surveys and analyses; preparing impartial judgement	Judgement on ambition of objectives and probability of achieving them	Judgement on progress of different measures and their contribution to success of the programme		Judgement of overall success of programme and cost-effectiveness
Writing up an evaluation	Formulating real conclusions by clearly answering evaluative questions			
Reflecting and acting on results, in appropriate stakeholder context	Adjusting objectives, monitoring system etc.	Improving measures and retargeting resources		Highlighting best practice and general lessons learned
Disseminating results	e.g. seminar for partners involved in design of next programme	e.g. publication of interim evaluation		e.g. seminar for authorities responsible for programme, publication of final evaluation
Monitoring actions taken, including defining who is responsible	Integrating status quo analysis in action plan document	Integrating conclusions in programme management and resource allocation		Integrating conclusions in determination of future policy directions

Aligning the time cycles of evaluations with the time cycles of programmes and policies can help ensure evaluations make their maximum contribution. It is better to deliver an incomplete or imperfect evaluation on time than to achieve a 10% improvement in evaluation quality and miss the window of opportunity when policy makers and programme managers can use evaluation results and incorporate the findings into the design of new programmes and policies.

### **Box 7.2** Evaluation of the Czech Republic's Second Organic Action Plan <sup>98</sup>

As part of the third 'Czech Action Plan for Development of Organic Farming 2016–2020' (Akční plán ČR pro rozvoj ekologického zemědělství v letech 2016–2020), an evaluation of the second action plan 2011–2015 is reported and used to support specific actions in the new plan.

The basis for the evaluation was the collection of information about all the major activities implemented in 2011–2015. Some activities formed part of the action plan, others were based on another (indirect) initiative. The evaluation took into account all the activities in the given period.

Key findings were:

- 11.7% (15% target) organic share of total agricultural acreage
- 11.4% (20% target) share of arable land in total organic acreage
- 0.7% (3% target) organic share of total volume of consumed foods
- 43% (60% target) Czech products share of organic food market
- 6.8% (20% target) annual increase in organic consumption

Key lessons learned from the evaluation process included:

- having more indicators and more quantitative/precise monitoring
- having a predefined group of responsible key actors (a so-called Implementation Commission) meeting at least 4 times a year
- having activity reports and performance indicators annually
- trying to link proposed activities/ suggestions for organic farming development with existing activities and programmes, looking for synergies
- expanding the Implementation Commission with organisations from outside the organic sector, but which were important for its development and for helping to find new solutions to intractable problems, for example how to make organic products available in schools.

## Practical experiences with the evaluation of organic action plans

A 2015 analysis of previous organic action plans revealed that there are few examples of formal evaluations being explicitly included as part of an action plan.<sup>96</sup> However, a previous evaluation of organic action plan evaluations done as part of the ORGAP project showed that in a few cases a systematic evaluation has been done.<sup>97</sup>

## 7.3 EVALUATING ACTION PLAN DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Many of the techniques proposed to improve action plan design and implementation in Sections 4-6 of this manual can also be applied to the evaluation of these issues.<sup>99</sup> There are three key areas to consider:

- The process of designing and implementing the plan, including the reasons for potential problems that may arise/have arisen
- The logical structure (coherence) and failure risks of the plan itself
- The level and effectiveness of stakeholder engagement

### 7.3.1 Evaluating programme design and implementation processes

The evaluation of the design and implementation process concerns the extent to which relevant information was obtained and utilised to support the process; whether best practice procedures were used in programme design; and whether effective communication strategies were used to support programme implementation.

Key useful questions include:<sup>100</sup>

- What was the extent (type, scale and policy orientation) of prior policy initiatives in support of organic food and farming (if any)?
- How was the agenda for the policy process defined and what were its characteristics (describe the policy process adopted)?
- What was the specific occasion/problem leading to the policy initiative, if any?

- What kind of analysis (if any) of the organic food sector and its needs was carried out in preparing the decision?
- Were results of previous evaluations available? If so, how were the results of these evaluations applied?
- What is the programme content (e.g. action plan action points) and relevant regulatory (legislative) framework?
- Were clear and specific (SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-dependent) objectives defined?<sup>101</sup>
- Was an appropriate theoretical basis developed to justify and assess the potential impact of the policy measures proposed and was it relevant in solving the original problem?
- Was an analysis of conflicts and synergies (coherence) and risks of implementation failure carried out?<sup>102</sup>
- What were/are the relevant alternative (complementary or exclusive) policy options that could have been implemented (could the desired results have been achieved by different or additional policies, such as a prohibition on nitrogen or pesticide use, by supporting integrated farming or by taxation)?
- What kind of changes in public or private organisations within the agricultural sector were required and/or made with specific relevance to organic food and farming?
- Was the strategy/programme finally developed relevant to the original problem and for how long did it remain relevant? If no longer relevant, what factors have changed to cause this?
- Who were the main actors involved in decision making?<sup>103</sup>
- What was the level of political conflict? What were the main discussion points? What proposals were rejected and why?
- How strong was the level of political commitment to the plan (very low, low, moderate, high, very high)?
- Which institution(s) was (were) responsible for the implementation of the plan (describe type and affiliation, e.g. governmental/non-governmental, and main characteristics of the institution(s), and assess the comprehension, willingness and capabilities of the institution(s) regarding policy objectiveness)?
- Were a separate budget and staff resources allocated to the action plan?<sup>104</sup>
- Which specific administrative issues/constraints could have influenced the implementation?
- Were monitoring and evaluation issues addressed appropriately from the outset?<sup>105</sup>
- Was an effective communication plan implemented, covering both administrators and beneficiaries?

## 7.3.2 Evaluating programme coherence

The basis for this part of an evaluation is the best practice guidelines set out in Section 4.4 of this manual.<sup>106</sup>

### First step: identification of objectives<sup>107</sup>

The first step is to identify both the implicit and explicit objectives (ideally formulated in a SMART form) and to structure them in a hierarchical framework so that the link between overall aims, strategic objectives and individual action points can be clearly seen. At this point, inadequacies in objective specification or logical structure should become obvious.

Where aims and objectives are not clearly specified, the following questions may be helpful in terms of specifying aims and objectives that can be evaluated:

- Do the overall aims (top level) set out in Section 4.3 of this manual correspond to the action plan to be evaluated? If not, which should be added or deleted?
- Do the strategic objectives set out in Section 4.3, supplemented by any published action plan aims, reflect the implicit as well as explicit aims of the action plan? If not, which should be added or deleted?
- In the context of the action plan and specific regional, national or international situation to be evaluated, to what extent (e.g. not at all, partly, highly, completely) are the defined objectives SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-dependent)?
- Can the action points and the defined overall aims and strategic objectives be structured in a hierarchical objectives diagram or table, identifying cause and effect relationships and, where relevant, additional implicit objectives?

