



## Organic research and innovation: a strategic investment in Europe's agri-food systems

### Introduction

The EU's ambition to build a resilient, competitive, and sustainable agri-food system depends on innovation that strengthens farm performance while restoring natural resources and supporting rural communities.

Organic farming plays a strategic role in this transition. It reduces dependency on external inputs, regenerates soils and biodiversity, and delivers system-based solutions that are increasingly taken up in agriculture. To sustain and scale these benefits, targeted research and innovation (R&I) is essential.

Organic farming faces distinct challenges that cannot be addressed through generic or purely technology-driven innovation pathways. Managing soil fertility, pests, and diseases without synthetic inputs, adapting to climate change, and strengthening organic value chains require knowledge-intensive, system-based solutions developed in close cooperation with farmers and other practitioners. Organic R&I has a long tradition of co-creation and on-farm experimentation, making it a valuable model for innovation delivery within Europe's Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS).

The EU's Vision for Agriculture and Food recognises the central role of R&I in delivering climate neutrality, biodiversity protection, food security, and viable rural livelihoods. Support is currently provided

### Summary

- Research and innovation (R&I) in organic is strategic as a driver of Europe's resilience, competitiveness, and sustainability.
- Organic and agroecological R&I strengthens farm profitability, reduces dependency on external inputs, and regenerates natural capital. It delivers solutions that are taken up throughout the agricultural sector.
- However, organic R&I risks being diluted within broad sustainability agendas, not serving the specific needs of the organic sector. There is limited transparency on funding levels, weak coordination, and insufficient mechanisms to translate research results into practice.
- The next EU research and innovation framework (Horizon Europe), the European Competitiveness Fund, and a future EU Organic Action Plan will determine whether organic farming can continue to contribute effectively to EU priorities on climate and biodiversity, food security, rural vitality, and the competitiveness of the agri-food sector.
- Policymakers should ringfence funding and build capacity for organic R&I in Europe, broaden participation of farmers and practitioners, strengthen Europe's organic leadership through better coordination of organic research networks, and invest in long-term capacity for sharing and applying research results.



through Horizon Europe, the Common Agricultural Policy via AKIS and EIP-AGRI (part of the EU CAP Network), and national research programmes. The 2021 EU Organic Action Plan set a target of 30% of agri-food research funding for topics relevant to organic farming. A future Organic Action Plan provides an opportunity to reinforce this commitment and ensure coherence across EU and national instruments.

At a time of major policy transitions, including the preparation of the next EU Research & Innovation Framework Programme (Horizon Europe) and the European Competitiveness Fund, clear choices are required. Without targeted priorities and good coordination, organic R&I risks being diluted within broad sustainability agendas. With strategic support, it can remain a key lever for implementing the EU's Vision for Agriculture and Food and for strengthening Europe's leading role in this area.

## Key findings

### **Research & innovation for organic farming makes a critical contribution to resilient, competitive, and sustainable food systems**

Organic farming depends on knowledge-intensive, system-based innovation, yet several structural challenges limit the impact of public investment in organic R&I. EU and national programmes show that organic R&I delivers practical solutions, with benefits extending beyond the organic sector.

### **Broad research priorities of sustainability and agroecology dilute specific needs of organic**

Current funding frameworks do not consistently address the specific needs of the organic sector. The shift towards broad thematic European Partnerships for sustainability under Horizon Europe has reduced the visibility of organic R&I and diluted efforts at the EU and national levels. Available information does not allow transparent assessment of whether funding targets set out in the EU Organic Action Plan are met.

### **Funding levels are not proportional to the growth ambitions for the organic sector**

While most national Organic Action Plans include research priorities, funding is often not proportional to the size of or the ambition of the organic sector, and alignment with EU-level priorities remains weak. Results from applied research and innovation projects are insufficiently shared, limiting uptake by farmers and advisors. These findings point to a need for clearer priorities, better coordination, and stronger mechanisms to translate organic R&I into practice.

### **TP Organics identified 31 priority topics for organic and agroecology**

The Strategic Research & Innovation Agenda (SRIA) of TP Organics, developed in close collaboration over two years in extensive bottom-up consultation involving farmers, researchers, and other stakeholders, proposes 31 priority topics under three themes that make up the vision of TP Organics: Leading for the environment, biodiversity and climate; leading for people, communities and sustainable livelihoods; and leading for responsible innovation.

### **Participation and coordination gaps reduce effectiveness**

Farmers, advisors, and SMEs face barriers to accessing R&I funding, while weak coordination between EU projects, national programmes, EIP-AGRI Operational Groups, and other innovation initiatives leads to fragmentation.



## A persistent gap between research and practice limits uptake

Insufficient resources are dedicated to preparing practice-oriented materials, maintaining knowledge platforms, and facilitating exchange across regions and languages. This includes also effective linking to AKIS at national level.

## Policy recommendations

Funding for organic research and innovation and capacity building should be ringfenced and proportional to the growth ambitions of the sector. This strategic investment in the agri-food system delivers solutions to improve farm profitability, reduce input dependency, regenerate natural capital, and develop value chains.

**At the EU level, including in any future EU Organic Action Plans, the European Commission should:**

### Secure dedicated funding for organic research and innovation in all funding instruments

- Allocate a minimum of 30% of agri-food R&I funding under Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund to projects specific to or highly relevant for organic farming.
- Include organic R&I as an explicit objective of policy window 1 (Clean Transition & Industrial Decarbonisation) and policy window 2 (Health, Biotech, Agriculture and Bioeconomy) in Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund
- Ring-fence funding for organic and agroecological R&I within relevant national programmes.
- Ensure transparent monitoring and reporting on how EU and national R&I funding addresses organic sector needs and policy targets.
- Align European Partnerships, missions, and national programmes to explicitly include organic research objectives.

### Broaden participation in R&I projects through simplification of funding rules

- Design R&I calls that actively involve farmers, advisors, SMEs, NGOs, and value-chain actors through reinforced multi-actor approaches.
- Make two-stage procedures and simplified funding rules the standard for practice-oriented innovation.
- Expand the use of Financial Support to Third Parties to lower administrative barriers and enable experimentation in diverse regional contexts.
- Promote open science while safeguarding data rights and ensuring meaningful participation of practitioners in project governance.

### Strengthen Europe's leadership through a coordinated organic research network in the EU Organic Action Plan

- Secure long-term support for a European network of national organic research funding bodies, building on the experience of CORE Organic.



- Use this network to align EU and national priorities, coordinate calls, and maintain strategic capacity in organic R&I.
- Anchor the network within the future EU Organic Action Plan to ensure continuity and policy coherence.

### Encourage Member States to invest in specific organic research and innovation

- Allocate funding for specific organic projects and programmes in line with national and regional organic action plan priorities, including national contributions to joint European calls.
- Develop dedicated research and innovation capacities.
- Monitor how research funding is addressing organic needs at national and regional level and whether funding levels are adequate to achieve the targets set for the organic sector.

### Invest in capacity for sharing and scaling research results

- Provide stable funding for European and national knowledge platforms and research archives relevant to organic farming.
- Support the development of practice-oriented materials, tools, and multilingual resources from all publicly funded organic R&I.
- Facilitate exchange through networks, conferences, and training opportunities, particularly for early-career researchers and practitioners.
- Strengthen links between research, advisory services, and innovation support within AKIS.

### Further information

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