

AREPO ANALYSIS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ACTION PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EU ORGANIC PRODUCTION

The [Association of European Regions for Products of Origin \(AREPO\)](#) is a network of Regions and producer associations that deals with products of origin and EU quality schemes. It represents 33 European regions and over 700 associations of producers for over 50% of European Geographical Indications.

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Attention: this document does not express an AREPO political position. It simply is a first technical analysis realised by AREPO services.

CONTEXT

On December 11th 2019, the new Commission President Ursula von der Leyen presented the [European Green Deal](#), European Union's roadmap for green transition that should help cut emissions, create jobs and open up new opportunities in a fair way.

The [Communication](#) details a comprehensive and ambitious package of measures touching several policy areas, among other **food policy**. In this regard, the document attributes to **'Farm to Fork' (F2F) strategy** the challenge of designing a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system.

As a result, on May 20th 2020, the Commission published the [communication and draft action plan of the Farm to Fork strategy](#). [Click here to consult AREPO feedback to the Roadmap published on February 2020](#).

In line with the priorities laid down by the European Green Deal, the Communication set as **overall objective** *"to reduce the environmental and climate footprint of the EU food system and strengthen its resilience, ensure food security in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss and lead a global transition towards competitive sustainability from farm to fork and tapping into new opportunities"*.

The Communication on the Farm to Fork strategy details as well specific objectives and target for 2030. **A specific target is set for organic agriculture with the objective to reach 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030.**

In order to reach this target and boost the production and consumption of organic products, on 25th March 2021, the European Commission published the [Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production](#).

In line with the Farm to Fork strategy, the Communication on the Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production clearly recognises the **key role of organic farming in a transition toward a sustainable food system**.

ACTION PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EU ORGANIC PRODUCTION

The action plan is organised along **three axes** that take into account the structure of the food supply chain **including production, processing, retailers and consumers**.

- **AXIS 1. ORGANIC FOOD AND PRODUCTS FOR ALL: STIMULATE DEMAND AND ENSURE CONSUMER TRUST:** this axis aims at supporting the development of the sector by **boosting the overall demand** for organic products in order to **encourage new conversion** to organic.
- **AXIS 2. ON THE WAY TO 2030: STIMULATING CONVERSION AND REINFORCING THE ENTIRE VALUE CHAIN:** the second axis aims at creating other **incentives for production** to meet the target of 25% of utilised agricultural area under organic agriculture.
- **AXIS 3: ORGANICS LEADING BY EXAMPLE:** the third axis aims at improving the **contribution of organic farming to sustainability and environmental challenges**.

AXIS 1. ORGANIC FOOD AND PRODUCTS FOR ALL: STIMULATE DEMAND AND ENSURE CONSUMER TRUST

This axis focuses on the **pull effect**, aiming at boosting the consumption of organic food products across the EU. To do so, the actions proposed under this axis focus on **stimulating the demand for organic products by increasing the awareness of its benefits and consumer trust in the organic logo**.

The proposed actions include: **informing and communicating** about organic production, **promoting** the consumption of organic products, stimulating a greater use of organics in **public canteens** through **public procurement** and increasing the distribution of organic products under the **EU school scheme**. Actions also aim at **preventing fraud**, increasing consumers' trust and improving traceability of organic products.

Under this axis, **AREPO welcomes in particular:**

- Actions 1 and 2 aiming at **promoting organic farming and the EU logo**. A range of measures are proposed going from giving greater focus to organic among the themes covered by the annual call for proposal on information measure on the CAP, to allocating an enhanced budget to organic sector under EU promotion policy. **These measures are essential to boost the demand of organic products**.
- Action 3 aiming at **stimulating a greater uptake of organics in public canteens**. **AREPO welcomes the recognition of Regions as key players in the promotion of organic production**. In particular, public procurements are an important policy instrument to allow regions and local authorities to develop long-term partnerships with their local organic producers and to incentivise conventional farmers to convert to organic production. Concerning the introduction of a minimum mandatory criteria for sustainable food public procurements, **AREPO would like to insist on the importance to assure adequate capacity building programme** for both purchasing authorities (national, regional and local) and organic producers organisations.