### Second step: identification of synergies and conflicts

The second step is to evaluate the degree of synergy and conflict between objectives/action points, which can be done using the cross-impact matrix approach outlined in Section 4.4.1.<sup>108</sup> Experts involved in this evaluation process (the evaluation team) should identify any synergy which may exist between pairs of measures and be asked to match quantitative evaluations on conflicts and synergies with qualitative comments and explanations of the ratings given.

Depending on the structure of the programme concerned, it will be more relevant to analyse synergy between the axes, the measures, the actions or the projects. The level of analysis chosen obviously depends on the number of programme components at each level. Some programmes consist of only a few projects, which makes it possible to rapidly analyse synergy at a particular level. If the number of projects is very high, it may be preferable to analyse synergy at the level of policy measures or strategic objectives. The choice of a level of analysis can be made by referring to the objectives hierarchy.

### Third step: identification of implementation failure

The third step is to evaluate the potential for implementation failure, taking account of the possible failure mode cause and effects, the likelihood of a particular failure mode occurring, the probability of its detection and the severity of impact, as discussed in Section 6.<sup>109</sup>

Table 7.3 illustrates the application of part of this process to the EU Organic Action Plan.<sup>110</sup> Each of the cases is ranked from that with the highest risk priority number, RPN (lack of stakeholder involvement) to the lowest (different interests between Member States). Thus, inadequate stakeholder involvement has the highest likelihood of occurring and being detected, and the most severe impact.

**Table 7.3** The failure mode applied to a typical organic action plan

Cause	Effect
Lack of stakeholder involvement	Lack of capacity building
Inadequate communication and promotion	Lack of knowledge/awareness on OF
Lack of information	Lack of political interest to support OF
Weak lobbying for OF	No mandatory implementation of AP
Research not developed enough	Insufficient importance given to OF
Non-organic interests working against organic lobby	Lack of financial resources
Different priorities among states/regions	General implementation problems
Different interests between national and regional levels	Inadequate rules/procedures

OF = Organic Farming    AP= Action Plan    MS = Member State

### 7.3.3 Evaluating stakeholder involvement

Stakeholders may be involved at any stage of the policy cycle (agenda setting, policy formulation, decision making, implementation and evaluation). As part of an evaluation of an organic action plan it may be worth assessing the level and nature of stakeholder involvement: which stakeholders were involved at each stage, to what extent were they involved by policy makers, did stakeholders themselves seek involvement, and what came out of their involvement?<sup>111</sup> These and other questions may be relevant as part of any evaluation assessing the conditions for successful implementation since a high level of stakeholder involvement may be expected to result in a high level of successful implementation. Stakeholder involvement may even be an end in itself and hence evaluation may be part of assessing the extent to which this goal has been reached.

#### **Grouping the stakeholders for the evaluation**

There are potentially numerous stakeholders involved in action plans on organic food and farming. They should be grouped according to the kind of stakes/interests they represent in this context. One type of grouping is mentioned in Section 5 regarding the three key perspectives of the first EU Organic Action Plan: organic values perspectives, market perspectives and public goods perspectives. Some stakeholders are central to all perspectives while others are central only to one perspective and others have peripheral involvement, possibly only to one perspective. Moreover, some stakeholders represent the organic sector while others represent mixed or solely non-organic sectors. On the basis of the grouping of stakeholders it is possible to assess the balance of stakeholders involved at any stage of the policy cycle. Are all central stakeholders involved equally in all stages? Are some peripheral stakeholders involved more than central ones? Or are certain types of stakeholders left out from certain stages? There may be good reasons for involving various stakeholders to different extents in various stages of the policy process, but these reasons need to be clarified as part of the evaluation.

## Assessing resources and level of conflicts

Having categorised the stakeholders involved and the degree of their involvement, it may be worth identifying the type of resources exchanged between stakeholders within the policy cycle and what impact on policy contents came out of these exchanges. The three main resources are information, legitimacy and power/ influence. Which types of stakeholders delivered which kind of resources and what did they get in exchange? Such questions may be asked of key actors at every stage of the policy process and may help in explaining the content of the action plan and why certain parts of it were implemented more successfully than others. Finally, the assessment may include the level of conflict and the level of communication between stakeholders in attempts to explain outcomes.

## What has to be considered for the evaluation of stakeholder involvement? <sup>112</sup>

For each relevant stage of the policy cycle (agenda setting, policy formulation/decision making, implementation and evaluation), the following questions should be addressed, where necessary taking account of the perspectives of different informants (e.g. government, organic sector, research):

- 1. With respect to ALL relevant stakeholders (whether involved or not), identify the following information for each stakeholder in tabular form:**
  - a. The identity and type of the relevant stakeholders/stakeholder groups
  - b. Their specific areas of interest (e.g. agriculture, food, environment, consumer, health, animal welfare)
  - c. Their level of expertise with respect to the policy area
  - d. Their priorities, objectives and 'authority'
  - e. Their involvement in the policy process – where appropriate give reasons
  - f. The degree of impact of the proposed policy on the different stakeholders
  - g. Their orientation to the policy
  - h. Their influence on the policy – explain why?

Based on this tabulated information and other relevant sources, consider:

**2. The overall result concerning involvement of stakeholders:**

- a. What priority was given to the involvement of stakeholders?
- b. How well, and by which stakeholders, were the main stakeholder perspectives (organic values/principles, market/business and public goods (environment etc.) covered?
- c. To what extent can the process of stakeholder involvement be considered to be unbiased?
- d. How well did the process balance desirable inclusion, engagement, legitimisation and knowledge on the one hand, against undesirable promotion of personal, business or institutional interests on the other?
- e. How satisfied were the stakeholders with the process?

**3. The actual engagement by stakeholders in the policy process and with each other:**

- a. What influence (effect) did the decision to implement the policy process have on stakeholders?
- b. Which stakeholders promoted which ideas?
- c. What was the fate of their suggestions and for what reasons?
- d. Who supported/opposed them and for what reasons?
- e. What conflicts, if any, arose between different types of stakeholders?
- f. What was the degree of conflict?

