Statistics in focus

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Organic farming in Europe

Organic farming is progressing in the EU-15[1], although it only represented around 4 % of the total EU utilised agricultural area (UAA) in 2002. The area organically cultivated in the European Union increased at a rate of about 21 % per year between 1998 and 2002. It continued to expand in most Member States while the number of organic producers slightly decreased in 2002 (-2 %). However, the importance of organic farming still varies across the EU.

Organic farming aims at sustainable farming by means of a specific farm production system offering an alternative to the more traditional approaches to agriculture. It emphasises the use of management practices avoiding off-farm inputs and responding to a consumer demand for naturally-produced foodstuffs (excluding as far as possible the use of synthetic substances). In particular, organic farmers are concerned about producing agricultural products while minimising the negative effects on the environment, preserving as far as possible natural resources and maintaining biological diversity on farms and their neighbourhood. Rules have therefore been introduced to ensure the protection and the respect of organic farming methods.

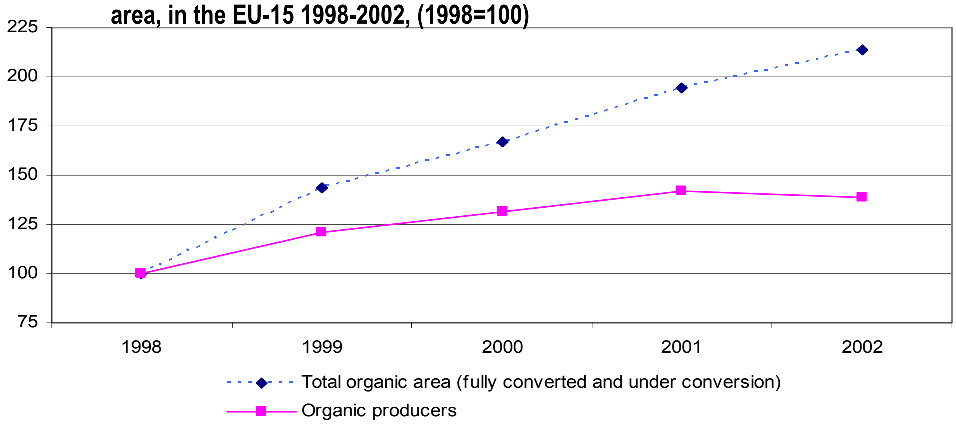
Farming covered in this publication is considered to be organic at EU level if it complies with Council Regulation (EEC) N^0 2092/91. This Regulation has been amended on several occasions, in particular in 1999 when the Council extended its scope to cover organic livestock production (N^0 1804/99). In June 2004, the European Commission adopted the "European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming" whose objective is to facilitate the ongoing development of organic farming in the EU with 21 concrete policy measures to be implemented.

Figures presented in this publication concern statistical returns that represent the sum of fully converted areas as well as those in conversion, unless otherwise indicated.

Highlights

- **The total organic area in the EU-15, fully converted and under conversion, increased from 2.3 million hectares in 1998 to 4.9 million hectares in 2002; the organic farming area reached 3.8 % of the total Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) of the EU-15 in 2002, up from 1.8 % in 1998.**
- **The Member State with the largest number of producers and the highest number of hectares is Italy.**
- **Fodder grass is the most grown organic product.**

Figure 1: Evolution of the total number of organic producers and size of total organic area, in the EU-15 1998-2002, (1998=100)



[1] *All references to EU include the 15 Member States, as before the EU-enlargement of May 2004*

4 % of Utilised Agricultural Area devoted to organic farming

The total organic area in the EU-15, fully converted and under conversion, increased from 2.3 million hectares in 1998 to 4.9 million hectares in 2002 (Table 1). This corresponds to an annual average growth rate of nearly 21 %. The organic farming area reached 3.8 % of the total Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) of the EU-15 in 2002, up from 1.8 % in 1998.

The Member States with the highest annual growth rates for total organic area over the 1998-2002 period were the United Kingdom (75.1 %) and Greece (49.6 %). The lowest were Austria (1.6 %), Ireland (5.1 %) and Finland (7.8 %). The high growth figures for the United Kingdom are mainly due to the conversion of many very large agricultural areas in Scotland in 1999.

