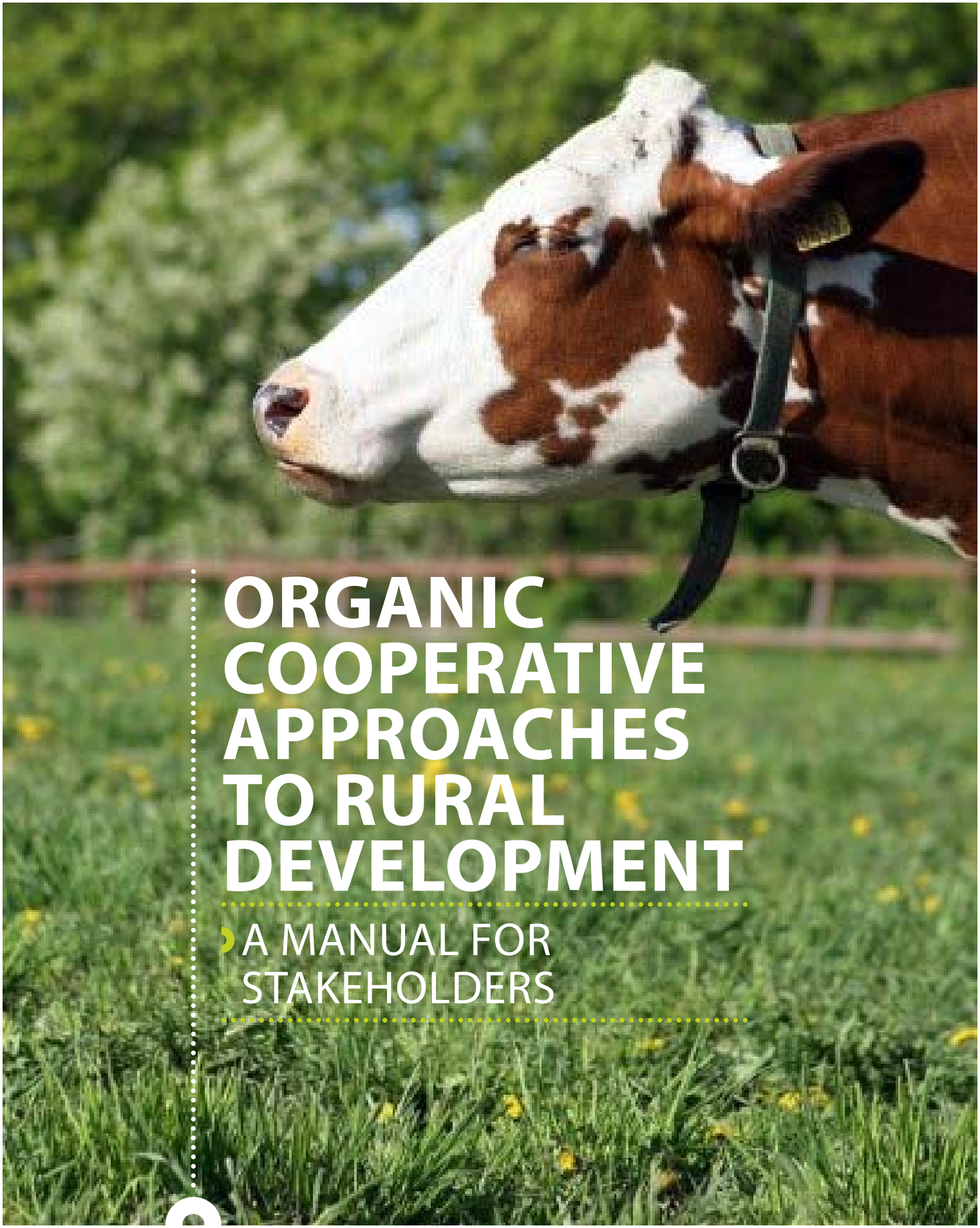

ORGANIC COOPERATIVE APPROACHES TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

A MANUAL FOR STAKEHOLDERS

IFOAM EU GROUP

MAKING EUROPE MORE ORGANIC

Lifelong Learning Programme

PROJECT PARTNERS

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FOREWORD

Across Europe, the organic sector continues to grow year on year. It has doubled in size in the last ten years, from a value of 10.2 billion euro in 2004, to 22.2 billion in 2013. These growth trends reflect the fact that, in an agri-food sector dominated by conventional food and farming systems, organic farmers have traditionally needed to work together and innovate to ensure the long-term viability of their farm businesses. Capacity building is not an easy or straightforward task. Strong cohesion amongst farmers can be difficult to achieve due to their differing objectives and expectations, as well as the competition for market access. It also takes time to develop good working relationships, which can be further complicated if the organic farmers are dispersed over a wide geographical area. Moreover, the weak position of organic farming in the overall agri-food chain means that changing market needs and fluctuating prices can impede capacity building. At the same time, support for organic farming in public policy has played an important part in the development of a vibrant organic sector in Europe. This has been the case in some countries since the early 1980s, and has generally been true across the EU by the 1990s.

While the national and regional Rural Development Programmes in most countries support conversion to, and maintenance of organic farming, often the authorities do not prioritise support for organic approaches in areas such as processing and market development, education and advisory services, or research and innovation. This is despite the fact that the EU Rural Development Policy provides considerable scope for supporting cooperation among rural stakeholders – something which has evolved over the successive reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy, especially the latest reform for the period 2014-2020. In reality, the amount of information available about support measures for rural stakeholder cooperation varies significantly between and within countries. Furthermore, initiatives targeted at both conventional and organic farmers may not be immediately relevant to the needs of the organic sector. In short, the lack of prioritisation for organic approaches across a host of policy measures in both national and regional rural development programmes often acts as a major limiting factor to cooperation and innovation between organic farmers.

