



SUMMARY REFLECTIONS

ORGANIC SECTOR AGRICULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION SYSTEMS

The AKIS for the organic sector in Italy can be described as a thematic sub-system of the main AKIS. Across the national territory a number of structures, networks and individuals, renown as competent and credible AKIS actors, provide information and advisory services for organic farming. Some important local/regional hubs also exist. Knowledge about the management of organic farming systems is quite diffused, with highly specialized, competences on specific topics, in specific sectors, available in some places. And theoretical knowledge is also associated to good practical know-how. Focus on technical aspects is dominant though, leaving knowledge on other equally important aspects in organic farming management (e.g. marketing) relatively sketchy. Overall, the number of providers is still relatively low and the provision of advisory services remains insufficient and too fragmented – spotty as a leopard skin – for the needs of the national organic sector. Strong interactions exist between various organic AKIS actors most of which are passionate and very active, showing high organizational capacities and a very good international networking. At the same time, poor collaboration and coordination is also often lamented due to individualist behaviour and some internal competition, conveying the impression of a closed system, without a shared vision for the future and relying too much on people’s personal motivation for its functioning. From the methodological point of view, co-existence of different approaches - traditional & innovative; top-down & bottom-up - is observed with an increasing awareness of the need to move towards participatory methods and tools as well as to systematically adopt a multi-actor approach. Knowledge transfer capacities are varied, not homogeneously available; some difficulties are still encountered in the adoption of systemic, multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches. Interesting funding opportunities have been successfully experimented, e.g. EIP-AGRI, and others appear to be available in the new CAP programming period. Financial resources, though, are still reportedly insufficient and, above all, their availability discouragingly discontinuous.

The organic sector in Italy had a significant, but uneven growth in the last decades.

Regarding organic food processing and retail, the most important actors to support organic processors and retailers are certification bodies, followed by a few qualified lawyers specialising in agro-food legislation and some consultants, food technologists, universities and other research institutes as well as organic sector organisations (Assobio, Federbio, AIAB). Large companies with organic lines have internal consultants within their quality departments. Overall, the system is described as uncoordinated and fragmented. There is a lack of communication and knowledge exchange especially between processors and farmers and farmers’ organisations. The sector is marked by high competition especially on the retailing level.

GENERAL INFORMATION

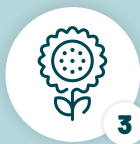
MAIN CULTIVATED CROPS



Cereals



Plants Harvested Green



Industrial Crops

CROPPING PATTERN (% OF UAA)



Arable Land

57%



Permanent Grassland

25%



Permanent Crops

17%



CONTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURE TO ECONOMIC OUTPUT

1.85 % (2022)



CONTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURE TO EMPLOYMENT

3.43 % (2022)



UTILIZED AGRICULTURAL AREA (UAA)

12,041,230 Hectares (2020)
39.86 % of Total Area (2020)



ORGANIC SECTOR OVERVIEW

Organic land management expanded by 77% between 2001 and 2021. In 2023, the overall organic and land area under conversion to organic was 19,2% of the utilised agricultural area (UAA), which is the second highest share after Austria (FiBL, 2023). In the same year the total share of organic food sales in Italian food expenditure was 3.5% of total food sales. The geographical distribution shows that 55% of the organically cultivated land are in five regions: Sicily, Puglia, Tuscany, Calabria, and Emilia-Romagna (SINAB, 2024).

Italy has the second highest organic aquaculture production after Ireland in terms of live weight. In 2020, 9.608 mt of organic aquaculture products were produced in Italy, accounting for 8% of the total aquaculture production. Aquaculture production growth in Italy was constant, in 2020 being seven times higher than that in 2012 (1.3790 mt). The production of organic mussel is by far dominant, accounting for about the 80% of the total organic aquaculture production. The other species produced organically are: Japanese carpet shell, Rainbow trout, European seabass, Gilthead seabream and Oyster.



GROWTH OF ORGANIC AREA (2001-2021)
77%



AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION
22,187 Live Weight Tonnes



GROWTH OF ORGANIC RETAIL (2001-2021)
247%



NO. OF PRODUCERS
84,191



EXPORTS AND IMPORTS
2,900 / N.A. (million €)



NO. OF PROCESSORS
24,231



DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION
62,19€/Person



NO. OF IMPORTERS
579

MAIN CROP TYPES

CEREALS

1

OLIVES

2

GRAPES

3

SUPPORTING STRATEGIES, POLICIES & REGULATIONS

An AKIS to support the organic sector in Italy is dealt with under both the National Action Plan for Organic Production and Products (NOAP) 2024-2026 as well as in the National CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

In the framework of NOAP, specific actions are envisaged to support, among other things, long-term professional training of organic advisors and the setting up of a dedicated platform on training and advisory activities. To improve organic advisory services and enhance economic and environmental performances of organic farms, NOAP also supports the establishment of specific agreements with agricultural professional bodies and clearly acknowledges and important role to be played by biodistricts.

