

eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

Organic farming

Innovative approaches to support conversion



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This brochure has been produced within the framework of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), which was launched by the European Commission to promote innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors and to improve connections between research and practice. This publication follows up on the work of the EIP-AGRI workshop 'Conversion to organic farming: innovative approaches and challenges'.

More information on this event and on organic farming can be found online via www.eip-agri.eu and on the thematic webpage on organic farming. For more details on the Operational Groups and other innovative projects featured in this brochure, please see the EIP-AGRI project database on the EIP-AGRI website.





► Developing organic production in the EU

Organic agriculture enables farmers to produce high-quality food with a low environmental impact. By reducing the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and antimicrobials, organic farming systems can have positive effects on our environment, climate, biodiversity, animal welfare, farmer incomes, rural development and more.

As part of the [European Green Deal](#), the 'Farm to Fork' and [Biodiversity Strategies](#) aim to achieve at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming by 2030. [The Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production in the EU](#) was developed to help the organic sector reach its full potential and meet the goals of the European Green Deal. As part of the Action Plan, an EU network of

national 'organic ambassadors' promotes organic production at the national level and helps exchange best practices at the EU level. Promoting innovative approaches, including new ways to collaborate, and exchanging good practices can support farmers, organisations and others in the value chain in their efforts to successfully convert to organic farming.

This brochure highlights inspiring examples as to how a successful conversion to organic farming can be achieved. It showcases platforms and projects working towards a stronger organic value chain.



- Find all EIP-AGRI activities related to organic farming on the [dedicated 'spotlight' page](#).
- The [organic farming playlist on the EIP-AGRI YouTube channel](#) offers video inspiration from across the EIP-AGRI network.
- Participants at the EIP-AGRI workshop entitled 'Conversion to organic farming: innovative approaches and challenges' shared inspirational practices to support farmers in successfully converting to organic agriculture. Browse all results, presentations and projects [on the event webpage](#).



► Networking for conversion

Converting to organic farming entails major changes both in terms of farm practices and mindset. Advisory support and access to funding as well as the exchange of knowledge, expertise and solutions can help farmers in the process.



ECOPIONET: Knowledge network supports pioneer farmers in Spanish drylands

In the dryland cereal areas of inland Spain, many farms have been affected by climate change and increasing prices for inputs and production. The EIP-AGRI Operational Group ECOPIONET has set up a knowledge network to support farmers in converting to organic farming and to help them produce more sustainably and competitively, while adapting to climate change.

ECOPIONET has provided continuous training, advice and knowledge exchange opportunities for 29 newly converting farmers ('pioneers'). They were supported by a network of researchers, technical advisors and nine experienced organic farmers ('tutors').

Coordinator Raquel Arroyo explains: "During the two-year span of the project, 1 136 hectares were converted to organic agriculture. Some farms had already initiated the process before the start of the project. In our areas, organic production is associated with lower but more stable yields. However, if farmers take into account the costs saved in agro-chemical inputs, the higher price of the final product and the

subsidy for organic production, this actually improves the economic balance of the farm."

Training and workshops showed farmers first-hand how to adapt their production to market demands, access new markets and improve their bargaining power by working together, allowing them to increase their profitability. ECOPIONET has built the foundations on which a future producer organisation, which can further support farmers in commercialising their organic products, can be created.

► More information:

Have a look in the [EIP-AGRI database](#) or [watch the video](#).



► [Spanish Operational Group OBEPAS-PC](#) explored new markets and products to improve the commercialisation of organic beef cattle produced in 'dehesa' pasture systems. You can find more Operational Group inspiration in the [EIP-AGRI database](#).

► [Horizon 2020 multi-actor project RELACS](#) ('Replacement of contentious inputs in organic farming systems') fosters the development and adoption of cost-efficient and environmentally safe solutions to help farmers reduce their dependence on external inputs.





► Opportunities across the value chain

Converting to organic farming is a demanding process that involves the entire value chain. Farmers need to familiarise themselves with organic production practices and understand the certification that is applicable for production, processing, labelling and marketing at every stage of the conversion process. It takes several years before products can be sold as organic. Comprehensive business plans for conversion are therefore essential tools in developing a successful organic farm. Knowledge exchange and new ways to involve consumers and others in the value chain may offer innovative opportunities for conversion challenges.