**4. The level of communication and understanding of the policy process and outcomes:**

- a. What mechanisms were used to promote two-way communication with stakeholders?<sup>113</sup>
- b. How were the plans and activities for involving stakeholders documented and communicated?
- c. How well did stakeholders understand the policy and have the capability and willingness to act and effect policy change?
- d. To what extent did involvement in the policy process lead to learning and understanding by stakeholders?

## 7.4 EVALUATING ACTION PLAN EFFECTS

It is one thing to evaluate the way in which an action plan has been developed and implemented, and another to evaluate the effects or outcomes of that action plan. Most evaluations will seek to quantify the effects as far as possible, in order to determine the scale of the benefit relative to the resources invested. In the case of complex policy programmes such as action plans, this usually involves the definition and measurement of a system of indicators that can be evaluated using techniques such as multi-criteria analysis.<sup>114</sup>

However, this may not always be possible, either because there is inadequate data or other evidence to determine the size of the effect, or because causal relationships between the policy measure and the effect observed are difficult to establish. In such cases, it might be necessary to rely on expert judgement approaches.<sup>115</sup>

### 7.4.1 Developing and using indicators for evaluation<sup>116</sup>

Indicators provide a means of measuring the effect of an action or policy measure on an objective and are usually accompanied by criteria (of a pass/fail or score type) that allow a judgement to be made as to whether or how well an objective has been achieved. The choice of indicators will therefore be based on the defined objectives of an organic action plan, as well as any additional implicit objectives that may be derived as part of the evaluation process outlined in Section 7.3.2.

#### **What makes a useful indicator?**

Indicators are often chosen to represent complex issues in a simple way that can be easily quantified or described in qualitative terms. 'A good indicator must provide simple information that both the supplier and the user can easily communicate and understand.'<sup>117</sup> Indicators should be policy-relevant, analytically sound, measurable and easy to interpret.

Indicators must be relevant for decision makers and should be closely linked to the goals and objectives of stakeholders. For the indicators to

be accepted widely, stakeholders must include a wide range of people who have the power to affect policy development and those who will be affected by the policy.

However, their choice is also influenced by the costs of obtaining data relative to the benefits that the data will yield. An indicator that is exact and close to a problem (e.g. soil analyses to measure actual nitrate leaching) may be very expensive for the purpose of assessing pollution from agriculture on an EU-wide scale, whereas an alternative indicator (such as the area of organically managed land, based on the assumption that organic farming leads to reduced pollution) might be much easier to obtain, but also much less precise in terms of cause and effect relationships.

### Linking indicators to objectives

In addition to questions of data availability, precision and cost/benefit relationships, indicators need to be relevant to be effective, i.e. clearly *linked to specific objectives* on the basis of a clear concept of the effect that a particular policy or action will have on that objective (i.e. an impact statement derived from the policy measure included in the organic action plan). There should also be a clear understanding of how an indicator result can be used to indicate performance with respect to the objective – criteria are required to determine whether the indicators show a) positive or negative changes over time, b) success or failure or c) degree of success (a grading or scoring system). In this context, the SMART criteria for defining objectives are relevant.

The precise definition and quantification of indicators may not be possible in all or many cases, and a judgement-based evaluation may need to be undertaken. Such evaluations may involve the judgement of an individual assessor or a group of assessors. In these situations, a process for eliciting expert opinion will be required.

The choice of indicators requires careful consideration: they must be appropriate for decision making and evaluation for each situation. In each case, thought must be given to the temporal, geographical and organisational scale at which the indicator will be measured, and evaluations will be made.

## Different types of indicators

Appropriate indicators for organic action plan evaluation will also reflect the different hierarchical levels of objectives. A classification of indicators is outlined in Box 7.3.

### Box 7.3 Classification of indicators

There are different types of indicators, each of which serves different purposes:

- ▶ **Design process indicators** provide information on the nature of the design process, including the degree and quality of stakeholder involvement and the relevance (nearness) of the process to the target beneficiaries.
- ▶ **Programme or context indicators** provide information on the business, social and environmental characteristics of the organic sector, including its position relative to agriculture and the food industry overall.
- ▶ **Resource and implementation process indicators** provide information on the resources used by operators in implementing a policy or programme (financial, human, material, organisational and regulatory resources), including stakeholder involvement in the implementation process.
- ▶ **Output indicators** represent the direct effect of the programme on the immediate beneficiaries, for example the number of hectares supported or the number of farmers participating in a scheme, or other measures of uptake with respect to specific actions in an organic action plan.
- ▶ **Result indicators** represent the immediate advantages for direct beneficiaries of the programme that are indirectly a result of programme activity, for example the increase in farm incomes or market share – these are most likely to relate to the sectoral-level objectives focused on the performance of a sector against a defined set of goals and the programme's beneficiaries.
- ▶ **Impact indicators** represent the effects of the changes made by beneficiaries as a result of the programme on wider public policy goals, for example environmental protection or animal welfare goals – these are most likely to relate to the societal-level objectives and 'state' indicators (impacts on the environment) and 'response' indicators (changes in policy in response to changes in the environment).

Indicators must identify:

- The immediate ability of the organic action plan to develop the organic farming and food sectors – output and result indicators are particularly relevant
- The wider effects of organic sector development as a result of the organic action plan with respect to agri-environmental and rural development policy goals – here the impact indicators are relevant
- The process of design and implementation, including stakeholder involvement – here process indicators are relevant

Organic stakeholders are more likely to be interested in the output and result indicators. These reflect the effect of the organic action plans on the organic community. Policy makers may have more interest in the impact indicators. Thus, the selection of indicators can lead to conflicting policy evaluation results. Nevertheless, the needs of all the different groups interested in the outcomes of evaluations should be considered in the choice of indicators.

### Indicators have to be linked to the evaluation types

Table 7.4 shows where particular types of indicators may be relevant in the different types of evaluation.

**Table 7.4** Linking indicators and evaluation types

Type	A Formative	B	C Summative	D
Timing with respect to action plan implementation	Before (ex-ante)	Mid-term	Mid-term	After (ex-post)
Design process	Yes	Yes		Yes
Programme/ context	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Resources and implementation process	Budgets and planned procedures	Compare budgets with actual and revise		Yes
Outputs	Predicted, baseline	Key to review implementation progress	Yes	Yes
Results	Predicted, baseline		Preliminary assessment	Final assessment
Impacts	Predicted, baseline		Preliminary assessment	Final assessment

## Defining indicators using impact statements

The EVALSED Guide and Sourcebook<sup>118</sup> (and older MEANS approach) contains useful suggestions on methods of producing and using indicators. In particular, they highlight that a system of indicators has more chance of functioning when the suppliers and the users of the information have been involved in its creation, suggesting that a closed group of specialists will be tempted to construct an expensive, technically ideal system which may never be operational. To solve this problem, it is suggested that a steering group including data suppliers and users should be established, which should take responsibility for defining the indicators. This group may be very similar to the group that might be responsible for conducting the evaluation. Broader public or stakeholder involvement could be achieved through a series of workshops or interviews to provide input into the steering group discussions.

