

SUMMARY REFLECTIONS

ORGANIC SECTOR AGRICULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION SYSTEMS

In Hungary, the organic Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS for organic) is in need for more central coordination efforts and dedicated funding. Currently, AKIS for organic is characterized by a network of few dedicated public and private actors: influential actors like ÖMKI and the Hungarian Organic Farmers Association, supported also by certifying organizations, input providers, and progressive NGOs. There is potential for further support of AKIS development in actors such as farmers' organizations and the Chamber of Agriculture's advisory network. Coordination and collaboration within the organic AKIS are weak, with sporadic cooperation driven by enthusiastic individuals, hindering system integration. Enhanced collaboration and resource allocation are critical for sustainable development, emphasizing the need for improved coordination efforts to strengthen Hungary's AKIS for organic.

Hungarian organic production needs more practice-oriented research, more dissemination work, backed up by local scientific evidence. Efforts should be made to increase consumer awareness and create a stable and growing organic sector and a stronger internal market. Cooperation and better communication between organic actors (producers, traders, umbrella organisations, certifiers and research institutions) is essential.

Regarding organic food processing and retail, there's a noticeable gap in specialized assistance for navigating organic market entry, certification requirements, and available subsidies. Existing organizations primarily focus on aiding conventional farmers, leaving newcomers to rely on the information from well-established processors. Certification bodies hold the problem of conflict of interest and are described as slow in the interpretation of international regulations.

GENERAL INFORMATION

MAIN CULTIVATED CROPS



Cereals



Oilseeds



Fruits

CROPPING PATTERN (% OF UAA)



Arable Land

81.8%



Permanent Grassland

14.9%



Permanent Crops

3.2%



CONTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURE TO ECONOMIC OUTPUT

3.66 % (2022)



CONTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURE TO EMPLOYMENT

3.45 % (2022)



UTILIZED AGRICULTURAL AREA (UAA)

4,921,740 Hectares (2020)
52.9 % of Total Area (2020)

ORGANIC SECTOR OVERVIEW

The organic sector in Hungary has expanded rapidly over the last two decades. Between 2001 and 2021, the area under organic farming increased by 271%; by 2021, the area fully converted and under conversion to organic farming has reached 5,9% of the utilized agricultural area (UAA) by 2021, which is a total of 293.000 ha certified or under conversion. The organic sector in Hungary is highly export-oriented, with approximately 85% of the organic production going into export. Exports are mainly raw materials or products with low added value.



GROWTH OF ORGANIC AREA (2001-2021)
271%



AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION
N.A.



GROWTH OF ORGANIC RETAIL (2001-2021)
N.A.



NO. OF PRODUCERS
5,129



EXPORTS AND IMPORTS
20 / 18 (million €)



NO. OF PROCESSORS
489



DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION
3.04€/Person



NO. OF IMPORTERS
61

MAIN CROP TYPES

1
CEREALS

2
OILSEEDS

3
FRUIT

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES, POLICIES & REGULATIONS

The Organic Action Plan (2014-2020) aimed to develop AKIS. The renewed National Action Plan for the Development of Organic Farming (2022) emphasises the need to improve advisory services for organic farming by the Chamber of Agriculture. In line with this policy goal, the Chamber of Agriculture aims to build a specialised advisory network by 2024 and to publish sector-specific technical guidelines for farmers to facilitate a successful conversion to organic farming. A task force on organic R&D was established in early 2023 by the Ministry of Agriculture to improve R&D in organics and to coordinate relevant research of AKIS actors. In the absence of a comprehensive policy strategy, sporadic activities, like project grants (e.g., the MNVH, EIP Agri Operational Groups) support AKIS development.

KEY COMPONENTS & FUNCTIONS OF AKIS FOR ORGANIC

KNOWLEDGE CREATION, RESEARCH & INNOVATION

ÖMKi has a leading role in organic research and knowledge exchange together with few dedicated researchers working at different university departments or public research institutes, and a number of innovative organic farmers. At ÖMKi, co-creation, Living Labs and on-farm experiments are in practice in addition to traditionally structured scientific work. Research activities are funded by local and/or international projects, which usually have a duration of 2–5-years. The experts interviewed highlight that small and medium-scale organic farmers are usually more open to research collaboration, while larger producers have the financial means to involve (often foreign) advisors in case they wish to overcome specific technological challenges. Producers of organic plant protection materials (e.g., Biocont Ltd.) also have advisory services and set up on-site trials to measure the effectiveness of their products and to develop them further.

ADVICE AND CONSULTANCY

The advisory network planned by the Chamber of Agriculture for 2024 should make advisory services available to all farmers. However, there are few staff specialised in organic farming, and relevant professional training to help advisors understand the differences between organic and conventional methods has not been started, which is hampering farmers' transition. Advice is currently limited to administrative assistance on the application process for organic subsidies. More complex and production-related technical assistance relies mainly on the expertise of international input providers and grain traders. As they are not independent consultants, their activities are not subsidised. Accordingly, farmers tend to turn directly to certification bodies to find out the basic compliance requirements. Although they are not formally independent either, their informal advice meets farmers' knowledge needs. A few international organic advisors are also active in Hungary at larger scale operations, who can afford the extension service costs.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Different training programmes are available on organic farming at the different levels of the education system often for free or at low costs. More complex training programmes by for-profit and not-for-profit organisations come with an attendance fee. While there is no 'formal' qualification for converting farmers, there are shorter courses on organic farming topics offered outside the formal higher education system. Workshops and training on organic farming are usually organised as part of international research projects. There is one MSc programme on organic farming (at MATE University of Life Sciences). However, no BSc-level programme allows to embark on the matter, while organic farming generally remains underrepresented in a broad portfolio of sustainability-related courses.

CONCLUSIONS

Key challenges faced by the AKIS for organic: There are no independent, personalised advisory services with cross-regional specialisation and comprehensive coverage available for organic farmers, leading certification bodies to step in as advisors. Limited funds hinder knowledge creation and innovation, with heavy reliance on international R&D calls. However, there is insufficient R&D funding on local needs that exacerbates the lack of scientific knowledge accessible to organic farmers. The sector suffers from a deficiency in accessible scientific knowledge tailored for organic farmers, compounded by disorganized dissemination efforts that limit access to valuable information. Additionally, there is a lack of motivation among academic researchers to engage with and address the knowledge needs of organic farmers and processors. Political debates surrounding academic reorganizations further destabilize the academic community. Organic farming lacks dedicated curriculums in agricultural education, leading to a shortage of skilled advisors and specialized organic advisors. Schools and teachers show limited interest in organic farming, and online courses addressing organic practices are scarce, contributing to newcomers' lack of knowledge.

Opportunities for improvement and growth: The organic sector's knowledge and innovation system thrives on several strengths. Dedicated actors within the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS), notably ÖMKi, actively support organic farming development. Agricultural input providers drive innovation by adapting technologies and offering advisory services to their clients, similarly, international trade companies provide crucial technical assistance to their contracted farmers. Knowledgeable professionals contribute expertise relevant to organic production. A strong dialogue led by the Ministry of Agriculture ensures inclusive policymaking. The Organic Farming Association's national coverage strengthens the organic movement, although some responsibilities overlap with those of the certification body.

FIND OUT MORE HERE

[Deliverable D1.1 Assessment of Knowledge and Innovation Systems for Organic Agriculture, Aquaculture and Value Chain Actors](#)



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