[For the complete list of actions under axis 1 consult the table below.](#)

AXIS 2. ON THE WAY TO 2030: STIMULATING CONVERSION AND REINFORCING THE ENTIRE VALUE CHAIN

In order to reach the 2030 target of 25% of utilised agricultural area under organic agriculture, the Commission will try to boost the uptake of organic production, notably in those Member States where the share is below EU average. All MS have defined national targets concerning the organic production, as required by the CAP. **The Common Agricultural Policy will be a key tool for supporting the conversion and the expansion of organic sector.**

Beyond the CAP, key actions include **organisation of information events and networking for sharing best practices** (among which an annual EU "Organic day"), **certification for groups** of farmers rather than for



individuals, **research and innovation**, use of blockchain and other technologies to **improve traceability** increasing market **transparency**, reinforcing **local and small-scale processing** and supporting the organisation of the food chain.

The Commission will also encourage the **development of organic tourism networks through 'biodistricts'**. 'Biodistricts' are areas where farmers, citizens, tourist operators, associations and public authorities work together towards the sustainable management of local resources, based on organic principles and practices.

Under this axis, **AREPO welcomes in particular:**

- **Action 9** aiming at encouraging conversion, investment and exchange of best practices through **CAP future strategic plans**. On one hand, AREPO welcomes that MS shall assess their needs regarding organic sector in order to identify the best measures to support its development. On the other hand, we would like to highlight the **importance of European Regions for an effective identification of local specific needs as well as for a successful implementation of CAP strategic plans**.
- **Action 14** aiming at **reinforcing local and small-volume processing and fostering short trade circuit**. AREPO greets the intention of the Commission to move toward **shorter organic supply chains** and encourage MS to support the development of **bio-districts**. **AREPO supports the development of local consumption models linked to regional production**. Once more, to reach this objective it is fundamental to associate the Regions in the implementation of this action.

[For the complete list of actions under axis 2 consult the table below.](#)

AXIS 3: ORGANICS LEADING BY EXAMPLE: IMPROVING THE CONTRIBUTION OF ORGANIC FARMING TO SUSTAINABILITY

The action plan recognises that, while organic farming already contributes greatly to agriculture sustainability, its environmental impact could be improved. To this hand **AREPO welcomes the EC commitment to dedicate at least 30% of the next calls related to Intervention Area 3 "Agriculture, forestry and rural areas" of Cluster 6 of Horizon Europe to topics specific to or relevant for the organic sector.**

The actions under this axis will focus on improving **animal welfare**, ensuring the availability of **organic seeds**, **reducing the sector's carbon footprint**, and **minimising the use of plastics, water and energy**.

[For the complete list of actions under axis 3 consult the table below.](#)

AREPO REMARKS ON THE ROLE OF REGIONS

AREPO welcomes that the Commission intends to set up *"a common enabling framework to foster initiatives taken by Member States, regional or local authorities"* for the implementation of the Action Plan. Nevertheless, the role of Regions is not systematically taken into account in the Action Plan.

To this end, AREPO would like to remind to the Commission that all the initiatives related to sustainable agricultural and food transitions are the result of local experiences and practices. It is crucial to establish a common framework and a set of tools at European level, just as it is fundamental to be able to support and adapt these approaches to the needs of the territories in order to achieve change on a broader scale.

Our regions have long been involved in these processes of transforming agricultural and food systems and supporting the development of organic agriculture, in particular through the management and implementation of Regional Rural Development Programs. This decentralization also goes in the direction of a



democratisation of EU policies and tools and makes it possible to better meet citizens' expectations by encouraging multi-stakeholder dialogue at local level.

In this context, in order to better address the challenges faced by the need to reach the abovementioned targets as well as to make better use of the available resources:

- **AREPO encourages the European Commission to better associate and systematically consult its Regions in the next steps of both the development and implementation of the new organic action plan.** The decentralization towards EU Regions allows for a multi-stakeholder dialogue at local level which could provide a comprehensive understanding of the major issues at stake as well as the right means to tackle them.
- Furthermore, AREPO reminds to the European Commission that such an ambitious project requires an **integrated and coordinated approach**. This means that this action plan must fit into the wider framework of **EU Common Agricultural Policy**, as well as **be in line with the priorities and objectives of the European Green Deal, running parallel to the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies**.