The following seven-step process is recommended to define appropriate indicators:<sup>119</sup>

1. Specify or clarify the objectives (or small number of objective groups) as described earlier in the manual
2. Define impact statements (based on literature or experts' views; see example in Box 7.4) and structuring them in an effects diagram (see Figure 7.1)
3. Use the effects diagram to cluster impact statements to identify a few key impacts and reduce the potential number of indicators
4. Using the clustered impact statements and the generic indicator list<sup>120</sup> as a guide, identify a parsimonious list of indicators relevant to the specific programme to be evaluated
5. Quantify and describe the indicators using appropriate data sources<sup>121</sup>
6. Define performance criteria for specific indicators, e.g. do they show success or failure and to what degree?<sup>122</sup>
7. Conduct a quality assessment of the individual indicators and the indicator system<sup>123</sup>

**Box 7.4** Example of how to derive impact statements and indicators from action plan objectives

**Action (Objective) 1:**

Provide direct financial support for organic land management

**Action 2:**

Provide financial support for conversion-related advice

**Impact statement 1:**

The provision of direct financial support will increase/increased the area of land under organic management (e.g. hectares).

**Impact statement 2:**

The support for conversion advice will increase/increased the area of land under organic management (could also consider the quality of that management).

**Indicator (combining linked impact statements):**

Area under organic management

These impact statements and indicators could be linked, in turn, to higher-level objectives (aims/goals):

**Aim (top-level objective):** Maintaining and enhancing the environment

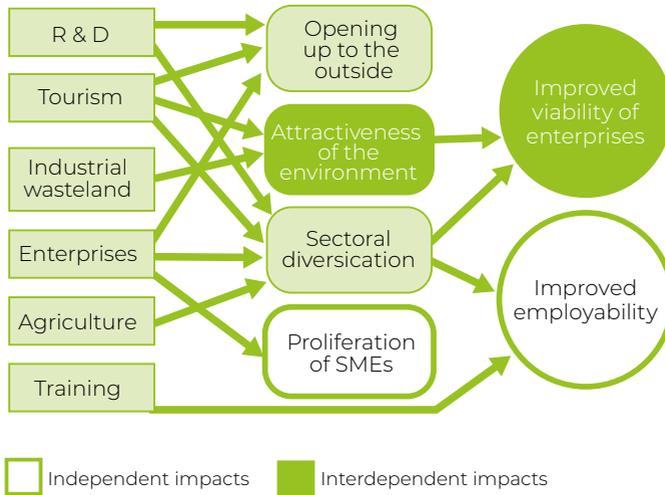
**Impact statement:** Research shows that organic management generally has a positive (how big?) impact on the environment, so that an increase in land area under organic management benefits the environment.

**Indicator (as for lower-level objectives):** Area under organic management

Using this approach, area under organic management can serve as an indicator for several objectives and is a relatively easy indicator to quantify at reasonable cost. However, it could be argued that the area under organic management indicator is too imprecise to measure the environmental impact, and that a more closely related indicator, such as nutrient balances, would be preferable, provided that the data can be obtained/estimated at reasonable cost. This needs to be considered in the context of individual evaluations, depending both on priorities and the resources (expertise as well as financial) available locally.

## Visualising effect relationships and impacts

The process of identifying and structuring cause and effect relationships and impact statements can be facilitated by using effects diagrams. An example of an effects diagram is provided in Figure 7.2.



**Figure 7.2** Example of an effects diagram showing the links between policy measures/action points and impacts <sup>125</sup>

## Simplification and reduction of number of indicators

In complex, multi-objective/multi-policy programmes, the temptation is to measure everything, including the output and results for each action, but if an organic action plan has 20 or more actions, the number of indicators would quickly grow out of control. Simplification can be achieved by distinguishing between the needs of operators monitoring delivery, and the indicators needed for programme evaluation, which may require the input of only a part of the monitoring data collected by operators.

## Key generic indicators for organic action plans

On the basis of national and European level consultation in the ORGAP and other research projects, Table 7.5 provides a list of key generic indicators that have been defined, with further details available on each as part of the ORGAP evaluation toolbox.

**Table 7.5** List of key generic indicators for organic action plans <sup>126</sup>

### **Generic Indicators**

#### **A: Design process indicators**

- A1 Programme content
- A2 Programme design scoring
- A3 Programme design qualitative assessment
- A4 Stakeholder engagement (qualitative assessment)

#### **B: Resource and implementation process indicators**

- B1 Budgeted/planned expenditure for individual actions or plan in total
- B2 Number of staff months allocated to implementation for individual actions or plan in total
- B3 Legal framework for programme
- B4 Monitoring/evaluation implemented from start of programme
- B5 Stakeholder engagement (qualitative assessment)

#### **C: Output indicators**

- C1a Number (or proportion) of action points achieved/completed with description
- C1b Number (or proportion) of action points started/in progress with description
- C2 Actual expenditure on individual actions or plan in total
- C3 Area/holdings/businesses/people/animals/projects/events supported by individual action points
- C4 Availability of statistical data to meet business and policy evaluation needs by topic/indicator

#### **D: Result indicators**

- D1 Number of certified organic and in-conversion holdings
- D2 Area of certified organic and in-conversion land
- D3 Organic farm incomes
- D4 Number of certified market operators
- D5 Organic market size (retail sales value and/or volume) by region
- D6 Consumer confidence and trust
- D7 Business confidence
- D8 Number of control organisations
- D9 Number of inspection visits
- D10 Number/frequency of revisions to key regulations
- D11 Regulatory burden on businesses
- D12 Number of research and extension organisations supporting organic food and farming

#### **E: Impact indicators**

- E1 Overall environmental impact
- E2 Overall animal health and welfare impact
- E3 Overall social impact
- E4 Overall economic/rural development impact
- E5 Overall food quality/safety/security impact

## 7.5 OVERALL EVALUATION OF ORGANIC ACTION PLANS – JUDGING SUCCESS

Many of the evaluation tools presented in this manual have been developed in the context of relatively simple programmes where the use of one or a few indicators presents no major problems. The challenge with complex policy programmes, such as organic action plans with their multiple objectives, multiple action points and policy instruments and multiple stakeholders and beneficiaries, is to reach a conclusion that reflects all the different elements fairly and appropriately.