This publication is intended as a reference work for organic farming associations, advisors and educators, to help them better understand the opportunities provided under the new EU Rural Development policy for building capacities and establishing greater cooperation among farmers and stimulating the further development of innovative approaches in the organic sector. It includes an overview of the options presented by the new policy, as well as examples of how organic farmers and other stakeholders across the EU are pioneering cooperative approaches. It also gives details of how to obtain more information.

We trust that the information will guide stakeholders in the organic sector in making full use of the new rural development policy in their respective regional and national programmes, and that it will help build the capacities needed to make Europe more organic.

KSC4 farmers' project team

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EU RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND ORGANIC COOPERATION

WHAT IS THE EU RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY?

The EU Rural Development Policy is part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which is implemented by Member States through their national and regional rural development programmes (RDPs). RDPs are designed and administered by the relevant authorities in the Member States, in conjunction with the European Commission. They offer a range of policy support measures targeted at farmers and other rural people. The measures invest in farming and rural areas with the intention to:

- improve the viability of farm businesses
- address environmental challenges related to agriculture
- support the economic development of rural areas.

RDPs are partly financed by the *European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development*, which represents about 20% of the CAP budget, and partly through national and regional co-financing provided by individual Member States. In the majority of Member States, the RDPs supporting organic farming primarily involve land-based area payments, which are recognised as a key tool for supporting the growth and development of organic farmland area. The payments are intended to cover the costs incurred and income forgone when farmers convert to, and maintain organic production. RDPs can include additional provisions for support in other areas relevant to organic farming, such as education and advisory services, market development and innovation. Such measures have huge potential to stimulate wider development of the organic sector.

Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020: The latest reform of the CAP was finalised between 2010 and 2013. As part of the implementation process, Member States must put in place new RDPs for the period 2014 to 2020. These RDPs will take a similar basic form to those in previous programming periods, focusing strongly on:

- fostering knowledge transfer and innovation
- preserving and enhancing ecosystems
- promoting resource efficiency and acting on climate
- social inclusion and the economic development of rural economies.

There are 118 programmes in total. Twenty Member States have introduced RDPs on a national basis, and eight on a regional or outer-regional basis. All programmes must be agreed between Member State authorities and the European Commission. The first programmes were already adopted in late 2014, with the remainder to be approved in the course of 2015.

HOW CAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES SUPPORT ORGANIC FARMING COOPERATION?

With a number of measures available to Member States for inclusion in their RDPs, the programmes offer huge potential in terms of capacity building for organic farmers, and they can be used to encourage greater cooperation between farmers and other value chain stakeholders. Below we highlight seven key measures for supporting cooperation.

OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT RURAL DEVELOPMENT MEASURES TO SUPPORT COOPERATION

***Cooperation (Measure 16)*:** This is a flagship measure of the *European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and sustainability.* It supports efforts by agri-food actors to come together and develop practical solutions or opportunities for innovation. It promotes applied research and innovation in a diverse range of practical and scientific contexts. The measure has a very broad focus and can support projects related to:

- the development of new products, practices, processes and technologies
- agri-tourism
- the growth and promotion of short supply chains and local markets
- joint actions on the environment and climate
- biomass for food and energy production; forest management
- farm diversification, such as community-supported agriculture and food education.

***Knowledge transfer and information actions (Measure 1)*:** This measure covers skills acquisition and vocational training. It also provides support for demonstration activities, information campaigns, and short-term visits and exchanges on the topics of farm and forest management. It could, for example, help farmers and advisors disseminate new information about animal and plant health management practices.

***Advisory services, farm management and farm relief (Measure 2)*:** Under this measure it is possible to establish farm and forestry advisory services. This includes the provision of support for training advisors and, more generally, for activities that promote the use of advisory services. Member States are strongly encouraged to tailor their advice to the needs of organic farming, animal health and the development of short supply chains. This could, for example, include services to assist those interested in converting to organic, or to advise existing organic farmers on improving their farm management practices.

***Quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs (Measure 3)*:** This includes support for producer groups, delivering information and promotion activities across different EU countries. As organic farming is recognised as an official EU quality scheme, the relevant support for quality schemes is also available under this measure, for example, for the promotion of a new line of organic produce.

Investments in physical assets ***(Measure 4)*****:** This measure includes investments in farm infrastructure; the development, processing and marketing of agricultural products; farm and forestry modernisation; and non-productive investments. It could be used, for example, to support the development of group processing and marketing by primary producers.

Setting up of producer groups and organisations ***(Measure 9)*****:** This measure supports the establishment of producer groups that can allow farmers to better organise and position themselves in the food chain. The groups can therefore help to strengthen producers' bargain power in relation to production and marketing.

Agri-environment- climate ***(Measure 10)*****:** In addition to farm level practices, this measure can support collective approaches to environmental land management amongst farmers and other rural stakeholders. For example, the measure could support the joint establishment, management and connectively of high species grassland areas to promote on-farm habitats for nesting birds and other wildlife.

Support for LEADER local development ***(Measure 19)*****:** LEADER has a proven track record of supporting communities across the EU in building local capacities for sustainable development in rural areas. This measure primarily supports the activities of local action groups (LAGs), consisting of rural public and private partners from different socioeconomic segments, who are working to devise and introduce local development strategies. Depending on the LAGs' activities, LEADER funding could be used, for example, to diversify farm businesses.

BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES TO ORGANIC COOPERATION IN RURAL AREAS

WINTER HARVEST: SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIC WINTER GROWING

Thomas Fertl, BIO AUSTRIA (AT)

HIGHLIGHTS

- Winter growing according to organic principles being developed in order to meet consumer demand for domestically produced organic produce
- Product innovation can perform an important function in strengthening direct marketing, and farming organisations can play a key role in supporting producer cooperation projects
- Research is essential for overcoming practical problems; a farmer-led process ensures that research addresses practical questions.

BACKGROUND

In Austria, apart from corn salads, hardly any organic vegetables are available during the winter from domestic production. As a result, most of the vegetables on sale are imported or grown through high-energy intensive production. To address this problem, a project has been developed called *Winter harvest: seasonal, energy-extensive and innovative vegetable production.*[1] This aims to raise the profile and strengthen the position of farmers who directly market vegetables, by supporting technical innovation in the production of winter vegetables using non-heated systems. As part of the process, the project focused on resource efficiency and climate protection to further develop winter growing that is in line with the organic principles. Offering winter vegetables using climate-friendly organic production methods during the winter months satisfies a growing consumer demand for such produce. The farmers are not only able to use their production facilities during winter, they can also continue their direct marketing for a longer period of the year and thereby increase the economic viability of their farms. The project was led by *BIO AUSTRIA*, the country's organic farmers' association, which was tasked with developing cultivation plans, procuring seeds, providing advisory services, documenting the process and establishing links between farmers and scientific institutions.

[1] The original title in German: *Winterernte: Saisonaler, Energie-extensiver und innovativer Gemüseanbau.*

Between May 2014 and the end of April 2015, *BIO AUSTRIA* brought together seven organic farmers and six research and extension (mainly scientific) institutions to carry out on-farm trials in five federal states - *Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria* and *Carinthia*. This included *Lebensmittelcluster Niederoesterreich*, the *University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna*, *Hoehere Bundeslehr- und Forschungsanstalt für Gartenbau* Schoenbrunn, *Gartenbauschule Langenlois*, *Versuchsstation für Spezialkulturen Wies,* and *FiBL Austria*.

The project involved testing the frost resistance of the most important and innovative species and varieties of lettuce (120 in total); developing sequences of cultures and cultivation plans for winter salads and herbs; documenting cultivation practices that increase frost resistance; researching basic information regarding traditional knowledge, ecological footprinting and nutritional value; and carrying out a range of dissemination activities (e.g. leaflets for producers and consumers, tasting sessions etc.)

RESULTS

- Farmers optimised their sowing and planting times, while frost proved less of a problem than expected. Red radish and chicories were the most promising varieties
- Light and ventilation (to reduce fungal diseases) played an important role in the management of winter production
- Farmers were able to raise their profile and improve their position through direct marketing (especially to restaurants seeking out high quality produce).

LESSONS LEARNT

- Many questions remain open and there is still considerable potential for optimising winter growing systems further.
- One year is a very short period in which to achieve sound results. Based on experiences to date, at least three years are required
- After production has been developed, follow-up initiatives are required to stimulate market access, e.g. using information and promotional measures.

FUNDING

Mainly supported under Austria's Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, using the cooperation and innovation measure. This is co-financed by the EU and Austria, with the national funding provided by the federal government and the federal states. These sources accounted for 70% of the funding, with the farmers involved providing the rest of the capital. The institutional partners provided their services for free.

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FLEMISH ORGANIC RESEARCH & KNOWLEDGE NETWORK: PROMOTING FARMER-LED KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND RESEARCH

An Jamart, BioForum Vlaanderen (BE)

BELGIUM

HIGHLIGHTS

- Farmers have lots of knowledge they can share before looking elsewhere, whilst other stakeholders, such as advisors and researchers, can provide complementary expertise to help the farmers innovate their management practices
- Ownership is essential as it lets farmers feel that they are leading their networks, and that they enjoy equal status in terms of knowledge sharing, identifying problems
- A tailored approach to dissemination is crucial for effective communication to farmers and other stakeholders, and for the development of a common approach to problem solving.

BACKGROUND

The *Flemish Knowledge and Research Network for Organic Food and Farming (FORK)* was created in 2009 by *Landwijzer*, the organic training centre, *BioForum*, which represents the Flemish organic food and farming sector, the *Coordination Centre for Applied Research* and *Extension on Organic Agriculture* (CCBT) and the *Network for Organic Food and Farming research (NOBL)*. *FORK* supports the development of the organic sector in Flanders by promoting co-creative and participative learning and research between farmers, advisors and researchers. *BioForum* is responsible for coordinating the Flemish farmer networks - *Biobedrijfsnetwerken (BBN)*. Guided by a facilitator and an advisor, these networks bring together farmers from different sectors to exchange knowledge and experiences, encourage greater interaction between stakeholders, and seek to develop new knowledge for the sector.

For example, organic dairy farmers have used their network to work with an agriculture advisor to address a number of health and nutrition problems affecting their herds. The advisor already had encountered similar problems in the Netherlands and was therefore well placed to help them analyse the problems. After the underlying cause was identified as a mineral deficiency, the network agreed to prioritise the issue, and it set up a more comprehensive research project to examine the link between feed quality and animal health. Since then, the network has helped to improve the health and nutrition of herds, through increased and enhanced management of grass and clover pasture. A new project has now been proposed by *NOBL*, which will investigate innovative ways of improving health and nutrition further, and in so doing, aim to reduce medicine use.

