

# The Lazy Man of Europe

Wake up to what Europe can teach the UK  
about backing organic food and farming



Soil Association

# Executive summary

The global production of organic food is set to grow substantially, with the organic market frequently cited as one of the most significant growth markets in the food industry

This potential is demonstrated in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland where sales of organic food continued to grow in 2009, despite the recession. In the UK, sales fell, although they are now recovering. A range of factors may explain the recent decline of the UK organic market compared to our European neighbours, but the passive role of successive UK governments in supporting organic food and farming is one of the reasons commonly given.

The aim of this short report is two-fold: to demonstrate how and why governments across Europe are supporting organic food and farming; and to launch a discussion to consider what the UK government and the organic movement could and should be doing to support organic growth.

We have found that most European countries have acted confidently to normalise and champion organic food and farming as a pioneering, sustainable and environmentally friendly way to produce food.

In contrast, UK governments have been diffident, if not lazy on the subject. When it comes to thinking in a truly sustainable way about the future of food and farming, successive UK governments have preferred to sit back and snooze.

The new Coalition Government has taken some tentative, positive steps, such as cancelling the last Government's publicly-funded, pro-GM propaganda consultation, to have been carried out by the Food Standards Agency. The new Agriculture Minister, Jim Paice, has said recently that organic principles lead the way on sustainable farming, and that organic farming should be fostered for this reason.

As this report shows, other leading European governments are doing far more than ours to advance organic food and farming. Most of these

initiatives involve shifts in policies and priorities, not new funding. The recommendations listed below, all implemented by our European neighbours, provide our Government with a list of the actions needed to deliver on the Coalition's pledge – 'to be the greenest government ever'.<sup>1</sup>

**A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS?**

Each of the case studies in this report demonstrates how our Government might better support organic food and farming. As a starting point for a conversation about the proper role for government in this area, the Soil Association is suggesting the following actions:

 The UK Government should welcome the organic market as an important growth area for the UK economy, recognise the vital role played by organic farmers and food businesses in creating this growth, and support organic businesses with the same enthusiasm as with other small but rapidly growing areas of the economy.

 The UK Government should introduce a cross-departmental food strategy which recognises the role of organic and agro-ecological farming in producing food in a resource-constrained world. The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) should make a start on catching up with their Dutch opposite numbers by itself using a minimum of 30% organic food.

 The Department of Health should offer the same advice to consumers as the Swedish National

Food Administration, to help consumers make both healthy and environmentally sustainable food choices, including advice to eat organic, local and seasonal food.

 The UK Government should endorse the Food for Life Catering Mark, and ensure that public food procurement standards meet at least the Food for Life silver standard, which guarantees the use of seasonal, freshly prepared produce and some use of organic food.

 Changes to Pillar 1 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments should include a core element of support for organic farming and ensure that all member states, including the UK would gain the multiple benefits which a strong organic agriculture sector would provide. The 'greenest ever' UK Government should take a lead in Europe and support this change.

 Defra should follow the German example and re-establish a dedicated research budget to provide practical solutions to the problems organic farmers and businesses face. Defra should actively encourage knowledge sharing and the exchange of best practice in farming, within and between non-organic and organic agriculture.

 The UK Government should match any industry funding of generic promotional initiatives for organic in order to maximise the UK's use of available EU funding, and use the market to deliver public benefits.

# Introduction

Politicians in Westminster have had a historically uneasy relationship with organic food and farming. While other European countries have acted confidently to normalise and champion organic as a pioneering, sustainable and environmentally friendly way to produce food, UK government policy has been diffident, if not lazy on the subject

When in 2007 David Miliband (then Defra Secretary of State) quipped that organic was a 'lifestyle choice', he summed up his Department's laissez-faire approach to organic agriculture.<sup>2</sup> The Cameron-Clegg Coalition has so far shown no greater enthusiasm.

Across the channel in mainland Europe, organic food and farming enjoys a very different relationship with most European governments. The attitudes of almost all those who are leading policy making on food in the UK are out-of-step with attitudes in the rest of Europe when it comes to organic. Outside the UK, the often oppositional debate between organic and non-organic farming is absent or much less prominent – and organic food and farming is appreciated for the full range of public benefits it delivers.