The average size of area organically cultivated was about 35 hectares at EU-15 level in 2002. The United Kingdom had the largest average size of organic area (180.6 ha), about 5 times the EU-15 average, followed by Portugal (more than twice the average size: 74.4 ha). Six Member States had an organically cultivated area average size under the EU-15 average: Ireland (32.4 ha), Finland (30.3 ha), the Netherlands (27.3 ha), Italy (22.9 ha), Austria (16.1 ha) and Greece (12.9 ha).

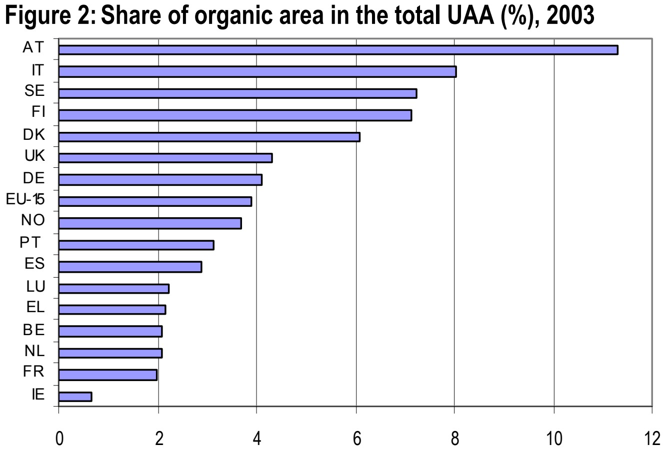
In the Southern Member States the average size of the area cultivated by organic producers is significantly different from the average area size based on UAA. It was 8 times larger in Portugal, about 4 times larger in Italy, and about 3 times larger in Greece. These large average areas might be influenced by the relatively high shares of olive groves (see also page 6). Organic producers' areas considerably over the EU average were also registered in the United Kingdom.

Table 1: Total organic area (fully converted and under conversion) and Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA), in hectares

	1998	2002	2003	Annual growth rate 1998-2002 (%)	Average size of the total organic area of organic producers (ha) 2002	Utilised Agricultural Area, (ha) 2003	Average size of UAA of holdings, (ha) 2003
EU-15	2 280 645	4 886 979	:	21.0	35.1	125 939 720	20.2
BE	11 744	29 118	:	25.5	40.3	1 394 400	25.9
DK	93 201	164 519	161 381	15.3	44.3	2 658 210	55.1
DE	414 293	696 978	:	13.9	44.6	16 981 750	41.4
EL	15 402	77 120	:	49.6	12.9	3 583 190	4.4
ES	269 465	665 055	725 254	25.3	40.3	25 175 260	22.5
FR	218 775	517 965	550 990	24.0	45.9	27 795 240	45.8
IE	24 411	29 754	28 514	5.1	32.4	4 371 710	32.3
IT	577 475	1 168 212	1 052 002	19.3	22.9	13 115 810	6.7
LU	744	2 852	:	39.9	53.8	128 160	52.3
NL	22 268	42 610	41 866	17.6	27.3	2 007 250	23.8
AT	280 966	299 454	326 703	1.6	16.1	2 888 035	14.5
PT	29 533	81 356	120 926	28.8	74.4	3 863 090	9.4
FI	116 206	156 692	159 987	7.8	30.3	2 244 700	30.1
SE	127 329	214 120	225 785	13.9	58.4	3 126 910	46.8
UK	78 833	741 174	695 619	75.1	180.6	16 105 810	65.9
NO	15 579	32 546	38 178	20.2	14.1	1 038 210	14.8

Note: EL, AT, PT, NO: 2000 UAA data; organic areas for AT do not include the alpine pastures, therefore alpine pastures were taken out from UAA