Within *FORK*, the *BBNs* produce reports on the outcomes of their gatherings, and provide feedback to both *CCBT* and *NOBL*. *CCBT* issues a monthly newsletter and manages a website which presents the findings of Flemish organic research in a form that is easily accessible for farmers. NOBL publishes a more specific newsletter for researchers interested in organic farming and promotes all Flemish research at EU level through the organic e-prints website. There is also strong collaboration with research and innovation initiatives undertaken by the organic sector in the Netherlands.

RESULTS

- Between 2009 and 2014, 60% of Flemish organic farmers took part in 102 network gatherings across seven sectors, including dairy and beef cattle, vegetables and arable crops, goats, poultry, berries and greenhouse production
- Regional and European funding for research and dissemination have been secured for a number of different projects. These include 49 small and practical CCBT projects, five European research projects, a special network on arable production, and three projects aimed at the food chain
- Monthly newsletters and articles have been produced to highlight the different project results and promote innovation, whilst a number of partnerships have been developed with other European researchers and advisors.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Clear and simple methods and processes are very important to achieve the best results in the field, while every stakeholder needs to feel they are involved and have ownership of the process. Public funding plays an important role
- Farmers' networks can act as knowledge exchange groups, complementing research agendas. A facilitator or advisor can provide crucial help for problem solving and prioritisation. This should be done together with the farmers, taking into account the existing knowledge exchange processes. Cooperation with other regional and European partners is also essential
- Dissemination of results in the different phases of the process must be tailored individually to suit the needs of the farmers and scientists. This will ensure its effectiveness, while optimising the use of the limited funding for organic research.

FUNDING

Mainly provided through the Flemish Department of Agriculture, but also self-financed by the networks themselves. *CCBT* funding is available for smaller demonstration projects and practical research, while *NOBL* provides dedicated funds for academically-led research projects.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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SILO BIO OUEST: A COOPERATIVE SOLUTION TO ENSURE THE QUALITY OF ORGANIC GRAIN

***Juliette Leroux**, Fédération Nationale d'Agriculture Biologique (FR)*

HIGHLIGHTS

- Project response to the local needs of organic grain producers, and to the collective concerns of other supply chain actors, in order to improve organic quality post-production
- Adapting grain storage facilities, to the needs of the organic sector, using new innovative approaches
- Capacities being developed for localised growth of the organic sector, and for a forum for further development.

BACKGROUND

The wide diversity of different grains produced by organic farmers, as a result of their long-term crop rotation systems, means a significant number of dedicated silos are needed to meet the enhanced requirements for quality and traceability. These are often unavailable in the existing storage facilitates used by the conventional feed and food chain. Coopérative régionale d'agriculture biologique *(CORAB)*, an organic grain cooperative, established in 1998 in western France, faced significant challenges in this respect, due to the prohibition of artificial preservatives in organic storage. Since the available silo infrastructure failed to meet the requirements, *CORAB* needed a technical innovation.

As this issue impacted on the whole organic food chain, *CORAB* called on some of its main partners in the organic food industry, as well as a group of conventional agricultural cooperatives, to construct a grain silo specially adapted for organic grains. In 2009, all these partners formed a new cooperative called *Silo Bio Ouest*, based in *Saint Jean d'Angely*. Besides *CORAB*, the cooperative includes *UDCA*, a broader group of 18 conventional and organic farmer cooperatives, three processors - *Cereco, Lea Nature* and *Bellot* - specialised in, or involved in sourcing organic grains for added-value products, and *Biocoop*, the largest group of specialised organic retailers in France.

In operation since October 2011, the group's silo is adapted to meet organic standards, and can be used to store up to 22 different varieties of cereals and pulses. The silo has the capacity to store over 80% of the gain produced by the cooperative members in the region of *Poitou-Charentes*, and parts of *Pays-de-Loire*, *Limousin* and Aquitaine.

RESULTS

- A functioning capacity of 5,000 tonnes is available today; the cooperative aims to double this to accommodate the expected growth in future organic conversions
- Highly efficient systems of cleaning, sorting and ventilation have been developed, to fit the wide diversity of grains cultivated by cooperative members, and to avoid the use of synthetic preservatives in storage
- The quality of the grain stored has improved significantly since the silo was established (lower humidity, less damaged grain, fewer pest infestations, etc.)

LESSONS LEARNT

- Bringing together many different stakeholders requires a lot of time for discussion to find mutually beneficial agreement
- Flexibility is necessary on the part of all the stakeholders, so they can adjust their work plans and expectations based on the availability of funding
- The need for innovation to deliver specialised tools for the needs of the organic sector should not be underestimated.

FUNDING

65% of the investment came directly from the partners, with the remaining 35% from local, regional and national sources, including Ministry of Agriculture grants for the food industry, specially intended to support SMEs, innovation and the organic sector.

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THE LITTLE MILK COMPANY: A GROUP MARKETING INITIATIVE BY ORGANIC DAIRY FARMERS

Gillian Westbrook, *Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association (IE)*

HIGHLIGHTS

- Farmer expertise, and input from the artisan food sector demonstrate the best use of summer production
- Farmers are innovating by taking control of the farm gate price and reducing their susceptibility to future price fluctuations, especially with the removal of the EU milk quotas
- Working effectively as a collaborative group plays a key role in adding value to farm produce, thereby supporting farm viability and the expansion of the organic sector, whilst ensuring a degree of independence for the producers.