The aim of this report is two-fold: to demonstrate how and why governments across Europe are supporting organic food and farming; and to launch a discussion to consider what the UK Government and the organic movement could and should be doing to support organic growth. We hope these case studies will inspire a new conversation with government, policy makers, businesses, farmers and growers about why the UK has taken a less proactive policy stance when it comes to organic: a dialogue on the future of food and farming drawing on the very best practice from Europe and elsewhere.

What these European case studies uncover is rarely perceived as remarkable or ground-breaking in their own countries. Supporting organic is seen by most of our European neighbours as a completely normal, proper role for government. The public goods delivered by organic farming (in terms, for example, of less pollution, more wildlife, more employment, benefit to local economies, higher animal welfare,

encouraging a positive food culture and healthy eating) are seen as deserving of public support from governments. These governments are demonstrating a commitment to thinking about a future for food and farming that accepts organic techniques and principles have a critical role to play.

The evidence in these case studies shows that when it comes to thinking in a truly sustainable way about the future of food and farming, successive UK governments have preferred to sit back and snooze. In terms of investment to support organic farming, the UK is at or near the bottom of the European league table. The innovations across Europe that encourage organic agriculture and promote organic food are rarely if ever found in the UK. Is it any wonder that the UK organic sector has been hit hardest by the recession?

This report demonstrates that backing organic food and farming need not be divisive or even particularly radical for governments. The case studies reveal common sense approaches that show the role that organic food and farming can play in meeting broader ecological targets and other critical government objectives.

Experience demonstrates that building a green economy cannot be left to the market alone. Government too has an important role to play in the promotion of the green economy, either by providing a favourable operating environment or by engaging directly in the promotion of environmentally-friendly solutions.<sup>3</sup> How governments choose to do this is not necessarily a decisive factor, their ability to deliver results often explains success or failure – this ability is dependent not only on continuity of policy or policy expertise, resources or financial support. In the case of food and farming, engaging the

organic movement in providing resources and services to support organic farming policies is critical. Where political will can harness the capacity within the organic movement, then success is more likely.<sup>4</sup> The recommendations in this report are therefore as much a challenge to the Soil Association (and other representatives of the organic movement in the UK) as they are to policy makers and politicians in Westminster.

If Britain is the lazy man of Europe when it comes to support for truly sustainable agriculture, then how can we shape up? This handful of examples demonstrates that simple interventions can be powerful and cost effective in transforming the future of food. The recommendations following each of the case studies are intended as a workout regime for a sluggish Britain. A few easy steps and we should be able to move up from 'nil points' and our disappointing place at the bottom of the league table.

A healthy and sustainable Britain deserves it.

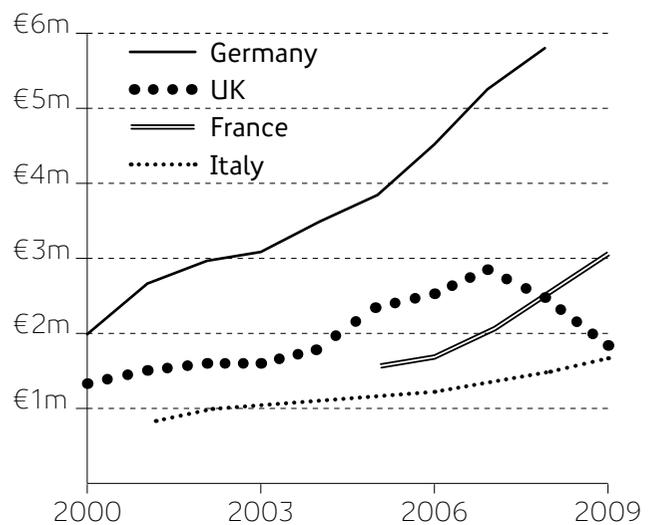
## RECESSION BUSTING ORGANIC

Globally the organic market was worth \$55 billion in 2009, an increase of 8% on the previous year. Europe achieved 10% growth in 2008 increasing its value to €18 billion.<sup>5,6</sup> The economic downturn has tested the strength of the organic sector in the different countries that make up the European Union. While demand remained stable in Germany and continued to grow sharply in France and Italy, in 2009 the total value of the organic market in the UK dropped by 13.6%.<sup>7</sup>