With regards to the CAP:

- **AREPO regrets the lack of a truly territorial and regional dimension in the Commission's proposals for the CAP post-2020.** A solid vision for the future of rural areas and the role they have to play in our society cannot be achieved without the reintroduction of this territorial logic in the future CAP.
- For the above-mentioned reason, AREPO **calls for the reintroduction of the notion of Regional Management Authorities** for the implementation of rural development interventions and **requests the full association of Regions to the drafting of the National Strategic Plans** and to the coordinating bodies set up by the European Commission.

AXIS 1. ORGANIC FOOD AND PRODUCTS FOR ALL: STIMULATE DEMAND AND ENSURE CONSUMER TRUST

1.1. Promoting organic farming and the EU logo

ACTION 1: As regards **information and communication**, the Commission will:

- from 2021, give a greater focus to organics among the themes covered by the annual call for proposals on CAP information measures;
- from 2022, continuously collect data and inform citizens and farmers about the environmental, economic and social benefits of organic farming;
- from 2022, measure consumers' awareness of the EU organic logo to monitor progress since the 2020 Eurobarometer;
- identify main events to inform about organics, in particular in MS where demand is below the average EU level.

ACTION 2: As regards **promotion**, the Commission will continue to secure an **ambitious budget in the EU promotion policy for boosting the consumption of organic products** that are aligned with the ambition, policy and actions of the Farm to Fork strategy and Europe's beating cancer plan. The Commission will, starting in 2021:

- allocate an **enhanced budget** in the framework of the annual work programmes of the agricultural promotion policy, with a view to raising consumer awareness of, and stimulating the demand for, organic products;
- step up the **promotion of EU organic products in targeted third country growth markets** through, for instance, the participation in fairs in cooperation with MS;
- raise awareness of **export opportunities** for EU organic producers, to take advantage of our network of Free Trade Agreements and equivalency agreements; and
- stimulate the sector's visibility through **awards recognising excellence** in the organic food chain in the EU.

1.2. Promoting organic canteens and increasing the use of green public procurement

ACTION 3: To stimulate a greater uptake of organics in public canteens, the Commission will, together with stakeholders and Member States:

- boost the awareness of the criteria for Green Public Procurement (GPP), of the work on Public Procurement of Food for Health, and of the Joint Action BestREMAP;
- integrate organic products into the minimum mandatory criteria for sustainable food public procurement to be developed as part of the legislative framework for sustainable food systems by 2023;
- monitor the application of GPP and invite MS to fix ambitious national targets for organics in GPP as well as to increase in the use of GPP by public authorities;
- prepare specific events for public administrations in charge of public catering, to raise awareness of EU.

1.3. Reinforcing organic school schemes

ACTION 4: As part of the review of the EU school scheme framework planned for 2023 under the F2F strategy, and in accordance with the Europe's beating cancer plan, the Commission will:

- engage with MS to identify ways to increase further the distribution of organic products in the school schemes; and
- carry out a study on real price of food, including the role of taxation, with a view to developing recommendations.



1.4. Preventing food fraud and strengthening consumer trust

ACTION 5: The Commission will, starting in 2021, strengthen the **fight against fraudulent practices** and in particular:

- *ensure a robust supervision of control systems in MS and third countries; increase cooperation with MS administrations and third countries recognised as equivalent, relying – inter alia - on their means and results of previous audits;*
- *assist MS in developing and implementing an organic fraud prevention policy, through targeted workshops to share lessons learnt and best practices;*
- *cooperate with the EU Food Fraud Network and Europol in analysing the sector to prevent fraud and coordinate investigations; increase cooperation with competent authorities and law enforcement bodies in third countries to exchange information on the organic trade and fraud;*
- *support MS with guidance on reinforced imports control at the border;*
- *promote stronger measures to tackle fraudulent practices through the sanctions catalogues;*
- *put in place measures to inform consumers and/or to recall from the market products where fraud is identified; and*
- *develop early warning systems, using artificial intelligence for data mining in EU and MS databases.*

1.5. Improving traceability

ACTION 6: The Commission will, as of 2021:

- *develop a database of certificates of all EU operators, and later also relevant third country operators, building on the analysis already started under the 2014 action plan, and as a follow-up to European Court of Auditors recommendations;*
- *promote the enrolment of competent authorities and control bodies sign certificates of inspection in TRACES digitally. This paperless process will reduce the administrative burden and the risk of forgery of documents; and*
- *coordinate regular traceability exercises on organic products in cooperation with Member States, their control bodies and third countries, especially in cases of food fraud suspicion.*

ACTION 7: The Commission will, as of 2021:

- *in synergy with the work on digital product passports, assess to what extent the traceability of organic products could benefit from blockchain or other digital technologies and envisage, in a second step, a pilot project with stakeholders. These steps will be supplemented by actions under Horizon Europe on the use of blockchain technologies in the agri-food sector as well as other targeted research & innovation actions aimed at developing innovative solutions to trace organic food.*

1.6. The contribution of the private sector

ACTION 8: With the objective of **reinforcing the role of retailers, wholesalers, catering services, restaurants and other businesses**, the EC will, starting in 2021:

- *aim at obtaining clear commitments from relevant stakeholders to support and increase the distribution and sale of organic products, in the context of the Farm to Fork strategy's code of conduct for responsible business and marketing practices, and disseminate best practices in relevant platforms; and*
- *establish partnerships with businesses willing to promote the use of organic products as part of their corporate sustainability policy. These measures will be further discussed in the platform for Business and Biodiversity*

AXIS 2. ON THE WAY TO 2030: STIMULATING CONVERSION AND REINFORCING THE ENTIRE VALUE CHAIN

2.1. Encouraging conversion, investment and exchange of best practices

ACTION 9: In the framework of the new CAP and CFP, the Commission will:

- *starting in 2023, assess the specific circumstances and needs of Member States regarding the growth of the organic sector, and ensure Member States make the best use of the possibilities offered by the new CAP to support their national organic sector. This support will include technical assistance, the exchange of best practices and innovations in organics, and the full use of relevant CAP instruments such as eco-schemes and rural development environmental management commitments, which include organic farming. Farm advisory services on specific topics will be strengthened, notably as part of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), to promote relevant knowledge exchange;*
- *starting in 2022, promote the exchange of best practices (education and training curricula, courses, materials, etc.) at EU and national level allowing education providers (e.g. technical schools, universities) to develop courses on organic farming as part of the general curriculum and present innovative solutions targeting the organic sector (production, processing, retailing and consumption). EU demonstration farm networks will be set up on specific topics to promote a participatory approach (dissemination). Best practices and synergies with the EIP- AGRI projects will be promoted via the future CAP network; and*
- *encourage Member States to include the increase of organic aquaculture in their reviewed Multi-annual National Strategic plans for aquaculture, and to make the best use of possibilities offered by the EMFAF 2021-2027 for achieving this purpose. The Commission will also facilitate the exchange of best practices and innovation on organic aquaculture in the context of the Open Method of Coordination.*

2.2. Developing sector analysis to increase market transparency

ACTION 10: To provide a comprehensive overview on the sector, the Commission will, starting in 2021:

- ***publish regular reports on organic production in the EU based on Eurostat data, containing, in particular, information on surfaces, holdings involved in organic production, and the main production sector; and***
- ***publish a yearly report on imports of organic products from third countries.***

ACTION 11: The Commission will, starting in 2022:

- ***intensify the collection of market data in collaboration with Member States and extend the EU Market Observatories' analysis to organic products.***

2.3. Supporting the organisation of the food chain

ACTION 12: The Commission will, starting in 2021:

- ***carry out an analysis of the degree of organisation in organic sector supply chains and identify ways to improve it in consultation with producer organisation representatives and other concerned stakeholders; and***
- ***investigate the legal possibility of forming or joining specific organic producer organisations and, where possible, encourage Member States to allocate funds for this purpose.***



ACTION 13: The Commission will, starting 2022:

- **raise awareness and provide better information about 'group certification'**, allowing small holding farmers to share the cost and administrative burden of certification, in line with Regulation 2018/848 on organic production.