Figure 2: Share of organic area in the total UAA (%), 2003

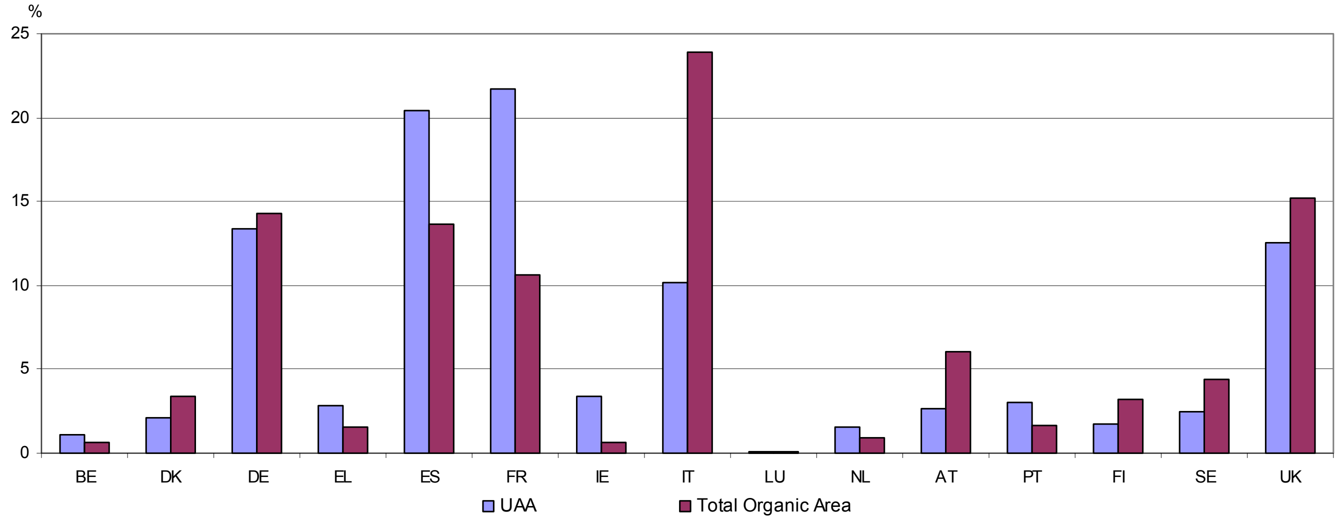


Note: BE, DE, EL, LU, EU-15: 2002 organic area data; EL, AT, PT, NO: 2000 UAA data

With 11 % in 2002, Austria had the largest share of total organic area, fully converted and under conversion, in the total Utilised Agricultural Area (Figure 2). Italy followed with an 8 % share.

Three Northern European Member States, Sweden, Finland and Denmark were the other Member States reporting values over 5 %. Ireland was the Member State with the lowest share of organic area in the UAA with a value of under 1 %.

Figure 3: Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) and Total Organic Area (fully converted and under conversion): relative share of the individual Member States in the EU-15 total (%), 2002