BACKGROUND

Dairy farmers generally produce either summer or winter milk, depending on their farm's calving system, with few exceptions, where milk is produced all year round. Due to its higher production costs, especially the price of organic feed, winter milk attracts a higher price premium than summer milk. Although some organic farmers can produce milk all year round, this option can be limited by the suitability and quality of available land as well as the herd size. Organic dairy producers tend to favour summer milk production because of their breed choice and the sustainability of the system, but the farm gate price for organic milk is often not sufficient to support a viable dairy business.

Summer milk from grass-fed cows has an ideal compositional quality for the production and maturation of certain high-value cheeses, while winter milk is suited to certain soft cheeses. Increasing the farm-gate price, by adding value to summer milk, was the main motivation for these farmers in their consideration to diversify from liquid milk as it is difficult for individuals to gain market access alone.

A group of ten organic dairy farmers from various regions of Ireland came together to establish The Little Milk Company. The farmers quickly realised that, to reach their objectives, it would be necessary to employ individuals with the right skills for product development, sales and marketing. Rather than set up an on-farm processing unit for cheese production, they instead opted to contract five local artisan cheese producers to make the products, and they employed marketing staff to develop their sales. By employing several cheese-makers, they were able to produce a range of different types of cheese, which they linked to consumer preferences in different markets, both domestic and export. Working as a collaborative group gives each farmer a degree of independence, as not all of their output is used for making cheese. Each farmer still sells a substantial amount to the liquid milk market – especially winter milk – thereby spreading their respective financial risks. The different dairy breeds kept by the farmers to suit the differing land conditions, ensure an ideal compositional mix for the best cheese production. It also reduces business vulnerability of fluctuating market prices.

RESULTS

- The farmers' collaboration reduces the vulnerability of organic dairy farming to fluctuating milk processor prices, and increases farm profitability
- Cooperation is critical for small and medium-sized farms, helping them prosper in a competitive market environment
- On-farm biodiversity studies used to highlight the added value of the organic farms' environmental credentials are helping to secure export contracts.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Raising sufficient finance to hold stock for mature cheese production, while employing experts for technical product development and sales means that farmers can have a solid stake in the enterprise, while still doing what they do best: farming
- Understanding business cash flow and reducing business risks by using different processors and manufacturers is critical to ensuring business stability and on-going development
- Best use should be made of training opportunities and funding for food and farm businesses.
- Food award recognition was critical for securing sales and promoting innovation practices.

FUNDING

Self-financed by the farmers and funded through the Irish Rural Development Programme under measures such as vocational training and advisory services, and LEADER. This is co-financed with national and EU funds. Funding was also provided by local and national enterprise agencies with a focus on marketing and development, business start-ups, innovation and mentoring.

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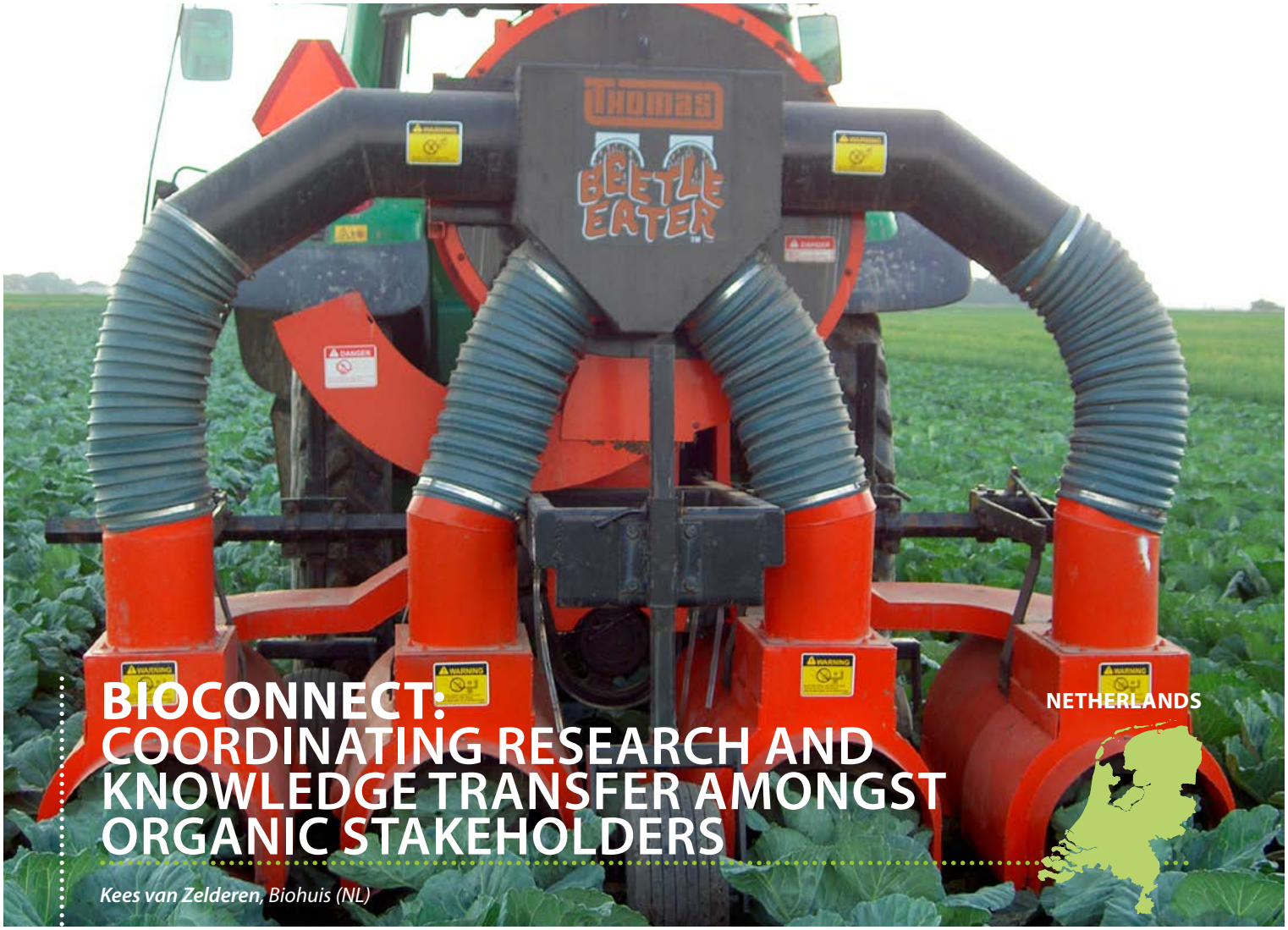