The organic market in the UK has grown steadily

Figure 1

### Evolution of organic food sales in France, Germany, Italy and the UK<sup>8</sup>

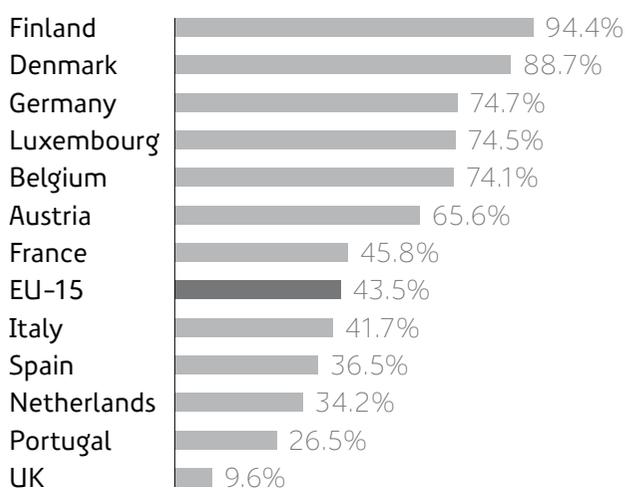


in the past ten years, with sales of organic products in the UK worth £1.8 billion in 2009, up from £800 million in 2000.<sup>9,10</sup> This expansion has mainly been driven by consumer demand for healthier, higher welfare food, specific concerns about the safety of non-organic food, and an increasing awareness of the detrimental impact of intensive agriculture and food processing on the environment and public health.

When it comes to buying organic, our European counterparts appear to be more aware of the benefits of organic than we are here in the UK. In countries where there is greater investment in and awareness of the organic sector, the value of organic food consumed per head of population is far greater, and in some cases around four times more than in the UK – Denmark (€139) Switzerland (€132), Austria (€104), Germany (€71), France (€47)

Figure 2

**Share of organic area benefitting from agri-environment 'organic commitment' support 2002-06 (% average)<sup>11</sup>**



compared to only (€34) in the UK.<sup>12</sup>

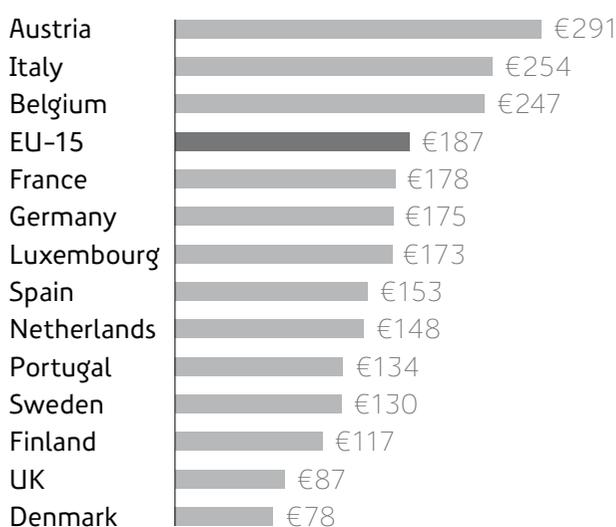
While a wide range of factors are attributed to the decline of the UK organic market in relation to its European neighbours, the passive role of the Government in its support of the sector is one of the reasons commonly given for this decline.

The UK Government's engagement with the organic sector has been market-led, with interventions responding to consumer demand – rather than encouraging it.<sup>13</sup> The Government has provided financial assistance to farmers to encourage them to meet demand, but even this support falls well below that provided by most if not all other countries in Europe (see figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2 shows the average agri-environment support (calculated from budget commitments, not actual payments) per hectare at EU-15

Figure 3

**Average agri-environment support 'organic commitment' 2002-06 (€/ha)<sup>14</sup>**



member state level for the 'organic agriculture' commitment (organic farms may benefit from other agri-environment payments) in the period 2002-2006. Figure 3 shows the proportion of land under organic production in the EU-15 benefitting from the organic-specific support provided through the EU-funded agri-environment measures.