Committed to organic: French cooperative involves consumers in the conversion process

Converting to organic agriculture does not happen overnight and, in many cases, it implies investments and risks for the farmer. To support producers during the conversion period, French farm cooperative D'Aucy has developed an 'under organic conversion' label for some of its products, raising awareness and adding value.

The label invites consumers to pay a small supplementary fee per product, directly supporting farmers in the conversion process. The range includes vegetables that were previously sold as conventional products but that were actually already grown in organic conditions. In a first stage, consumers were invited to select the products in this range, their packaging and sales locations, and the additional fee that they would be willing to pay. For a can of green peas, for instance, consumers now pay an extra 14 cents. Through public consultations, consumers also

helped to decide how the additional product fees could be used: for instance to support natural crop protection, to invest in equipment, for instance for mechanical weeding, or for farmer training and skills development.

By bringing producers and consumers closer together, the cooperative wants to support the long-term conversion to more sustainable agriculture.

► **More information:** [on the D'Aucy website](#)

Buy products under conversion at the CrowdFarming market place

Buying seasonal products directly from the farmer gives consumers fresh food with a traceable origin and a fair price for the producer. The CrowdFarming market place is an online platform that allows consumers to buy produce straight from fields under conversion or lets them adopt a fruit tree for one harvesting period, supporting farmers in their efforts to convert to organic agriculture.

► Take a look at the [CrowdFarming website](#)





► Maximising the potential of organic agriculture

Organic farming can be integrated into the sustainable management of a wider region through so-called 'biodistricts', in which farmers, public authorities, citizens and tourist operators work together to maximise the ecological, economic and socio-cultural potential of the area. This provides an opportunity to connect organic farming to local activities, resulting in products that are appreciated by consumers, receive a higher market value and are in a better position to be marketed and sold.



Scaling up: Chianti biodistrict fosters sustainability for an entire region

The Italian Chianti biodistrict does not only pride itself on fine Chianti Classico wine. It also supports the sustainable development of the entire area. A conversion to organic farming for more than 50% of the vineyard surface was driven by a partnership of organic farmers, innovative experts, citizen associations, advisors, municipalities and local communities.

"The biodistrict is an opportunity to set up an eco-friendly development model that preserves our natural resources, environment and local traditions, and lets us apply innovative techniques to produce quality food," says biodistrict representative Monica Coletta. "The biodistrict promotes organic farming in production and consumption, with specific attention paid to farm innovation, education, biodiversity and slow tourism. Local administrations have introduced organic food in schools and will promote local green

public procurement. They are also avoiding the use of herbicides in public areas."

Monica explains that cooperation is key: "We support farmers through advice, training and demonstration activities. Our network of biodistricts, organic farmers, agronomists, researchers, local institutions and rural development policies helps us share best practices, inspire others and ensure continuous growth."

► **More information:**

[on the Chianti biodistrict website](#)



Transfer trials for organic farming

The Austrian Bionet project has set up a network of organic 'transfer farms', where organic farming practices for arable farming and vegetable production are tested under Austrian site conditions. The field trials rely heavily on close cooperation between farm managers, advisors, researchers, agricultural schools and over sixty companies across Austria.

► Find out more [on the project website](#)





► Support tools for organic conversion

Organic farming is knowledge-intensive. Farmers may find up-to-date information through dedicated knowledge platforms, by participating in innovative projects and through peer-to-peer learning and exchanging ideas with others. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will continue to support organic agriculture in the context of the Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production in the EU. Advisory support and training will be strengthened to further promote knowledge exchange and innovation in the organic value chain. The Horizon Europe programme is boosting research that is relevant for organic farming.



Danú: Farmer-driven transition programmes for biological farming

A healthy, fully functional soil is the best foundation for sustainable and economically viable crop and pasture management. With this in mind, the Irish 'Danú Farming Group' is developing programmes to help farmers convert to 'biological farming' systems, which combine conventional and organic practices to generate productive soils with high levels of biological activity. At the heart of the EIP-AGRI Operational Group is a partnership of 12 farmers.