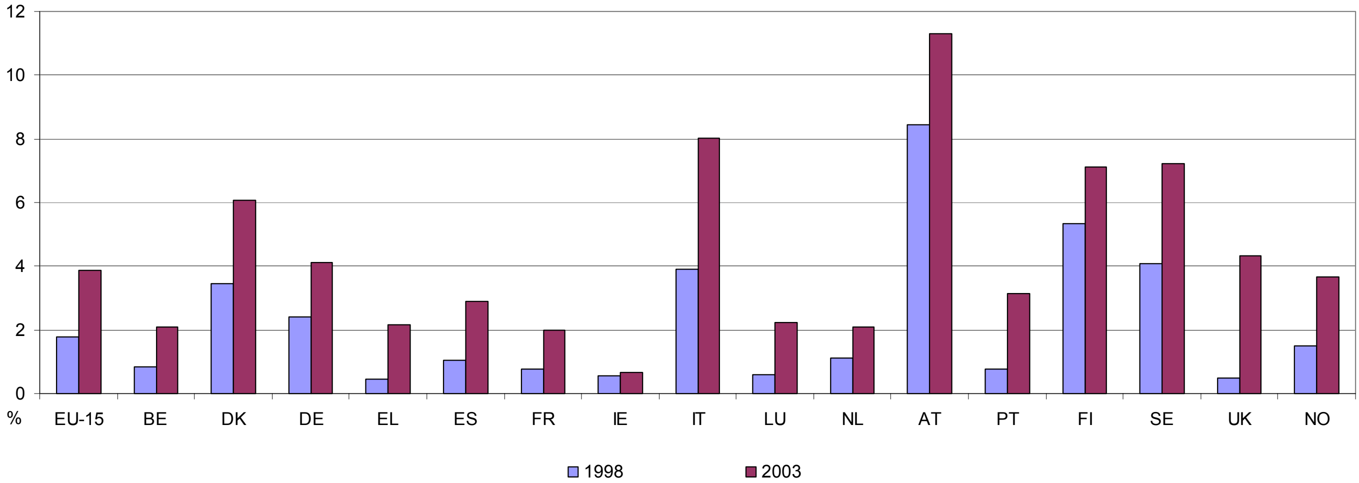
Note: EL, AT, PT, NO: 2000 UAA data

The Member States contributing most to the organically cultivated area at the level of EU-15 in 2002 did not change much compared to 2000. Italy provides most of the total EU-15 area devoted to organic farming with nearly 25 % (1.17 million hectares; see Figure 3). The United Kingdom comes second with a share of about 15 %, closely followed by Germany and Spain (both close to 14 %). France contributes 11 %.

A more interesting view is obtained when comparing the various Member States shares in the organic area with those of the UAA (Figure 3). Here, France and Spain distinguish themselves from the other Member States with a high contribution in Utilised Agricultural Area but a low share in the total organic area. Hence, these Member States contribute relatively little to the EU organically cultivated area. The opposite situation occurs in Italy and Austria, displaying the largest organic areas compared to their UAA.

The share of organic area in the total Utilised Agricultural Area (Figure 4) showed a strong increase between 1998 and 2003 for most countries, except in Ireland and Austria. In relative terms, Italy (4 % to 8 %) and the UK (0.5 % to 4 %) recorded the most significant increases. The 2003 value of the United Kingdom (4.3 %) exceeded the EU-15 average (3.8 % of the Utilised Agricultural Area).

Figure 4: Proportion of total organic area (fully converted and under conversion) in the total Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) by Member State (%), 1998 and 2003



Note: AT, BE, DE, EL, LU, EU-15: 2002 organic area data; EL, AT, PT, NO: 2000 UAA data

Share of organic producers stable at 2 % since 2000

At EU-15 level, the number of registered organic producers increased from 100 280 in 1998 to 135 191 in 2003 (Table 2), which represents a 6 % average annual increase over the 1998-2003 period. In 2003, Italy still accounted for the largest share (33 %) among the Member States followed by Austria (14 %), Spain (13 %), Germany (12 %) and France (9 %). Austria, with a high share of organically cultivated areas in relative terms (see Figure 2), recorded a drop in the number of organic producers (-6 %). Far behind Italy, Austria is closer to the number of producers found in Spain and Germany. It should be kept in mind that the areas cultivated by organic producers in Italy, Austria and Greece are on average much smaller than in other EU Member States (see Table 1 and Figure 5).

Regarding the average area organically cultivated and the number of organic producers (Figure 5), Italy and the United Kingdom both stand out compared to the two clusters of countries that emerged. Both Member States have a significant organic area but Italy records the highest number of organic producers while the United Kingdom has the largest average size of organic holdings.

Spain, Germany, France and Austria form a first group of Member States. They have larger organic areas and more numerous organic producers (between 10 000 and 20 000) but have an average size of cultivated areas similar to the second group of remaining Member States (Portugal, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Finland, Greece) and Norway.

In the EU-15, the share of organic producers among the total number of agricultural producers has been roughly the same since 2000 and stood at 2 % in 2003. Six Member States and Norway display proportions above the EU-15 average (Figure 6): Austria – despite the decline mentioned earlier – registers the largest share of organic producers (10 %), followed by Denmark and Finland (both around 7 %), Sweden (5 %), Norway and Germany (3.5 %) and Luxembourg (just over 2 %). Three Member States have a share of less than 1 %: Greece, Ireland and Portugal.

While the number of organic producers decreased (see Table 2) or did not show a significant increase for 2 Member States between 1998 and 2003 (Austria: -6 %, Finland: +2 %), some other countries experienced an outright boom. The United Kingdom had its highest increase over the 1998-2003 period (+175 %) and Luxembourg and Spain both saw their number of organic producers increase at a rate of 130 %.