The UK Government's approach has been described as a 'passive market development policy', characterised by: modest government engagement overall; some engagement on the supply-side through baseline standards or modest producer subsidies; and no active interventions aimed at increasing the market. Forthcoming research has pointed to this lack of engagement and intervention as an important factor explaining the comparatively low level of organic consumption in the UK.<sup>9</sup>

# Denmark drives demand

The organic market in Denmark is proportionally the biggest in Europe, with organic food making up 7% of the total food market

The growth of the organic sector in Denmark has been dynamic in recent years, doubling in the last four, and continuing to grow in 2009 and 2010, despite the recession. Danish consumers buy proportionately more organic food than any others in the world.<sup>15</sup>

But Denmark's appetite for organic food has not emerged by chance. The Danish organic laws, and every significant environmental and rural development policy since the mid 1990s, have included organic farming as a policy tool, and added some additional support for organic research, conversion and market development.<sup>16</sup> The recent 'Green Growth' strategy for example, sets a goal for doubling the organic farming area, and increased financing for market development and conversion. This policy focus on the organic sector has put organic food and farming on a firm footing.

Denmark's success is in part attributed to successive governments' approach to organic as an important emerging market for the national food industry and a sector which could create a basis for more economically sustainable farms. In the 1980s Danish policy makers considered the organic farming sector to be an 'infant industry' with potential for development in both domestic and export markets.<sup>17</sup> As a result, successive governments paid attention not only to supporting production but also creating demand.

A broad mix of policies have been used to promote organic. The Danish Government has created flexible financing for indirect demand measures that have been instrumental in stimulating market demand. They have also worked very closely with the Danish NGO, Organic Denmark, on both market development and policy development. Building capacity in Organic

Denmark, a not for profit organisation of organic farmers, food companies and consumers, has contributed to an unusually high level of joint marketing and sector collaboration.<sup>18</sup>

Denmark's Government has implemented a market development programme, through which the Government supports an Organic Product Development Team, government co-financing of the team allows small-companies to receive pro-active, free support for product development and marketing. These efforts are stimulating a wave of new organic products coming out of Denmark and a proliferation of new organic companies.<sup>19</sup>

Through a 'Programme for quality organic foods' the Government has provided up to 70% of the cost of a wide variety of consumer information and marketing initiatives, including campaigns in supermarkets, schools (where 45% of school milk is now organic), restaurants and in relation to export markets.

In addition, funding through a consumer information programme delivered through Organic Denmark has led to some innovative and successful initiatives:

- ▶ 'Let the cows free day' – an experiential approach to gaining public support for organic production. This event lets consumers experience the electrifying stampede when cows are let out on the fresh spring grass. These free events are jointly funded by the Government and organic dairies, and almost 2% of the population attends each year.
- ▶ Organic baby club – members get tips on organic food and nutrition, one third of new parents in Denmark joined within just four months.

## Leading by example

The Dutch Government's ambition is to be a European leader in sustainable food.<sup>20</sup> The Netherlands' food policy strives for 'safe, responsibly produced food and a living countryside'<sup>21</sup>

- ▶ Promotion of a free bronze, silver and gold award 'organic cuisine label' for restaurants, cafés and canteens, based on the proportion of organic food they serve.

### BRING IT HOME

The UK organic market is worth £2 billion to the economy. UK organic businesses are some of the most entrepreneurial and innovative in the food sector, but have received none of the support and encouragement championed by the Danish Government.

**The UK Government should welcome the organic market as an important growth area for the UK economy, recognise the vital role played by organic farmers and food businesses in creating this growth, and support organic businesses with the same enthusiasm as with other small but rapidly growing areas of the economy.**

These ambitious aims have been reinforced by targets that put sustainable production of food at the heart of their policy agenda – addressing energy, phosphate and nitrogen surpluses, pesticide use (which must be reduced by 95% compared to 1998 levels) and organic agriculture. In 2010 they set a target to increase land under organic production by 5% annually.