"Results from the first years of soil trials have shown that a balanced soil and nutrient composition can help achieve greater crop resilience, better animal health through more nutritious forage, increased soil organic matter and carbon sequestration potential, fewer plant diseases with minimal herbicide or pesticide usage, and the production of nutrient-dense food, feed and forage," says farmer and project coordinator David Wallis. "Especially in the first years of converting to organic farming, crops need adjusting. Understanding soil dynamics can help bridge this transition."

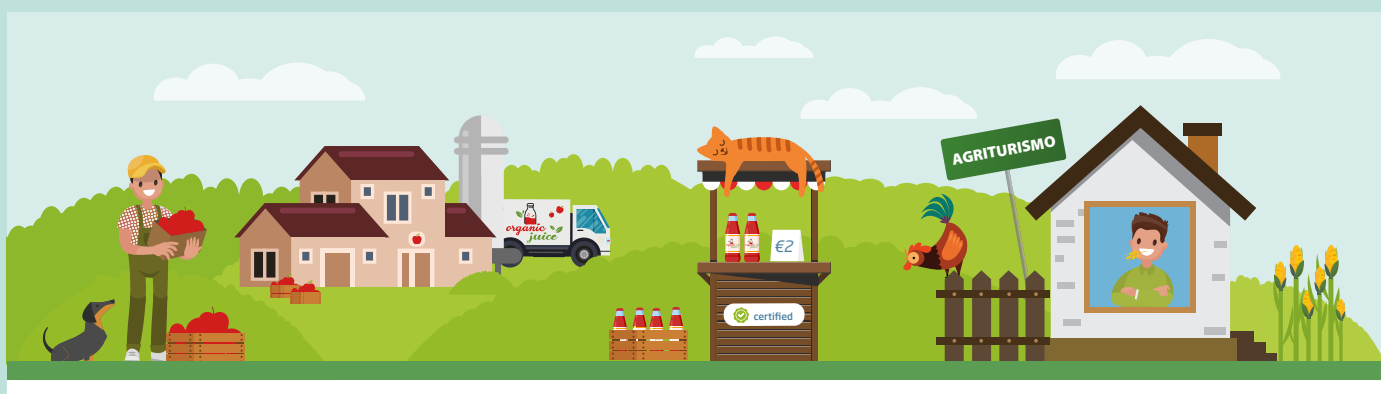
David continues: "The trial results help us develop clear, workable guidelines for any interested farmer to use. We need to learn to use our resources more

effectively, and it's the farmers who are driving this change. Mindsets matter. Our farmers had to review the way they had been doing things. Now, with positive results, 3 out of 12 farmers have already gone organic."

► **More information:** [in the EIP-AGRI database](#)

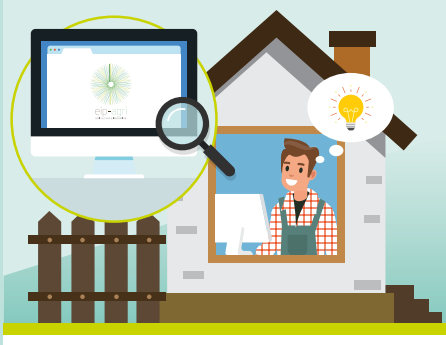


- [Horizon 2020 thematic network BIOFRUITNET](#) boosts innovation in organic fruit production (mainly organic pome, stone and citrus fruits) through robust knowledge networks.
- Find all Horizon 2020 [thematic networks](#) and [multi-actor projects on organic farming on the EIP-AGRI website](#).
- The CORE Organic ERA-Net pools national EU funding support research on organic farming, for instance in [FertiCrop](#), [ORGANICDAIRYHEALTH](#), [EcoBerries](#) and [other projects](#).



1 NETWORKING for successful conversion

- ▶ Knowledge exchange
- ▶ Advisory support & training
- ▶ Access to funding



2 COLLABORATING across the value chain

- ▶ Understanding needs for production, processing, labelling, marketing
- ▶ Supporting farmers under conversion
- ▶ Involving consumers and others in the value chain



3 SCALING UP maximising organic potential

- ▶ Biodistricts: sustainable management of a wider area
- ▶ Ecological - economic - socio-cultural