The CAP SP aims to support cooperation among AKIS actors, set new coordination bodies in every province, strengthen research funding and practice-oriented, participatory research, review the bureaucratic system to ease conversion, focus on monitoring and risk management (esp. new diseases).

The Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests (MASAF), in particular the General Directorate for the Promotion of Agrifood Quality, plays a central role providing continuous funding for research and innovation projects for organic aquaculture. The main strategy in place is the National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture (NSPA) 2021-2027. The Italian program of the "European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF 2021-2027) supports the EU common fisheries policy (CFP), the EU maritime policy and the EU agenda for international ocean governance. Similar to the NSPA, objectives and activities aimed at promoting the development of organic aquaculture in the national program of EMFAF 2021/27 are not defined in detail.

KEY COMPONENTS & FUNCTIONS OF AKIS FOR ORGANIC

KNOWLEDGE CREATION, RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Co-constructive approaches are not always systematic but knowledge exchange between research and advisory services has improved significantly, especially through programmes like the EIP-AGRI, PIF (Integrated Supply Chain Projects), and RDP. In the absence of a national e-infrastructure, several platforms provide knowledge exchange with a limited scope and for a specific audience. The strong decentralisation of AKIS is also reflected in the importance of local hubs as local groups as "Gruppo AIAB Torino", "Gruppo Friuli (regional body, AIAB)" or local networks as the "Network of advisory services in Tuscany" or "Biodistricts (IN.N.E.R)". Knowledge hubs are also related to specific sectors (e.g., the Italian network for peasant seeds "Reti semi rurali") or areas and villages as San Michele all'Adige or Laimburg for fruticulture and viticulture.

As for organic aquaculture, the dynamics of knowledge and innovation system encompass a wide range of actors, with research institutions having substantial potential. However, a comprehensive national programme is missing. Farmers are broadly involved in public or private research focused on technical aspects of production, processing and consumer perception. These initiatives appear not strategic or institutionally frequent enough to ensure a well-functioning knowledge exchange.

ADVICE AND CONSULTANCY

Very few advisory bodies provide assistance to organic farmers, especially when it comes to specific services for small-scale organic farmers. The organic advisory services mainly depend on a few dedicated and competent private actors. Services provided mainly include production-oriented technical assistance and, to a lesser extent, support for sales and direct marketing. However, there are also public support services, depending on the availability of regional funds and political support.

Aquaculture farmers receive support mainly as part of the certification process, less for the training part. The main topics of the advisory system appear to be technical issues of production.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In recent years, some universities have introduced courses on sustainable agriculture that included organic farming practices and principles, and others have introduced a specific course on organic agriculture production, but these are not permanent. Initiatives for technical training and professional development of organic advisors and inspectors are usually implemented by third sector actors. Among such initiatives, it is worth mentioning the 'Accademia Bio' developed by Federbio (Federazione Italiana agricoltura biologica e biodinamica), which provides specialised training programmes, coaching and technical assistance in classroom setting or on-farm to farmers, processors and consultants.

As for aquaculture, there are special funds to support training, but these remain largely unused due to too little interest specifically from small-scale producers.



CONCLUSIONS

Bottlenecks include fragmentation of the system, lack of coordination among actors, and lack of a common and systemic way of thinking. The most important bottleneck to training and education for organic farming is the lack of availability of constant and permanent public educational and vocational programmes on organic farming. Organic farming only occasionally appears in the curricula of undergraduate and post-graduate courses. Training programmes available on organic farming are sporadic, lacking innovative approaches to attract both students' and agricultural producers' attention to organic farming. The provision of advisory services is still not multidisciplinary, as there is insufficient interaction and dialogue between research actors and those responsible for knowledge dissemination. Advisors are reported to tend to focus on rather narrow areas, limiting their attention to certain crops or themes (e.g., soil fertility, plant disease) while failing to provide more comprehensive support. Efforts at regional levels are unable to influence other regions due to the lack of collaboration with inter-regional AKIS actors. There is the need for a better national and interregional cooperation. The lack of continuity of the efforts and a shared vision for the future of the sector undermines effective collaboration on research and innovation in the Italian AKIS.

As for organic aquaculture, the current advisory system lacks focus on market integration, branding, and marketing strategies, essential for the sector's success. Given the fragmented network between actors and the limited interest in organic aquaculture from private advisory services, greater institutional commitment is required.

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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