Table 2: Number of registered organic operators

	Organic producers		Organic processors		Organic importers	
	1998	2003	1998	2003	1998	2003
EU-15	100 280	135 191	:	:	:	:
BE	480	722	218	784	31	77
DK	2 228	3 510	502	639	17	39
DE	9 194	16 476	3 109	5 581	237	487
EL	4 183	5 964	71	478	0	5
ES	7 392	17 028	388	1 439	2	38
FR	6 233	12 202	3 467	4 862	:	108
IE	762	889	15	92	:	1
IT	38 616	44 039	1 490	6 276	0	175
LU	26	59	16	30	0	1
NL	835	1 448	:	1 020	:	171
AT	20 316	19 056	:	939	:	17
PT	542	1 145	25	81	0	0
FI	4 984	5 074	380	487	8	12
SE	3 027	3 562	465	482	72	250
UK	1 462	4 017	664	1 941	90	:
NO	1 627	2 467	320	341	21	27

Note: BE, EL: 2002; EU-15 estimated

Figure 5: Organic farming: average size of producers' –area and number of producers, 2002

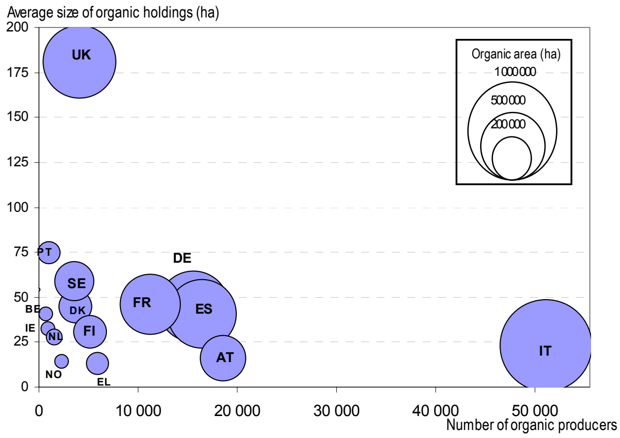
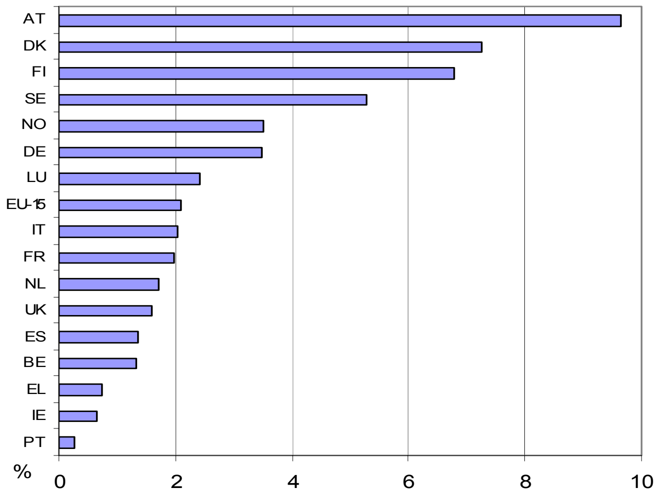


Figure 6: Organic producers as a proportion of the total number of agricultural producers (%), 2003



Note: BE, EL: 2002

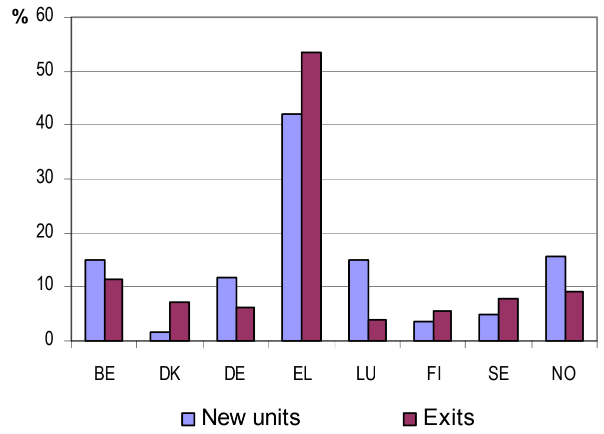
The evolution in organic producers varies considerably among the Member States considering the net balance between new units and withdrawals (Figure 7).

A strong renewal of organic producers was observed in Greece. The balance remained however negative as the exits (-53 %) were more numerous than newcomers (+42 %). This was also the case in some Northern European Member States (Denmark, Finland and Sweden).