BIOCONNECT: COORDINATING RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AMONGST ORGANIC STAKEHOLDERS

NETHERLANDS

***Kees van Zelderen**, Biohuis (NL)*

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stakeholders assume ownership and exercise leadership on public funding for organic research that meets the needs of the sector
- Shifting public research models to a bottom-up approach, with the active involvement of organic stakeholders, helps to identify existing knowledge and expertise, and to highlight current research gaps
- Dissemination of practices using good facilitation allows information to be shared more effectively, and thus supports better knowledge transfer and uptake of new innovative practices.

BACKGROUND

Research priorities are often defined by policy makers without involving stakeholders sufficiently, or with ineffective measures put in place to disseminate the final results. Responding to this problem, the Dutch organic sector set up *Bioconnect* in 2005, with the aim of reorganising the coordination of organic research and knowledge transfer through greater stakeholder involvement.

The sector persuaded the Dutch government to delegate responsibility for setting the organic research agenda to the *Bioconnect* members, on the basis of a pilot project. This involved the creation of various working groups focusing on specific issues, such as biodiversity and soil, and on different agri-food sectors. The working groups brought together farmers and processers to identify the needs and funding requirements of each sector. A knowledge committee of the stakeholders was responsible for steering the process and constituting the groups. It also liaised with the government officials and communicated the outcomes to the different groups. A number of knowledge managers were responsible for coordinating the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

The network was publicly financed until 2011, with about 10% of the overall budget for public agricultural research typically allocated to the organic sector. In 2008, this amounted to 9.6 million euro. *Bioconnect* also took responsibility for the dissemination of research outcomes and the promotion of knowledge transfer related to organic agriculture, to farmers and other organic food chain actors. Farmer networks played an important role in the sharing of sector-related knowledge, meeting regularly to exchange information and experiences. The groups were supported by professional advisors, with input from relevant research institutes and NGOs. The farmer networks also helped to provide feedback regarding potential bottlenecks as well as new developments in farming practice, based on common observations and opinions developed by the farmers.

RESULTS

- Stakeholders from across the sector participated actively. They included 62% of the current 600 farmers, and 50% of those involved in organic processing.
- Strong working relationships have developed among the organic stakeholders, and between the organic and conventional sectors. This has encouraged the sharing of information of research results, as well as the development of the *Biokennis* platform.
- A number of issues have been addressed, for instance the development of innovative strategies for zero antibiotic use, the introduction of new, disease-resistant potato varieties, and new marketing concepts and biological controls.

LESSONS LEARNT

- A strong sense of stakeholder ownership was critical for engaging different people and moving the process forward.
- Promoting diversity ensures that the sector is widely represented, while helping to bring different players on board. Particularly significant are the exchanges of practical – rather than abstract – knowledge and experience.
- Direct stakeholder involvement ensured that research priorities meet the needs of the organic sector, based on value-driven and systemic approaches, that are often absent from mainstream approaches to innovation.

FUNDING

Mainly provided in the form of research funds from the Dutch Ministry Agriculture, with individual farmers often investing personally in the work of the network. Additional funding for dissemination was offered through the Dutch Rural Development Programme under the vocational training measure. This was co-financed with national and EU funds

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FARMER-TO-FARMER EXCHANGE: PROMOTING CONVERSION TO ORGANIC FARMING

Victor Gonzálvez, *Sociedad Española de Agricultura Ecológica (ES)*

HIGHLIGHTS

- The main aim is to promote conversion to organic farming, using innovative experience-based training programmes.
- Dialogue between conventional and organic farmers is being enhanced through a collective approach based on peer-to-peer exchange.
- The preservation of traditional practices and new knowledge empowers farmers and strengthening their leadership role within farmers associations through the promotion of innovation.

BACKGROUND

Converting to an organic farming system or developing one further, can present major challenges for conventional producers who lack basic or advanced information about agro-ecological practices, or who do not understand the value of such practices. This often creates a barrier to potential new converts, or for the up-take of agro-ecological practices by existing organic farmers. To remedy this situation, the *Sociedad Española de Agricultura Ecológica (SEAE)* is working with organic and conventional producers in the region of *Valencia*, to help them overcome their fears and concerns regarding conversion and further development. This work, conducted in partnership with regional farming associations such as *La Unió de Llauradors i Ramaders del País Valenciá* and *Coordinadora de Organizaciones Agricultores y Ganaderos*, takes a farmer-to-farmer approach inspired by the *Campesino* movement in Latin America. It uses clear and simple language to strengthen farmers' innovative spirit and to build up their capacities to pass on knowledge. Moreover it encourages participants to learn from each other by sharing, not just information and techniques, but also their experiences, creativity and know-how. To this end *SEAE* has applied the basic farmer-to-farmer principles in collaboration with several local organisations – starting on a small scale with a multiplier effect of the different outcomes benefiting farmers in different territories overtime.