Key questions that need to be asked at this stage include:<sup>127</sup>

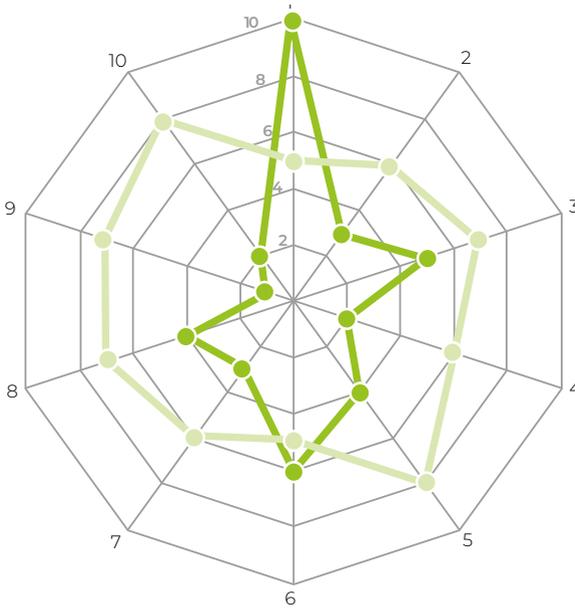
1. Is the quality of the evaluation acceptable so that it can provide a sound basis for learning and future actions?
2. How can the indicator results be interpreted and do all stakeholders perceive the results in the same way?
3. Can combinations of indicator results provide greater insights? For example, if planned expenditure, committed expenditure and actual expenditure are looked at together, is there evidence of implementation failure that might not be seen if the indicators are looked at individually?
4. Were certain policy instruments more cost-effective than others? (i.e. would the same amount of resources achieve greater results if used in another way?)
5. Were the overall environmental and economic benefits positive?
6. What external factors (economic or policy shocks, animal health epidemics) might have influenced the outcomes significantly?
7. What would have happened if there had been no action plan in place (the counter-factual situation)?
8. Are there unmet needs that still need to be addressed?

### **Integrating results from several indicators**

Whilst it might be tempting to combine the results from several indicators into a single overall score or index, this is not advisable, as important details may be lost, and the weightings used (if any) are likely to reflect only one particular perspective amongst many.

An alternative way of dealing with multiple indicators is to visualise them using radar or 'cobweb' diagrams, especially when comparing

different options (Figure 7.3). One option may perform very well with respect to one objective, but relatively poorly on the others, while another option may not score so well on that one objective, but the higher score achieved for the others gives a better rating overall.



**Figure 7.3** A hypothetical radar or 'cobweb' diagram

### Using multi-criteria analysis

A more formalised approach is to use multi-criteria analysis, a decision-making tool used to assess alternative projects taking several criteria into account simultaneously in a complex situation. The method is designed to reflect the opinions of different actors, and their participation is central to the approach. It may result in a single synthetic conclusion, or a range reflecting the different perspectives of partners.

Many of the stages in the multi-criteria analysis approach are similar to the procedures outlined here for structuring objectives and defining indicators. The key issue at the synthesis stage is how the weightings for (and trade-offs between) performance criteria are determined (by the evaluators or by the stakeholders).<sup>128</sup>

## Other techniques suitable for evaluating organic action plans

Other formalised techniques that might be relevant include cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis, benchmarking, and environmental impact analysis.<sup>129</sup> Some of these involve the allocation of monetary values to outcomes that normally are unpriced, potentially making them more difficult to apply. However, if it can be done, then a measure of return to the resources invested in the action plan might be determined.

## Use of expert panels

An alternative approach to synthesising judgements is to use expert panels.<sup>130</sup> In this context, however, the expert/stakeholder panel is not being used to develop policy proposals or evaluate impacts in the context of individual indicators, but to collectively produce a value judgement on the programme as a whole. Expert panels are used to reach consensus on complex and ill-structured questions for which other tools do not provide univocal or credible answers. It is a particularly useful tool in relation to complex programmes, when it seems too difficult or complicated, in an evaluation, to embark on explanations or the grading of criteria in order to formulate conclusions. Expert panels can take account of the quantitative and qualitative information assembled as part of the evaluation, as well as the previous and external experiences of the experts.

The experts are chosen to represent all points of view, in a balanced and impartial way. Experts are independent specialists, recognised in the domain of the evaluated programme. They are asked to examine all the data and all the analyses made during the evaluation, and then to highlight consensus on the conclusions that the evaluation must draw, and particularly on the answers to give to evaluative questions. The panel does not fully explain its judgement references nor its trade-off between criteria, but the credibility of the evaluation is guaranteed by the fact that the conclusions result from consensus between people who are renowned specialists and represent the different schools of expertise. The advantage of this type of approach is that it takes account of the different possible interpretations of the results that might be made by different experts.<sup>131</sup>

## Making the most of the evaluation

It is pointless completing an evaluation if the report is then filed away and nothing is done with it. There is a need to reflect and act on the results, in an appropriate stakeholder context such as an action plan steering group. In an ex-ante or mid-term review, this may involve adjusting objectives, improving monitoring procedures, refining the measures or retargeting resources. In an ex-post, summative context the emphasis might be more on highlighting best practice and the general lessons learned (see Tables 7.1 and 7.2 of this manual).<sup>132</sup>

The results then need to be communicated effectively, for example through seminars and publications, to a range of groups:

- ▶ Programme administrators, particularly where adjustments to programmes are required or lessons need to be learned to avoid implementation problems that may have arisen
- ▶ Beneficiaries and other industry stakeholders, to demonstrate that lessons have been learned, and that feedback has been taken seriously and acted upon
- ▶ Policy makers who may be involved in the design of future programmes.

Finally, there is a need to be clear about who is responsible for taking actions arising from the evaluation, and for monitoring that the actions have been taken.

## Organic Action Plans – Recommendations

Organic action plans offer the organic sector, policy makers and other stakeholders a framework for coordinating public policies and private or voluntary-led initiatives at different governance levels – regional, national or European, to support the development of organic food and farming across Europe. To this end there are some key recommendations that can help to ensure successful organic action plan development, implementation and evaluation.