A general increase in the number of organic processors could also be observed (see Figure 8). Their growth proved to be most dynamic in Greece (average annual growth rate of 61 %), Ireland (57 %), Portugal (47 %), Belgium (38 %), Italy (33 %) and Spain (30 %). The data for Ireland, Portugal and Greece should be interpreted with caution as the numbers of organic processors were still rather low in 1998 (15, 25 and 71 units respectively; see also Table 2).

With regard to organic importers, the lack of data does not allow for a complete picture, although some insight can be gained by looking at the available numbers (Table 2).

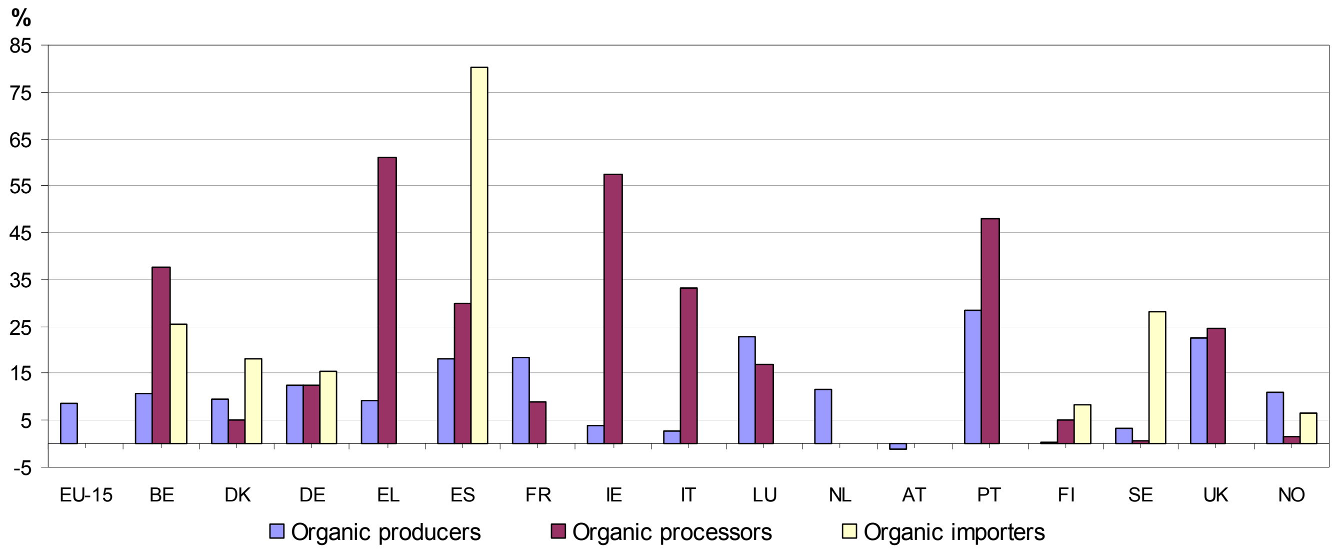
Figure 7: Organic producers, exits and new units (%), 2003



Note: BE, EL: 2002

There are few organic importers in absolute terms (see Table 2); they are most numerous in Germany (487), Sweden (250), Italy (175), the Netherlands (171) and France (108).

Figure 8: Average annual growth rate of the number of organic producers, processors and importers (%), from 1998 to 2003