Various activities have been organised to support better knowledge transfer among organic farmers, and to enhance cooperation between conventional and organic farmers. These include field days, study sessions, farms visits, workshops, meetings and farmer gatherings. In some cases teams of organic promoters have been created, which are able to spread knowledge more widely, including the benefits and the challenges associated with organic production. As a reservoir of expertise, teams underpin a wide range of social, economic and technical activities that contribute directly and indirectly to the development of organic farming. Promoter teams draw on the support of agricultural advisors, such as the *SEAE* facilitators, who provide technical, logistical and financial advice.

RESULTS

- Between 2000 and 2003, a partnership was established with a farmer organisation, exploiting the existing network of support and advice, by bringing together organic and conventional farmers affiliated to the same organisation.
- Until 2012, the farmer-to-farmer approach mainly involved workshops and training events, with practical lessons accounting for over 50% of the time spent. Organic farmers have also contributed as teachers for on-farm visits.
- A key outcome of the farmer-to-farmer approach has been about bringing together conventional and organic producers to share experiences and overcome fears.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Practical experience and knowledge sharing can facilitate the process of conversion to organic farming, while creating a pool of organic farmers willing to pass on their know-how and ideas
- Farmer-to-farmer facilitators must have technical and methodological expertise, combined with enthusiasm to work with farmers. They should be able to adapt technical language and approaches to suit farmers' needs. Long-term funding, however, can be a major constraint
- Collaboration between organic and conventional farmers is possible and has huge potential to promote innovative approaches. Moreover, such collaboration is necessary for the preservation of traditional farming methods and their transfer to new generations of farmers.

FUNDING

Provided through government funding in the fields of agricultural training and advice, and an open call for farming associations supported by the Spanish Rural Development Programmes. This is co-financed with national and EU funds. A number of initiatives have received additional funding from local authorities and other sources of government funding, and through an environmental education scheme run by a local bank.

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PROTEIN TIPS: PRODUCING MORE ORGANIC FODDER LOCALLY IN RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

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SWEDEN

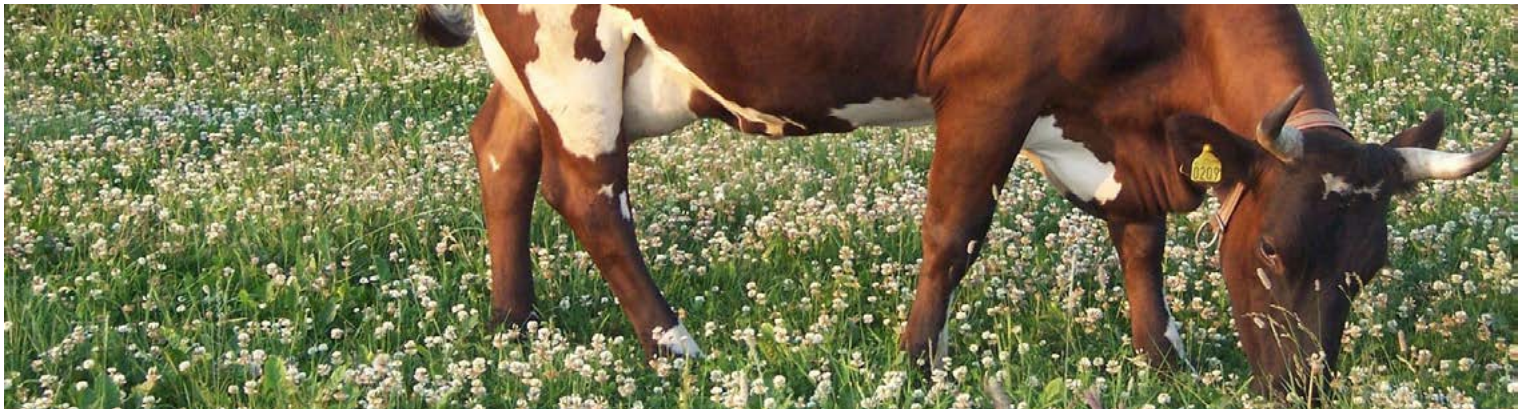
HIGHLIGHTS

- Sustainable development of organic feed supplies to improve local fodder production, especially protein crops as an alternative to soya imports as an alternative to soya imports.
- Collaboration is encouraged between organic and conventional farmers to stimulate a farmer-led dialogue and solve problems, for instance, by improving the design of crop rotations, enhancing feed autonomy and increasing the diversity of genetic resources at farm level.
- The (local) market for organic fodder, and accessibility, are being improved through networking and exchanging knowledge and development of an innovative online marketplace where farmers can buy and sell animal feed.

BACKGROUND

The aim of the project *Protein Tips* was to increase the amount of locally produced fodder, as a response to climate change, in order to reduce the need to import soy beans for protein fodder. Research showed that the use of locally produced protein fodder crops could considerably improve the climate friendliness of Sweden's agricultural production. However, local farmers were hesitant to produce local fodder, due to the risk of poor harvests caused by pest infestations.