### **1. Undertake a thorough status quo analysis of the organic sector, involving key stakeholder groups, to identify relevant development needs and priorities**

- 1.1 An understanding of the organic food and farming sector and where it is situated in the wider agri-food industry, including the relevant policy areas of the country or region, is needed to inform the development of the plan's objectives.
- 1.2 Different stakeholder groups ranging from policy makers and administrators to organic and non-organic producers, SMEs and civil society should be closely involved the identification of the needs and priorities based on a partnership approach.
- 1.3 An analysis of the organic sector's internal strengths, weaknesses and external opportunities and threats (SWOT) should be undertaken to identify specific development needs and priorities

### **2. Stimulate participatory stakeholder involvement throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation phases, recognising that stakeholders can lead actions as well as benefit from them**

- 2.1 A participatory approach, based on a partnership between policy makers and stakeholders, encourages ownership, ensures a high degree of acceptance of the outcomes of the process and helps to assign leadership roles on certain actions.
- 2.2 Allow sufficient time for planning and consultation (about 12-18 months) to inform the development of the plan's objectives and action points.

- 2.3 A transparent process and good communication amongst the different government departments, agencies and stakeholders involved is critical.

### **3. Link the plan to the country or region's overall strategies for stimulating wider economic and rural development and achieving environmental and other societal benefits**

- 3.1 A plan is a strategic instrument for strengthening the organic sector, but as governments are unlikely to support the development of the organic sector just for its own sake, it must be seen as a means to an end and not an end in itself.
- 3.2 Reference should be made to European, national or regional policies that impact on the sustainable development of the agri-food sector, including areas related to the environment and climate change, health and well-being, and green growth and job creation.
- 3.3 A successful plan should involve relevant government departments, such as agriculture and food, health, education, sustainable development, environment and research, where a strengthened organic sector can contribute to meeting their policy aims.

### **4. Define strategic objectives that are clear, measurable and prioritised to be achieved within a relevant timescale**

- 4.1 Objectives need to be precisely formulated to ensure a clear focus to the plan. More general objectives may be supported by all stakeholders, but results-orientated objectives allow for better targeting of resources.
- 4.2 Objectives should be ambitious, but also realistic, and require clear prioritisation in order to secure the support and credibility of key stakeholder interests.
- 4.3 An appropriate balance between economic, social and environmental objectives is needed which stimulates organic market growth and recognises the provision of public goods from organic land management.

### **5. Select actions that are well aligned with the plan's objectives and clearly address the needs of the organic sector in the country or region**

- 5.1 Focusing on specific needs, grounded in the status quo analysis, can help to prioritise objectives, better target and tailor actions

and prevent the plan from becoming a wish-list of aspirations.

- 5.2 Detailed specification of each action point, including the targets, resourcing and responsibilities, linked to the plan's overall aims and strategic objectives, is required.

## **6. Ensure a balance between 'supply-push' and 'demand-pull' actions which recognise SME needs for high quality produce and public goods from organic land management**

- 6.1 Exploiting synergies and avoiding conflicts between 'supply-push' (producer-focused) and 'demand-pull' (consumer-focused) action points is needed to support producers and SMEs to develop new and existing supply chains, whilst ensuring sufficient demand for organic produce.
- 6.2 Full use should be made of all relevant policy instruments available at regional, national or European level, reflecting the organic sector's contribution to wider economic and societal goals, many of which come from organic land management, rather than the organic market.

## **7. Enable knowledge and information exchange to support a growing organic sector, particularly if there are many new entrants**

- 7.1 Specialised professional training and advice is crucial for both producers and SMEs who may wish to make the move to organics. Producer knowhow of organic land management is essential, while SMEs have an active role to play in working directly with producers to improve practice and quality.
- 7.2 Awareness-raising programmes are required for professionals working with new and existing producers and SMEs involved in the organic value chains.
- 7.3 Formal education in organic food and farming is also important to promote generational renewal and create a better skilled organic workforce for the future including producers, SMEs, advisors, administrators, policy makers and other service providers.
- 7.4 A research and innovation programme and knowledge platform should be established to support the collection and dissemination of technical and market data, encourage information sharing between stakeholders and strengthen capacities and knowhow within the organic sector. At EU level, for example, specific funding is available through Horizon 2020 – the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

## **8. Improve organic consumers' and citizens' access to and awareness and understanding of organic food and farming**

- 8.1 Promotion campaigns can help clarify what organic standards deliver in terms of sustainable land management, animal welfare and food quality, and how organic products can be identified and where they can be found.
- 8.2 Specific funding available at EU level, for example, to support organic stakeholders developing information and promotional campaigns and action should be fully utilised collectively by both producers and SMEs.
- 8.3 Public and private procurement has great potential to improve access to organic food and increase consumers' and citizens' awareness and understanding of sustainable production and consumption from farm to fork. Existing initiatives for developing green public procurement, such as national and private standards for organic food and catering services, as well as the EU's voluntary guidelines, may be helpful in designing new initiatives.

## **9. Allocate sufficient financial and human resources to implement the plan, including specific funding from both private and public sources, that build on existing programmes**

- 9.1 Adequate staffing in the relevant ministries, departments and agencies is needed for both the plan's development and its implementation. The different administrative levels and competencies necessary for successful implementation should be carefully considered.
- 9.2 A specific and dedicated budget, taking advantage of existing regional, national or European policies, can help to successfully deliver on all action points. Specific initiatives to secure political support from Ministers, policy makers and parliamentarians may be required.
- 9.3 Available support for organic and sustainable land management activities, infrastructural investment, knowledge transfer and innovation, for example under the EU's Rural Development Programmes, should be fully utilised.
- 9.4 Organic SME development and entrepreneurship, and other organic initiatives, must be prioritised across all relevant public funds, for example the European Structural and Investment funds and in particular the European Regional Development Fund as well

as funding related to research and innovation. Transparent and simple schemes for producers and SMEs to obtain support are essential.

- 9.5 Public-private partnerships are also essential for SMEs to invest in high quality produce and public goods delivery. This could involve organic organisations and businesses bidding individually or collectively for specific European, national or regional schemes or projects as well as providing financial contributions, independently of direct government involvement.

## **10. Integrate regular monitoring and evaluation from the outset**

- 10.1 Evaluation is a vital part of the process to learn from experiences and/or to assess the impact of the plan's implementation, and as a tool to support development of future plans. It needs to be made clear from the outset what type of evaluation is required and how and by whom the results will be used; this increases transparency and accountability.
- 10.2 Well-designed objectives and actions will aid the monitoring and evaluation process. Specific indicators, which may be quantitative and/or qualitative, need to be closely linked to the plan's objectives and to balance cost and accuracy considerations. The ORGAPET toolbox, developed in the ORGAP project, provides useful resources for choosing indicators for specific objectives.