Note: BE, EL: 2002

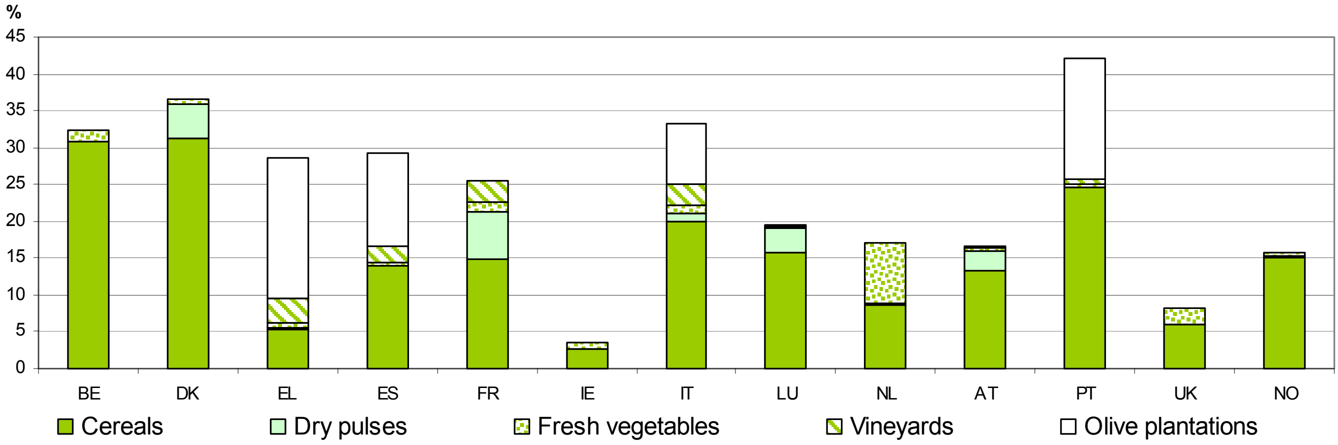
Crops: fodder grass prevails in organic farming

Production of grass as fodder was the most important use made of organic land in 2003.

Forage plants as well as pastures and meadows are the main organic crop areas as their share exceeded 50 % in most Member States. Influenced by a dryer climate, the shares in Portugal and Spain amount to 39 % and 31 % respectively; but it should be noted that in the case of Spain, the category 'other' (unspecified use of crop including 'Forest and wild growing fruits') accounts for 24 %.

The Member States where pasture and meadows are particularly important do not produce organic forage plants. Pastures and meadows account for more than 60 % of the total organic area in Ireland (91 %), the United Kingdom (75 %), Austria (68 %), France (64 %), Belgium (65 %) and Greece (62 %). Regarding Ireland, it should be recalled that the organically cultivated area only accounted for 0.7 % of the Utilised Agricultural Area (see Figure 2).

Figure 9: Relative shares of total organic area for main food crops other than fodder grass* (%), 2003



**The percentages do not sum up to 100% because fodder grass, which takes the main share (see previous paragraph), and other irrelevant crops are not displayed (i.e. 'main food crops' exclude all other crops such as fodder grass).*
Note: AT, BE, EL, LU: 2002

Apart from forage plants production and the use as pastures and meadows, cereal crops appear to be the most important organic crop in most Member States (see Figure 9). In Southern Europe, the influence of olive groves is significant, especially in Portugal and Greece.

Four Member States have main foodstuffs crop areas (cereals, dry pulses, fresh vegetables, olive groves and vineyards) with a share above 30 % of their total organic area. First comes Portugal with main foodstuffs crops accounting for 42 % of its organic area (of which 25 % from cereals alone), followed by Denmark with 37 % (of which 31 % from cereals crops), Italy (33 %) and Belgium (33 % of which 31 % from cereals alone).

Table 3: Total organic crop area in the total crop area, for selected crops, 2003

		BE	DK	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	UK
Cereals	Total crop area (ha)	310 495	1 484 585	1 302 560	6 626 875	8 949 510	302 907	4 146 964	29 368	225 720	814 098	450 968	3 058 741
	Organic area (ha)	8 968	50 432	4 043	100 860	82 087	784	209 376	449	3 636	39 590	29 864	42 095
	Share of organic area %	2.9	3.4	0.3	1.5	0.9	0.3	5.0	1.5	1.6	4.9	6.6	1.4
Dry pulses	Total crop area (ha)	1 891	31 397	25 550	568 404	468 357	2 850	70 528	668	5 737	46 087	22 963	235 051
	Organic area (ha)	:	7 447	276	:	34 802	:	11 662	92	43	7 896	:	:
	Share of organic area %	:	23.7	1.1	:	7.4	:	16.5	13.8	0.7	17.1	:	:
Fresh vegetables	Total crop area (ha)	55 109	7 638	129 955	410 904*	285 765	7 213	495 102	93	82 027	14 321	45 741	115 595
	Organic area (ha)	425	1 059	514	3 802	7 180	234	11 354	10	3 481	892	469	14 326
	Share of organic area %	0.8	13.9	0.4	0.9	2.5	3.2	2.3	10.8	4.2	6.2	1.0	12.4

*Note: AT, BE, EL, LU: 2002; * 2002; Dry pulses include beans, peas, lentils, vetches, lupines.*

Table 3 focuses on the production of cereals, dry pulses and fresh vegetables. The table gives an overview of the total area cultivated with the respective crop and the proportion that is organically grown (both in hectares and as a percentage).

