



ORGANIC

TRADE CONFERENCE 2025

WINNING HEARTS & MINDS

“IF THE PUBLIC KNEW WHAT WAS IN IT FOR THEM, THEY WOULD BUY MORE ORGANIC”



Benefits marketing

Soli struggled to find examples of organic brands communicating the benefits of their product to consumers – rather, brands tend to centre organic status itself as the benefit. Can we shift the focus away from sharing stats and facts and instead to tell stories that connect with people as human beings, and deliver tangible benefits that will heighten their lifestyle, health, social status, etc?



Functional, emotional, social

The benefits trifecta.

Soli stated that brands are marketing their organic products as if people already know what the functional, social, emotional benefits of the product are – and they don't! As a sector, we are underestimating how little the wider public knows about the benefits of organic, and we need to close this gap to remove the barriers leading to action from the consumer.



“Regen” doesn't resonate

Soli warned brands that “regenerative” as a term or a practice doesn't currently mean anything to consumers. She said ‘organic is the big kid’ and urged brands and retailers to ‘not switch horses’, and add to the noise.



“Virtue signalling” isn't a dirty word

A major social benefit for shoppers is the ability to ‘virtue signal’ – how can brands help a consumer to wear their virtues on their sleeve and tell the world what they believe in? How do we make sure they feel they have communicated their own virtues, rather than those of a brand?

KEYNOTE

SOLITAIRE TOWNSEND

Harnessing storytelling for success

“Make the consumer the hero of the story”.

Solitaire urged organic brands and businesses to stop ‘ego-marketing’ and make the consumer the hero. Consumers care about ‘virtue-signalling’ – harness this in storytelling to place the consumer as the one with the values, not brands.

Value – action barrier

Soli highlighted the idea that the commonly touted ‘value – actions gap’ isn't a gap, it's a barrier. Brands need to remove these perceived barriers (price, social status, availability, trust, self-perception) to empower consumers to make the decision to buy organic



EVIDENCE FOR ORGANIC

Turning data into trust

Michael Hanley, Commercial Director, Soil Association Exchange, **Dominie Fearn**, Founder & Director, The Wild Hare Group, and **Julia Kirby-Smith**, Executive Director, Better Food Traders joined a panel to ask why building a strong data pool is key to evidencing organic as a powerful solution for climate, nature, and health, and why data is important for decision making, branding and marketing.

Commercial Director, Soil Association Exchange
Founder & Director, The Wild Hare Group
Executive Director, Better Food Traders



Data isn't the goal – a tool for growth

Michael emphasised the business case for collecting data to inform and de-risk business practices and unlock opportunity for funding, “Organic and other nature-friendly farming systems can and should deliver both environmental and economic returns – the sweet spot is where practices that regenerate nature also regenerate the bottom line.”



Evidence to communicate benefits

Evidencing data is key to communicating specific claims or benefits to inform consumer choices and tell the story. Customers really care about nutrient density – it's a huge missing piece of the puzzle and a big opportunity for organic. Michael noted that he is seeing early infrastructure for this kind of measurement and despite it still being in its infancy, could provide an exciting way forward for evidencing nutrient density.



A step-change for modern data

Julia called for “a step change in thinking from measuring food in calories post-war to thinking about the metrics we need today, such as nutrient density and delivery against public goods”, to address the needs and concerns of a modern society.

RIDING THE REGENERATIVE WAVE

Why organic leads the way

Niamh Noone, Head of Marketing, Soil Association Certification and **Sarah Compson**, Director of Standards Innovation, The Soil Association, discussed the unique opportunity organic businesses have to lead the regen conversation and demonstrate how organic already delivers on regenerative principles.



COMMUNICATING THE ORGANIC STORY WITH CONFIDENCE & CLARITY

Regen is an on-ramp for organic

Regenerative's big benefit to organic is that it provides an on-ramp for longer term transformative changes – of which organic is already leading the way. Regen is really good at 'making soil sexy', and organic can learn a thing or two in terms of innovation. What can organic do to push things further and ensure our standards are a floor not a ceiling?

Greenwashing risks of regen are ever-present due to its unregulated nature – from truly nature friendly farming practices to corporate greenwashing of business as usual. Whilst organic is legally regulated, independently inspected and globally recognised, which gives it a level of trust that is hard to beat.

Whilst regenerative may not be hitting the consumer consciousness yet, it is the new kid on the block with the media and retailers, so we have created a [set of helpful graphics](#) to support those retailer conversations.



THE STATE OF ORGANIC IN RETAIL

Key market insights:

- Unit growth **still exceeding non-organic at 2.5%** (vs. 0.2%), despite wider cooling of consumer confidence
- In the last 12 weeks **60% of consumers** have bought organic at the till with 43% of shoppers voicing that organic is important to them.
- This increases to **55% of shoppers** when looking at a younger cohort

Consumer trends for 2025/6

- Health & sustainability remain top of the list of factors influencing purchases of organic
- Gen Z are proving to be more channel agnostic and therefore an opportunity for organic across channels
- Online still overtrading in organic, particularly in rapid delivery and direct-to-consumer.



SEEDING THE FUTURE

Inspiring the next generation

The future of the organic market rests in the hands of younger generations; the organic farmers and consumers of tomorrow. **Lennart Bertels**, Chairman, Junges Bioland e.V. **Olivia James**, Ambassador Programme Manager, Soil Association and **Patrick O'Flaherty**, Co-Founder, Pip Organic, discussed the challenges and opportunities facing the next generation.



Policy makers need to step up

We heard from Lennart that training and career pathways, funding and loan opportunities, are required in the UK and Germany alike, to make access to land available and support the skills needed to farm, organically or otherwise.



£800 a month – £3 an hour

After 4 years of hard work on their farm, Olivia could pay herself a wage for the first time – the peak was £800 a month, or £3 an hour. Liv's business was one of 6,000 land-based businesses in the UK to close last year.



You can't love what you don't know

The panel discussed a lack of connection of people to understanding where food comes from, and the need to get stories out there to show people what's possible.



"We have to take the kids with us"

Patrick spoke about their brand strategy, sowing the seed of organic, but also notions of good food, to normalise connections to nature, nutrition and healthy systems from a young age. He called for the industry to work together and be bolder.



CLOSING REMARKS DOMINIC ROBINSON



The intrinsic value of organic

Dominic remarked that over 150 organic Soil Association Certification businesses were present for the conference, coming together to begin work on the 'benefits proposition of organic' and help others see its "intrinsic value".



2.5% unit growth

Dominic picked out Mike Watkin's earlier figure of 2.5% unit growth for the organic market - indicating "the industry is getting something right", bucking the wider trend of difficulty in other sectors and diminished consumer confidence.



"Riding the regen wave"

Referencing the earlier discussion on regenerative, Dominic urged organic brands and businesses in the room to "ride the regen wave", and use its popularity as an on-ramp for organic.



NEXT STEPS

Collating data to evidence organic

Soil Association Certification would like to explore how we pool UK organic on-farm data to evidence the benefits the organic.

If you would like to be involved in this work, or be updated, **please provide your details**. This is for anyone who has already collected data, is in the process of doing so, or is interested in collecting data.

Help us plot the benefits proposition of organic

Inspired by Solitaire Townsend's rousing keynote speech, we would like to carry out an exercise to brainstorm the "benefits proposition" for organic, to support the launch of the new "Marketing Organic - what you can say" booklet.

If you're interested in taking part **please email businesssupport@soilassociation.org**.

WITH THANKS



Thank you to everyone who joined us for an inspirational series of talks and a packed day of networking.

Special thanks for our expert speakers and panellists and brands who provided the organic snacks.