# Annex 1: Key elements of organic action plan development

At the outset of Organic Action Plan development, the key elements listed below should be taken into consideration. Some of the key elements apply generally to action plans, whilst others are specific to organic food and farming.

## Phase 1: Agenda Setting

The characteristics of the process for setting the agenda of the policy making process, in particular the definition of the specific issues/problems leading to the policy initiative, if any.

The extent of prior policy initiatives in support of organic food and farming (if any) should be taken into account – including the outcome of completed evaluations.

The findings of status quo analysis (if any) of the organic food and farming sector. A status quo analysis of the organic sector is the precursor to the definition of objectives.

Summary of relevant legislative framework such as the EU Policy framework for supporting organic sector development

## Phase 2: Policy formulation

Setting clear and unambiguous objectives, which should be ‘SMART’ (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-dependent), but also take into account the complex systems and multiple objectives inherent to organic food and farming. These should consider the relationship between high-level economic and social and environmental aims, and strategic objectives.

Definition of the motivations and mechanisms of the policy objectives and measures/action points (the ‘programme theory’) and their relevance to reaching the strategic objectives.

An assessment of the relevant alternative (complementary or exclusive) policy options to be implemented.

An analysis of the conflicts and synergies (coherence) of the possible policy measures and risk of failure, including due attention to the different emphases that will be placed on these by different stakeholders (e.g. ethical value orientation versus purely market orientation) – results may imply adjustments of objectives and policy measures.

Indicators should be chosen that are relevant to decision makers. They may be developed by defining and clustering impact statements in a participatory process and need to be closely linked to the goals and objectives of stakeholders. They need to be described and possibly quantified. However, their choice is also influenced by the costs of obtaining data relative to the benefits that the data will yield. ORGAPET includes a list of indicators relevant to organic food and farming policies.

Ensure that monitoring and evaluation issues are addressed appropriately from the outset and are fully integrated into programme planning and management.

### **Phase 3: Implementation**

Definition of the institution(s) responsible for the implementation of the action plan (describing the type and affiliation, e.g. governmental/non-governmental) and main characteristics of the institution(s) in terms of their comprehension, willingness and capabilities regarding the agreed policy objectives.

Allocation of a separate budget and staff resources for the implementation of the action plan.

Understanding the specific administrative issues/constraints which may affect implementation.

Finding public-private partnership solutions for effective implementation with all involved stakeholders.

### **Phase 4: Evaluation**

Use a generally accepted evaluation standard but also develop specific indicators (standards) appropriate to the national action plan; ORGAPET provides a procedure for selection of indicators and examples.

Clearly differentiate between facts and areas more open for interpretation through inclusion of stakeholders and ensure sufficient data availability and resources for data collection.

Review the main actors who were involved in decision making and implementation.

Assess the level of political commitment to the plan (very low, low, moderate, high or very high).

Consider the situation that might have existed if the action plan or other policies had not been implemented ('counterfactual' analysis).

Evaluate whether the action plan was relevant to the original problem; if no longer relevant, review the factors that have changed.

## Annex 2: Detailed synopsis of ORGAPET

Below is a more detailed description of the content of ORGAPET, which can be found on the ORGAP website at [www.orgap.org/orgapet](http://www.orgap.org/orgapet).

The Organic Action Plan Evaluation Toolbox (ORGAPET) is a collection of different information/data sources and evaluation tools, including participative techniques, quantitative assessments and methods to identify relevant indicators, which can be used selectively to meet the needs of a particular assessment of regional, national or EU organic action plans.

The toolbox is structured around ‘compartments’ or sections containing ‘tools’ fulfilling different functions. Each section contains an overview document and a series of annexes detailing a range of methodological approaches (including background documents, relevant data sources and other items), as well as examples of how these have been applied in specific cases, for example the evaluations and workshops conducted as part of the ORGAP project. The structure of ORGAPET is summarised below.

### Part A: Background and context

- An introduction to the EU and other organic action plans and to the mechanisms by which policy instruments affect the development of the organic sector,
- an outline of the principles behind policy evaluation and the steps to take in planning evaluations,
- a guide to the importance of engaging stakeholders at all stages in the policy process, and ways of doing this effectively.

#### **Section A1: Introduction to organic action plans and the ORGAP Project covers:**

- the policy context for the EU Organic Action Plan and national action plans,
- the rationale for evaluating these plans, as well as
- the background to the ORGAP project and the Organic Action Plan Evaluation Toolbox (ORGAPET); supported by

- details of the EU organic action plan, information on its implementation progress, responses to the plan from key stakeholder groups, and
- a comparative assessment of national action plans conducted as part of the ORGAP project.

**Section A2: Principles of policy evaluation with reference to organic action plans includes:**

- an introduction for policy-makers and other stakeholders to the nature and principles of policy evaluation,
- examples of European policy evaluation frameworks, including the EVALSED (and older MEANS) approach that is used by the European Commission for the evaluation of socio-economic programmes, and that has been used as the basis for ORGAPET,
- a review of the special characteristics of organic action plan evaluations and their implications for the design of ORGAPET,
- further in-depth information on evaluation principles and organic farming policies from academic and governmental sources.

**Section A3: How does policy influence the development of organic farming?**

- how a sound theoretical understanding of the mechanisms by which policy interventions impact on a sector (programme theory) can help make policy interventions more effective; and
- what specific programme theories might be applicable in the context of organic farming policy and action plans, supported by examples in the annexes from previous research on organic farming policy development in Europe.

**Section A4: Involving stakeholders in programme design, implementation and evaluation**

- the role of and need for the inclusion of stakeholders at all stages in the policy process,
- issues relating to the identification of appropriate stakeholders,
- ways to ensure effective stakeholder involvement, including examples of participatory approaches used in the context of official action plans and in research workshops,
- significant additional supporting material relating to official perspectives on stakeholder engagement and examples of stakeholder involvement in practice.

### **Section A5: Planning an evaluation**

- the issues that need to be considered and the practical steps that need to be undertaken in preparing for and conducting an evaluation,
- ways of ensuring the quality of an evaluation, and
- a checklist summarising the issues that need to be addressed.

## **Part B: Evaluating programme design and implementation**

- The process of designing and implementing action plans, including the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement, and
- the logic, synergies, priorities and failure risks of action plan content.