With regards to cereals, it appears that Portugal, Italy and Austria show the highest share of organically grown area, with 6.6 %, 5.0 % and 4.9 % of the total area respectively. With regards to dry pulses, it appears that nearly one quarter of the total area dedicated to this crop in Denmark consists of organically cultivated land. Available figures for Austria, Italy, Luxembourg and France suggest relatively high shares, too, compared to the EU-15 average.

Denmark also registers the highest share in organic cultivation of fresh vegetables (nearly 14 % of the total area used for this crop) but is closely followed by the United Kingdom (share of 12.4 %) and Luxembourg (10.8 %). Conversely, in Belgium, Greece and Spain, the organic area of fresh vegetables has a share of less than 1 %.

➢ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Article 15 of Council Regulation (EEC) N^0 2092/91 on organic production of agricultural product and indications referring thereto on agricultural products and foodstuffs requires Member States to inform the Commission before 1 July of each year of measures taken in the preceding year for the implementation of the Regulation.

Abbreviations

EU-15: European Union, including 15 Member States: Belgium (BE), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Luxembourg (LU), the Netherlands (NL), Austria (AT), Portugal (PT), Finland (FI), Sweden (SE), the United Kingdom (UK).
Norway (NO)

Symbol

":" non available.

Data sources

The statistical information on organic farming presented in this publication is based completely on the information submitted by Member States to the Commission. Not all Member States have completed all the statistical forms, which restricted the analysis to a certain extent.

Most recent figures on organic operators are provisional and subject to later revision.

Organic data in this publication represent the sum of fully converted and areas in conversion, unless otherwise indicated.

Utilised **A**gricultural **A**rea (**UAA**) data are extracted from the Farm Structure Survey (FSS) (NewCronos/theme 5/Eurofarm). The FSS basic survey is conducted every 10 years and intermediate surveys 3 times in between (data are available for the following years: 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000 and 2003).

The source of all figures presented in this publication is available at Eurostat and reflects the state of data availability in Eurostat's reference database NewCronos as of April 2005.

Data treatment

The reader is informed of the fact that units of producers, processors and importers should not be added up, because the same operator can appear in several categories at the same time (see definitions below for further information).

Terminology

The agriculture-holding concept in agricultural statistics is used in the Farm Structural Survey (FSS). It is defined as a single unit both technically and economically, which has a single management and which produces agricultural products. The holding may also provide other supplementary (non-agricultural) products and services.

The Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) is the total area taken up by arable land, permanent grassland, permanent crops and kitchen gardens.

Organic farming can be defined as a method of production which places the highest emphasis on environmental protection and, with regard to livestock production, animal welfare considerations. It avoids or largely reduces the use of synthetic chemical inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides, additives and medicinal products.

The Regulation (EEC) N° 2092/91, defines in detail the requirements for agricultural products or foodstuffs bearing a reference to organic production methods. It notably defines a method of agricultural production for crops and livestock, and regulates the labelling, processing, inspection and marketing of organic products within the Community, and the import of organic products from non-member countries.

An Operator refers to any natural or legal person who produces, prepares or imports from a third country with view of the subsequent marketing thereof the above-mentioned products or who markets such products. Following the Regulation, the three main categories of operators are: producer, processor, and importer defined as follows:

A producer/organic farmer is any natural or legal person who operates an agricultural holding involved in producing, packaging and labelling of his own organic products following the rules of the Council Regulation (EEC) N^0 2092/91.

A processor is any natural or legal person who preserves and/or processes organic agricultural produce (including slaughter and butchering of livestock). The packaging and labelling of organic products is also considered as processing.

An importer is any natural or legal person who imports organic products from a third country with a view to the subsequent marketing of these products.

Further information:

Databases

EUROSTAT Website/Agriculture and fisheries/Agriculture/Organic farming/Organic crop area

EUROSTAT Website/Agriculture and fisheries/Agriculture/Organic farming/Number of registered organic operators

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