The Dutch Government acknowledges the potential of organic agriculture to increase the sustainability of the entire food and farming sector – a potential realised by increasing the 'strength' of the organic sector in terms of size and profile in order to maximise knowledge exchange between organic and non-organic agriculture.<sup>22</sup> As a result, their 2008–2011 action plan aims to increase the connectivity of the organic sector to society and to farming generally, alongside supporting the continued development of organic farming and food.

Their targets include:

- ▶ An annual growth of 10% in consumer spending on organic products
- ▶ Annual growth of 5% in acreage of organic agriculture
- ▶ Allocation to the organic sector of 10% of the budget for research.<sup>23</sup>

The Dutch Government not only takes a strong stance on the potential benefits of a strong organic sector. They also assert the need for government to fulfil an exemplary role in encouraging sustainable consumption: "The Dutch government wants to take concrete steps towards a sustainable society, and to set a good example."<sup>24</sup> The central government aim to do this by achieving 100% sustainable

# Inspiring informed choices

The Swedish guide to environmentally-friendly food

procurement in government catering. Their 'Criteria for the Sustainable Public Procurement of Catering' demands that ministries' caterers use 40% organic products, while the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality aim to go one step further by using a minimum of 75% organic products.<sup>25</sup>

The Dutch Government are not just leading by example. Their purchasing policies play an important role in stimulating demand for organic products.

"Each year, government organisations spend more than €50 billion on the purchase of Supplies, Services and Public works. By purchasing sustainably, the government can significantly boost the market for Sustainable Public Products."<sup>26</sup>

## BRING IT HOME

At the heart of the Dutch Government's success is a joined-up, cross-governmental approach to all food, not just organic and sustainable food.

**The UK Government should introduce a cross-departmental food strategy which recognises the role of organic and agro-ecological farming in producing food in a resource-constrained world. The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) should make a start on catching up with their Dutch opposite numbers by itself using a minimum of 30% organic food.**

Sweden's National Food Administration's (NFA) three areas of responsibility are safe food, fair practices in food trade and good eating habits (focused on consumer education). Since 2006 the NFA has been given sector responsibility for work on environmental objectives within the area of food, they therefore play a role in working to achieve environmentally sustainable development.<sup>27</sup> In the UK, similar official responsibilities used to rest with the Food Standards Agency, and now mainly with the Department of Health, and Defra.

The NFA have recognised the need to advise consumers on what food they should be eating to make environmentally-friendly choices. They identified environmental objectives affected by food production, including: reduced climate impact, a varied agricultural landscape and a non-toxic environment. Conclusions on what was 'environmentally-friendly' were then made regarding the effect of food production and consumption on these objectives. Their advice combines these conclusions with recommendations on a healthy diet.

Advice was drawn up for six groups of food: meat, fish and shellfish; fruits, berries vegetables and leguminous plants; potatoes, cereals and rice; dietary fat; and water.<sup>28</sup>

- ▶ On meat the messages are clear: eat less, choose locally produced, grass-fed beef and lamb, and choose organic.
- ▶ On fish: eat fish from stable stocks, wild caught or sustainably farmed, look out for the labels to prove it – such as the Marine Stewardship Council and KRAV (the leading Swedish organic and sustainable standards organisation).

# An educated palette

Public procurement accounts for roughly 14% of the EU's Gross Domestic Product,<sup>30</sup> and the use of organic produce in public catering is reported to be experiencing rapid growth<sup>31</sup>

- ▶ On fruit and vegetables: choose local, seasonal and organic.
- ▶ And on potatoes, cereals and rice: choose local and organic, choose potatoes and cereals over rice.

The NFA's aim was to translate complex messages into an 'understandable and usable decision-making tool for the consumer standing in front of the shop shelf'.<sup>29</sup> In doing so, they offer clear, concrete advice on what healthy, environmentally-friendly food choices are, from which the consumer can make better informed decisions.