ACTION 14: The Commission will, starting in 2023:

- *engage with Member States and stakeholders to foster local and small-scale processing, in line with the objective of Regulation 2018/848 on organic production to move towards 'shorter organic supply chains, providing environmental and social benefits' as part of its efforts to support trade for organic products within the EU single market. This action will be reinforced by targeted research & innovation under Horizon Europe, including support for the use of digital technologies; and*
- *encourage Member States to support the development and the implementation of 'Bio districts'.*

ACTION 15: As organic farming can enhance social inclusion in rural areas while promoting decent working and living conditions, the Commission will, starting 2022:

- *assist Member States in designing measures for organic farming in rural areas that promote **gender equality and youth farmers/employment**, which could include the sharing of best practices.*

2.4. Reinforcing local and small-volume processing and fostering short trade circuit

ACTION 16: The Commission intends to:

- *support research and innovation under Horizon Europe on alternative sources of organic vitamins and other substances that might turn out to be necessary, and on alternative sources of protein keeping in mind their technical and economic feasibility;*
- *explore means to support the application for feed additives produced without GMM, feed based on insects as well as marine feed stocks; and*
- *adopt an algae initiative in 2022 to support EU algae production and support the EU algae industry to ensure the supply of algae as alternative feed material for organic animal farming.*

2.5. Improving animal nutrition in accordance with organic rules

ACTION 17: Starting in 2022, the Commission intends to:

- *support research and innovation on alternative sources of nutrients, breeding and animal welfare in aquaculture; the promotion of investments on adapted polyculture and multi-trophic aquaculture systems; and the promotion of hatcheries and nurseries activities for organic juveniles; and*
- *identify and address as appropriate any specific obstacles to the growth of EU organic aquaculture.*

2.6. Reinforcing organic aquaculture

AXIS 3: ORGANICS LEADING BY EXAMPLE: IMPROVING THE CONTRIBUTION OF ORGANIC FARMING TO SUSTAINABILITY

3.1. Reducing climate and environmental footprint

ACTION 18: The Commission will, starting in 2022:

- *take steps, to set up, in cooperation with stakeholders, a pilot network of climate positive organic holdings, to share best practices.*

3.2. Enhancing genetic biodiversity and increasing yields

ACTION 19: In order to **enhance biodiversity and increase yields**, the Commission intends to:

- *starting in 2022, earmark funding under Horizon Europe to support the preservation and use of genetic resources, pre-breeding and breeding activities, and the availability of organic seeds, and to contribute to the development of organic heterogeneous plant reproductive material and plant varieties suitable for organic production;*
- *set up EU demonstration farms networks to promote a participatory approach (dissemination). Best practices and synergies with the EIP-AGRI projects will be promoted via the future CAP network;*
- *strengthen farm advisory services, notably as part of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), to promote knowledge exchange of material suitable for the organic farming; and*
- *support research and innovation on improving organic yields.*

3.3. Alternatives to contentious inputs and other plant protection products

ACTION 20: The Commission:

- *starting in 2023, intends to earmark funding under Horizon Europe for research and innovation projects on alternative approaches to contentious inputs, paying particular attention to copper and other substances as assessed by the European Food Safety Authority; and*
- *starting in 2022, will, building on the forthcoming regulation on biopesticides, and via the strengthened farm advisory services, notably AKIS, foster where appropriate the use of alternative plant protection products, such as those containing biological active substances.*

3.4. Enhancing animal welfare

ACTION 21: In the context of the Animal Welfare Platform, the Commission will:

- *continue working with Member States and civil society to find concrete and operational ways to further improve animal welfare in organic production.*

3.5. Making more efficient use of resources

ACTION 22: The Commission intends to:

- *adopt a Framework on bio-based, compostable and biodegradable plastic, which will include principles and criteria under which the use of sustainable bio-based materials that are easily bio-degradable in natural conditions is beneficial to the environment. The Framework will cover all plastics, including for uses in all types of agriculture, and will therefore also be highly relevant for organic farming leading the way in terms of sustainability.*

ACTION 23: The Commission will:

- *promote the more efficient and sustainable use of water, the increased use of renewable energy and clean transport, and the reduction of nutrient release, in all types of farming, with organic farming leading the way, and with the involvement of the Member States through their CAP Strategic Plans, as well as with the new Strategic Guidelines for aquaculture and EMFAF.*