### **Section B1: Evaluating the process of programme design and implementation**

- The process of policy design and decision-making, including the potential for conflict or collaboration and the need for integration of good governance principles,
- the process of policy implementation, including specific issues relating to the implementation of EU policy in Member States and the potential for implementation failure; supported by
- a checklist summarising the main issues to be considered and extensive references providing academic background to the issues as well as lessons learned from organic policy research.

### **Section B2: Assessing coherence and failure risk of action plans**

- The use of logical analysis to structure programme objectives and assess programme coherence,
- the assessment of synergies and conflicts within programmes,
- the prioritisation of activities, and
- the assessment of the failure risk of individual measures; supported by
- a checklist summarising the main issues to be considered and annexes illustrating the application of these techniques in the context of the ORGAP project and the EU action plan.

### **Section B3: Methods for evaluating the level and nature of stakeholder involvement**

- Stakeholder perspectives and how they influence potential involvement at different stages,
- issues to consider in evaluating stakeholder involvement, summarised in a checklist, and

- examples of techniques such as network analysis that can be used to support evaluation.

## Part C: Evaluating programme effects

- Procedures to support the identification and measurement of the effects of organic action plans on the organic sector and on wider policy goals; including
- definition of relevant objectives, indicators and criteria for assessing performance,
- suggestions for generic indicators with links to data sources and methods, and
- the use of expert judgement techniques in situations where data is poor, or cause/effect relationships are unclear.

### **Section C1: Methods for identifying objectives to be evaluated**

- How both implicit and explicit objectives can be identified and clarified as a basis for assessing the actual achievements of actions plans, using the logical analysis approach set out in Section B2,
- how differentiating between hierarchical levels of objectives can reflect the goals of different stakeholder groups,
- possible generic objectives that might be applicable to action plan evaluation, illustrated with reference to the EU organic action plan, the IFOAM principles and the Commission's strategic guidelines for rural development.

### **Section C2: Methods for defining indicators**

- The nature and classification of indicators to reflect different types of programme effects,
- how appropriate indicators can be identified using impact statements and effects diagrams to make the link between policy actions and objectives,
- how to ensure indicator quality, using the EU organic action plan as an example, and
- examples of indicators used in other contexts (rural development, environmental impact).

### **Section C3: Generic indicators**

- A set of key indicators reflecting different categories of effect and different objectives; with a distinction made between
- primary indicators that are likely to be relevant and possible to

- quantify with respect to most action plan evaluations, and
- secondary indicators that may be relevant only in specific circumstances or may be more difficult to quantify; supported by
- methodology and data fact sheets, data sources and examples of relevant indicators used in other contexts.

### **Section C4: Using expert (including stakeholders) judgement**

- Techniques that can be used where indicators are difficult to quantify, or causal relationships between policy actions and the final impacts are difficult to establish, due to the number of intermediate effects or the complexity of interacting elements; including
- stakeholder feedback, focus groups and more formal expert judgement methods such as Delphi and Nominal Group technique; supported by
- examples of how the techniques have been applied in organic policy research contexts and guidelines for their application.

## **Part D: Synthesis**

- Techniques for integrating and interpreting results from complex evaluations; and
- examples of evaluations of organic action plans that have previously been conducted.

### **Section D1: Integrating and interpreting results**

- The range of issues that need to be addressed when interpreting results, including how to interpret results from multiple objectives, allowing for trade-offs and conflicts and the priorities of different stakeholders;
- utilising experts (including appropriate stakeholders) to make judgements based on their direct knowledge and understanding of specific issues;
- formal methods such as multi-criteria analysis and cost-benefit analysis that can be used to support the synthesis process.

### **Section D2: Examples of existing evaluations**

- Evaluation experiences from Germany, Denmark, Netherlands and England, as well as
- an assessment of the lessons to be learned from these evaluations prepared as part of the ORGAP project.

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- 99 For more information see ORGAPET Part B
- 100 For more information see Section B1
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- 109 See also ORGAPET Section B2-5
- 110 See Annex to ORGAPET Section B2 for further details
- 111 See ORGAPET Section B3
- 112 For more information see ORGAPET Section B3
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- 119 For more information see ORGAPET Section C2
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- 125 Full details of the use of these indicators, and secondary supporting indicators, can be found in ORGAPET Section C3
- 126 For more information see ORGAPET Section D1
- 127 Further details on multi-criteria analysis are outlined in ORGAPET Section D1-4
- 128 See also ORGAPET Section D1
- 129 Described in ORGAPET Sections A4 and C4
- 130 Further guidance on the use of expert panels can be found in ORGAPET Section D1
- 131 See ORGAPET Section A5

# ORGANIC IN EUROPE

## EXPLORE THE INTERACTIVE MAP



## PRODUCTION & RETAIL DATA BY COUNTRY

[ifoam-eu.org/en/organic-europe](http://ifoam-eu.org/en/organic-europe)

Produced by



Data compiled by



Co-financed by



Action co-financed by the European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development

Supported by





## SET **COMMON OBJECTIVES**

TARGETS AND ACTIONS TO MEET EU, NATIONAL OR REGIONAL GOALS



## TAILOR **POLICIES**

TO ORGANIC NEEDS THAT SUPPORT HIGH QUALITY FOOD, JOBS, THE ENVIRONMENT, ANIMAL WELFARE AND OUR CLIMATE



CREATE A **PARTNERSHIP**  
APPROACH BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS  
AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS



## USE **PUBLIC POLICY**

SUPPORT TO COMPLEMENT  
ORGANIC MARKET GROWTH



## FOCUS ON **SUPPLY AND DEMAND**

ISSUES OF RELEVANCE TO THE  
ORGANIC SECTOR



## FOSTER A **POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT**

TO ENHANCE THE COMPETITIVENESS AND  
SUSTAINABILITY OF ORGANIC PRODUCERS  
AND SMEs

**SME ORGANICS** brings together regional governments, development agencies, organic food and organic farming organisations, enterprise bodies, universities and research institutes from eight regions across Europe over a 4-year period 2016-2020.

As part of a participatory learning process, partners and stakeholders exchange and share experiences of best practices for devising organic action plans. These action plans cover a number of areas such as production and processing, commercialisation and marketing, training and advice, and organic value chain efficiency and governance, that can support the competitiveness and sustainability of organic SMEs in their region.

**SME ORGANICS**  
Interreg Europe



European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund



[www.interregeurope.eu/smeorganics](http://www.interregeurope.eu/smeorganics)



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[https://www.linkedin.com/company/sme\\_organics](https://www.linkedin.com/company/sme_organics)