ENRD webinar

1st meeting of the Thematic Group on Strengthening the position of farmers in the organic food supply chain

Highlights report

The first meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) on Strengthening the position of farmers in the organic food supply chain took stock of the policy and regulatory framework for organic value chains and identified the key enabling conditions and barriers to strengthen the role of organic producers in the organic value chain through cooperation.

Event Information

Date: 15 September 2022

Location: Virtual meeting

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 51 individuals from 21 Member States including farmers, producer organisations, cooperatives, retailers, consumer organisations, banks, researchers, and the European Commission

Outcomes: Exchange of knowledge and experiences to identify ways in which the role of the organic producer in the organic value chain can be strengthened through cooperation.

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Framing Organic Farming

Oliver Sitar (European Commission, DG AGRI) briefly updated members on the EU policy context, for Organic Supply Chains including the EU Green Deal, Farm to Fork Strategy and the EU Organic Action Plan. Oliver elaborated on the role of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), referring to the possibilities for the organic sector under Common Market Organisation rules with reference to the opportunities for recognised Producers Organisations (PO) to enhance the farmers' bargaining power. **Elena Panichi (European Commission, DG AGRI)** offered a number of additional points, reinforcing the opportunities available through the EU Organic Action Plan on supply chain cooperation, e.g. biodistricts and public sector food procurement.

Miguel de Porras (FIBL Europe) outlined the challenges and opportunities for organic supply chains, presenting an overview of the EU organic market, providing detailed and updated information of the global dimension. Miguel also highlighted the important role of research, innovation, digitalisation and digital skills for sectoral development.

Group & Panel Discussions

Members were split into three break-out groups and shared their own experiences in two rounds of discussion. In the first-round members explained the current situation from their perspective in relation to the successes and challenges for organic producers and associated supply chain. In the second-round members discussed how they might realise the opportunities for organic supply chain cooperation. Second-round discussions started with an intervention from TG members to provoke thought and stimulate discussion:

- Group 1 - a policy perspective (Gerber van Vliet, Luxembourg and Jacob Makovsky, Czechia)
- Group 2 - a supply chain perspective (Jérome Cinel, Interbio Nouvelle Aquitaine, France)
- Group 3 - a producer perspective (Gerhard Eberhöfer, Cooperative Assomela - Italian Association of Apple producers, Italy)

A panel of TG members then reflected on the discussions, their views on the future role of the organics supply chain and next steps for the TG. The panel consisted of:

Amelie Steu, IFOAM (Belgium-EU)

Camille Perrin, BEUC (Belgium-EU)

Laura Nolan, Irish Government (Ireland)

Ida Lind, Swedish Association of Organic Farmers (Sweden)

Felix Schmidling, Franken Gemüse (Germany)

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Group & panel discussion highlights

Participants highlighted that:

- **Cooperation, including through Producer Organisations is essential** supporting viable prices, increasing confidence among all market participants, increasing producers bargaining power and providing for innovative marketing opportunities.
- All supply chain actors should cooperate more (both vertically and horizontally) to enhance organic farming, including **small farmers**.
- Product **availability, accessibility and affordability** are key to success, the organic marketplace being profitable for producers and affordable to consumers.
- It is crucial to reinforce support to **small-scale organic producers**, and during producers '**conversion period**' to organic.
- The route to organic certification and the associated burden on businesses will depend on locale and scale of production.
- **Young farmers and new entrants** should be linked with AKIS actors, who can play a critical role supporting business development.
- **Transparency for consumers** is needed, as is effective marketing and communication of the benefits of organics to actors throughout the supply chain.
- Need for greater recognition for organic sectors' contribution to **food safety and inputs efficiency** in agriculture.
- **Better market transparency** throughout the chain is key to enhancing the position of organic producers (pricing, volumes and other relevant information).
- Maintaining a **price premium** for organic produce can be challenging. There is a need to build consumer-producer bridges and for a greater variety of organic offers.
- **Public sector procurement** offers opportunities for farmers to find routes to market for organic and local products.
- The **certification** burden affects small and large businesses differently through the supply chain and needs to be proportionate.
- The whole value chain should invest in **organic seed and breeding material**. Current rules are perceived as creating unfair competition for organic seed and breeding companies.
- **Bio-districts** are being introduced in different countries and regions. It would be useful to better understand how they can constitute an opportunity for organic farmers.
- **Innovation, new technologies and applied research are key to** to improving farming systems and developing marketing opportunities.
- **The benefits** of consolidation and concentration should be balanced with the diversity of products.
- The **circular economy** presents opportunities for the organic sector as part of the transition to sustainable food systems.
- Consumers should value organic as the sustainable choice, with organic less niche and competitively priced. Key to this is achieving critical mass through the supply chain.

Next Steps

Work between meetings may include the collection and organisation of examples (some highlighted during the meeting) and more in-depth case studies; based on inputs from the TG members. The 2nd Forum on Good practices for the agri-supply chain scheduled for 10/11/2022 will provide a further opportunity for TG members to discuss the issues raised in the first 1st TG meeting. It is envisaged that TG members will be invited the event. The second and final meeting of the TG will be held on 24/11/2022, after which the outputs of the group will be shared with group members and finalised. An agreed set of outputs should then be published.

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