## BRING IT HOME

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 Unlike home energy, transport and recycling, the UK Government have been reticent about advising consumers about simple actions they can take to reduce their carbon 'foodprint'. Apart from reducing food waste, Government advice on food choices has been scant, despite a growing research base on the positive environmental impact of organic and agro-ecological farming.  
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**The Department of Health should offer the same advice to consumers as the Swedish National Food Administration, to help consumers make both healthy and environmentally sustainable food choices, including advice to eat organic, local and seasonal food.**

Italy's Government have clearly prioritised local and organic food in their public procurement strategies; the use of organic produce in catering is well established and was estimated to be worth €290 million in 2009.<sup>32</sup> The Italian Government has taken this position largely as a consequence of their multi-functional view of food. This is especially true in schools, where school meals are recognised as part of people's right to good education and health.<sup>33</sup>

The link between organic and local food and public catering food policies was made clear in the 1999 Finance Law 488, which states that:

"To guarantee the promotion of organic agricultural production of 'quality' food products, public institutions that operate school and hospital canteens will provide in the daily diet the use of organic, typical and traditional products."<sup>34</sup>

The implementation of this law has had a significant impact on food procurement in schools. In 2003 68% of Italian schools made at least some use of organic ingredients; organic school canteens increased from 69 in 1996 to 561 in 2003 and 650 in 2008<sup>35</sup> and organic catering has become established in large cities, with Milan and Rome serving 65,000 and 150,000 mostly organic school meals everyday.<sup>36</sup>

The City and province of Piacenza in the Emilia Romagna region of Northern Italy has taken the government's commitment a step further. Since 2001, Emilia Romagna has implemented a law stating that school meals in primary and secondary schools should be 70% organic or quality foods, and day care institutions should serve 100% organic food.

The food service charged with the provision of school meals in the city of Piacenza have put

in place short supply chains and localised systems. Produce is planned on a weekly basis and is supplied by a farmer marketing cooperative made up of a network of local and regional farmers and processors that work together to guarantee the availability of produce. Meals are then prepared in a central processing unit before they are delivered to kitchens where they are cooked. The case of Piacenza demonstrates that fresh organic meals can be delivered on a large scale, via short supply chains, with the support of government and co-operation of everyone in the chain.<sup>37</sup>

The Italian Government has recognised the need to change the values of consumers alongside the food supply. National law requires that each school appoints a 'Canteen Commission' which aims to involve families in the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of school meals. The Government have also implemented food education programmes which aim to teach children the importance of local and seasonal food, and engage them in stages of the food chain.<sup>38</sup>

## BRING IT HOME

The UK Government claims to be 'committed to ensuring food procured by government departments, and eventually the whole public sector, meets British standards of production or their equivalent, wherever this can be achieved without increasing overall costs.'<sup>39</sup> The Italian Government has recognised the importance of serving good quality food to infants, children and patients – and acted upon it accordingly.

The Soil Association's voluntary Food for Life Catering Mark, even without the advantages of

Italian-style government support, now accredits 250,000 public sector meals every day in schools, hospitals, nurseries, universities and other public sector institutions. The Food for Life Catering Mark award guarantees as a minimum that meals are freshly prepared, free from damaging hydrogenated fats and harmful e-numbers and do not contain any GM ingredients.

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**The UK Government should endorse the Food for Life Catering Mark, and ensure that public food procurement standards meet at least the Food for Life silver standard, which guarantees the use of seasonal, freshly prepared produce and some use of organic food.**

# The bigger picture

Austria's commitment to rural development

In 2004 the European Commission adopted the *European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming*. The action plan explicitly recognises the potential and benefits of organic production, for the environment, animal welfare and rural development. Action 6 of the plan recommends that member states give strong support to organic farming within their national and regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

Budgets for RDPs vary between countries. 'Pillar 2' payments of the Common Agricultural Policy (from which the budget for RDPs are allocated) require co-financing from member states. Pillar 1 payments are funded by the European Union, with Pillar 2 payments receiving as little as 23% of EU funds from the Common Agricultural Policy. The extent to which member states choose to co-finance Pillar 2, or the distribution of a country's budget between the first and second pillar, can be an important indicator of the importance of rural development in countries across the European Union.<sup>40</sup>

Austria has placed a strong emphasis on rural development. This emphasis comes from their understanding of the multi-functionality of agriculture and the wider benefits it brings to society. In Austria, agriculture is no longer understood as primarily producing food and feed. The aim of the Government is to "re-embed farms in their wider rural context, so that they can make a significant contribution to rural development by responding imaginatively to the new needs of the wider society".<sup>41</sup>

This emphasis is reflected in the country's budget for Pillar 1 and 2 of CAP. Since joining the EU, Austria has focused its public resources to support

the socio-economic development of rural areas and environmental management functions of agriculture. Pillar 2 therefore receives the lion's share of funding – with the budget split between Pillar 1 and 2 at 36%:64% respectively.

Within the RDP, the most important measure which directly impacts on the development and number of organic farms or organic land has been Austria's agri-environmental programme (AEP). Through this, payments are made for the conversion or maintenance of organic land.

Austria's AEP is referred to as OPUL, the primary aim of which is to support ecologically and socially sound agriculture. OPUL receives 62% of the budget allocated to Rural Development. The programme includes 32 measures and 'organic farming' is one of the most important, alongside reducing yield, decreasing inputs and greening of arable land in autumn and winter, in terms of payments given.<sup>42</sup>

Now, Austria has the highest percentage of organic land area of all the countries in Europe, at 15.5%. The EU average stands at 4.3%.<sup>43</sup> Strong growth of organic farming in Austria, and the growth in numbers of organic farms, has been directly linked to the introduction of OPUL.<sup>44</sup>

## BRING IT HOME

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In the United Kingdom, the share of the Pillar 2 budget compared to Pillar 1 is extremely low. From 2004 to 2006, 46% of the organic area in the EU benefited from organic-specific support provided from EU-funded agri-environmental measures. Again, the area of organic land receiving support varies between countries, but in the UK the share

## Support for sustainable growth

According to the German government organic farming is "economically strong, eco-friendly and sustainable"; they have explicitly recognised the benefits that organic farming has to offer for the environment and society<sup>46</sup>

of land covered by Pillar 2 that benefits from agri-environmental funding support for organic farming is 9.6%, the lowest of all member states.<sup>45</sup>

The current EU Commission position on the Future of the CAP post 2013 includes the suggestion that there should be a 'greening' of Pillar 1 (direct farm payments).

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**Changes to Pillar 1 CAP payments should include a core element of support for organic farming and ensure that all member states, including the UK would gain the multiple benefits which a strong organic agriculture sector would provide. The 'greenest ever' UK Government should take a lead in Europe and support this change.**

This understanding has been reaffirmed by concrete targets. In 2001 the Federal Minister of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture announced that the German Government aimed to increase the organically farmed area to 20% of the total area farmed in 10 years, an aspiration that was later integrated into the national 'Sustainability Strategy'.

While this target remained far off in 2008, when the share of organically-farmed land in Germany was 5.35%,<sup>47</sup> the Government have since taken concrete steps to enable the growth of the organic market. With sales of organic food reaching €5.8 billion in 2008,<sup>48</sup> Germany has the largest organic market (by value) in Europe.

Over the past 10 years the Government have focused on enabling the organic market to grow on a sustainable basis, over the medium term.<sup>49, 50</sup> A comprehensive set of measures have been put in place to achieve this through the German Federal Organic Farming Scheme, which was set up in 2002. The scheme is intended to eliminate the weak points in the organic supply chain – from production, to processing and marketing – in order to facilitate balanced growth in the market.

The German Federal Organic Farming Scheme has been widely praised as broadly-applied, well-financed and well-administered in comparison to other national programmes or action plans.<sup>51</sup> Although the scheme was set up to run for two years, the Government has recognised that the problems faced by the organic market cannot be resolved by short-term projects and cash injections. The scheme is therefore designed to initiate a process to expand organic farming on an on-going basis by targeting its resources to resolve the problems that most hinder the expansion of the

market in the first two years of the scheme. Reduced support will be provided after that, targeting any weak points that can not be remedied in a short time frame.<sup>52</sup> Funding allocated to the scheme reflects this approach, with €35 million available in the first two years, reducing incrementally each year, to €16 million in 2010.<sup>53</sup>

The scheme's measures address all areas of the production chain, but it places an emphasis on certain areas of work in order to facilitate sustainable and sustained growth of the market. Attention is being paid to shifting people's perception of organic. The Government recognises that ideological prejudice often keeps farmers, advisers and scientists from being impartial when considering organic farming, and that consumers are often misinformed about the benefits of organic, or avoid organic based on its image.<sup>54</sup> The scheme's measures therefore give centre stage to informing people, so that producers, processors and consumers can make informed choices: "The market for organic produce can be expected to see sustainable growth when people base their decision in favour of organic farming or organic produce on a thorough consideration of the pros and cons."<sup>55</sup>

Strengthening research is also considered to be vitally important to the expansion of the sector on a long-term basis.<sup>56</sup> The Government have identified a need for research that can provide practical solutions to the problems the sector faces. They consider government assistance for research to be particularly necessary because corporate and government-funded agricultural research has focused on areas related to non-organic farming, leaving little research for application to organic practices.<sup>57</sup>

**BRING IT HOME**

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 The German scheme has specifically focused on resolving problems that hinder the expansion of the organic market and developed a programme of knowledge transfer, research, education and market stimulus to address these.

Support for research, development and knowledge transfer made up 33% of the total expenditure by the Federal Organic Farming Scheme from 2002 to 2005, and allocated funds have remained relatively constant since the scheme's inception.<sup>58</sup>

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**Defra should follow the German example and set up a dedicated research budget to provide practical solutions to the problems organic farmers and businesses face. Defra should actively encourage knowledge sharing and the exchange of best practice in organic, sustainable farming, within and between non-organic and organic agriculture.**

# ■ ■ Getting the message across

France's support for marketing organic

France's organic market has experienced considerable growth in recent years, increasing by 25% in 2008, and by 19% in 2009, despite the recession, making the organic market worth €3 billion – the second largest market in Europe.<sup>59</sup> The French Government's support for organic farming has been recently reaffirmed through their strategy for agriculture to 2020 which puts forward a new model for French farms.<sup>60</sup>

The Government have acknowledged the need to produce more food, while preserving resources and biodiversity and have therefore recognised the urgency of making agriculture as whole more sustainable. Their plan for a new model of agriculture identifies five challenges to agriculture: scarcity of water, restoration of waterways, protection of farmland, improving energy efficiency, mitigating global warming and contributing to the richness of biodiversity and landscape.

The French Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries considers that these challenges can be met by reducing the impact and use of pesticides, engaging each farm business in sustainable development and developing the potential of organic agriculture.

The Government's understanding of the potential of organic agriculture to meet the challenges the agricultural sector as whole faces has been reinforced by a commitment to triple the organic land area from 2% to 6% by 2012.<sup>61</sup> They plan to achieve this target by strengthening the organic supply chain, prioritising research, development and training, using more organic food in government ministries (they aim to use 20% organic supply by 2012), adapting regulations and facilitating conversion of farms to organic.

Agence Bio, the French Agency for the Development and Promotion of Organic Farming, is a public interest group formed in November 2001: it is an association, made up of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fishery, The National Federation of Organic Farming, and the Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and Sea, amongst others. Agence Bio works with partners who contribute to the development of organic farming – one of their central missions is to 'communicate and inform on organic farming and products, its environmental, societal and territorial impacts'.<sup>62</sup>

With considerable financial backing from the French Government, Agence Bio has been successful in winning three successive bids for EU funding since 2004, supporting initiatives to promote organic for six continuous years.<sup>63</sup>

## BRING IT HOME

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The UK Government has never supported a bid for EU funding to promote organic food to the public. The only successful bid to the EU fund has been entirely supported by organic businesses. The £2 million 'Why I Love Organic' campaign, launched in January 2011, invites consumers to discover what organic means, by challenging their perceptions and discovering their own reason for loving it.

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**The UK Government should match any industry funding of generic promotional initiatives for organic in order to maximise the UK's use of available EU funding, and use the market to deliver public benefits.**

## ENDNOTES

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