In 2011, a number of stakeholders came together to develop a network between organic farming and conventional organisations and extension services in order to reduce their dependency on imported fodder crops. The need for local fodder was seen as one of the main obstacles in transitioning to local production, as livestock farms usually do not have enough land to cover their needs self-sufficiently. It was for this reason that the project identified regional level activities to promote working relationships between organic livestock producers and farmers interested in producing organic proteins. A taskforce was established to find ways of promoting local production including the use of information leaflets and articles, radio interviews, films, training and field days. A website was also set up for the exchange of information between farmers wishing to buy and sell fodder. In addition the network placed a strong emphasis on new innovative ways for farmers to share machinery and organic fertilisers.



The project also sought to promote dialogue with fodder companies and researchers, in order to develop the market for organic protein fodder and grain, while supporting farmer-led research on the issue. Various capacity-building approaches encouraged farmers to improve their production methods and management, in order to increase the amount of organic fodder they produced locally. This not only enabled farmers to meet and exchange fodder, but also stimulated cooperation between livestock and arable farmers. There are now 250 active partners in the network, ranging from organic and conventional farmers and farming organisations to advisors and consultants, fodder companies and researchers.

RESULTS

- The demand for fodder supplies was identified, and the potential for producing organic fodder in different regions of Sweden was promoted using magazines and websites
- Stakeholders were shown good examples of local fodder production, and introduced to methods of overcoming local production constraints
- Greater collaboration between farmers, SMEs and researchers has been developed to address the issue in proactive, practical and innovative ways.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Collaboration between farmers meets the need for better crop rotations on arable farms, while also improving local fodder production for livestock farms.
- Farmers who plan their production together with one or two other farms have seen many advantages and it has helped them to improve their production and management practices.
- With the improved and innovative local fodder production it is now possible to promote local farms as more environmentally friendly, with less transportation and improved self-sufficiency. This helps to create greater consumer confidence in organic products.

FUNDING

Part of the project was financed through the Swedish Rural Development Programme under the agri-environmental measure. This is co-financed with national and EU funds.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL ORGANIC COOPERATION

The best practice examples outlined in this publication demonstrate how organic farmers are collaborating in innovative ways in the context of existing conventional practices, processes and infrastructure that are ill-suited to the needs of the organic sector. It reflects the fact that organic food and farming systems are based on a systemic approach to sustainable agri-food chain development. Examples of cooperation exist in different shapes and sizes, each adapted to the local needs of organic farmers. Nevertheless, a number of specific ingredients are always necessary for their success and to stimulate innovative approaches.

FARMER-LED INVOLVEMENT

- Farmers should have a strong stake in efforts to build cooperation in their locality, region or country, based on a bottom-up approach. It is often a prerequisite for success that they have a minimum degree of control in joint initiatives with other agri-food stakeholders, or that they take a leading role.
- As farmers are usually the first to experience the threats or opportunities affecting their sector, farmer-led initiatives create a sense of ownership. They are essential in the medium to long term, and help to secure greater buy-in from farmers.
- To help meet farmers' expectations and enable those involved to share their experiences and acquire new knowledge for the duration of their cooperation, a collective space or forum is essential. These spaces could be established either through a farming association or as an informal group.
- Policy support can be critical for prompting cooperative projects. However, investments by the farmers themselves, and by other stakeholders, can go a long way towards achieving common goals and objectives.

APPROPRIATE COMMON GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Common goals and objectives should be clearly defined and understood before cooperation begins. Building capacities is not easy, so time and patience are needed, especially if the goals and objectives are ambitious.
- Farmers should recognise what they want to achieve and agree on the amount of commitment needed, taking into account their different expectations. It is important to remember that they often enter into cooperation in order to solve a problem or to take advantage of a new opportunity.
- Building cooperation can be difficult, due to the differing aims of the various stakeholders. Farmers should be aware of the need for effective governance, good group dynamics and the ability to deal with individualistic behaviour and competing aims outside the scope of a project.
- Expectations can vary from partner to partner. Farmers must therefore be able to recognise clearly what is actually achievable in the short to medium term, bearing in mind that new opportunities and challenges will also emerge.

DIFFERENT AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Projects and initiatives should capitalise on the strengths of cooperation, while recognising its weaknesses. Whether for a farmers' own initiative or a farmer-led initiative, it is important to recognise the roles of the different partners and apply the appropriate expertise.
- Farmers will not always have the necessary expertise to reach the desired goals and objectives, so they need to take advantage of others' advice, including scientific and business know-how.
- If they seek expertise by delegating or outsourcing certain activities, farmers will have more time to concentrate on their own main activities, while clearly retaining ownership of the project or initiative.
- Multi-stakeholder initiatives can help create a more cohesive organic sector. Such initiatives can range from listening to farmers and taking account of consumers' needs, to engaging with the organic food industry and taking advantage of existing research and advice.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ORGANIC COOPERATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

There are a number of national and European organisations and platforms working on rural development and cooperation. Below we list just a few of these, from which you can obtain more information about many of the topics covered in this publication.

IFOAM EU

IFOAM EU is a non-profit European umbrella organisation for organic food and farming. It fights for the adoption of ecologically, socially and economically sound systems based on the principles of organic agriculture – health, ecology, fairness and care. It has more than 160 member organisations from across the organic food chain. IFOAM EU makes sure that the organic movement is present at the heart of the EU by seeking to shape the organic regulations and to influence the EU, creating an information platform for the organic sector and helping to build organic capacities and drive sustainable production methods. Within IFOAM EU the Farmers' Interest Group (FIG) seeks to strengthen the voice of farmers in the organic movement, to create better links between organic farmers and increase their involvement in the policy process. The FIG provides members with regular updates about issues relevant to them in the EU policy framework, and facilitates exchanges between farmers in different farming regions in the EU.

TP ORGANICS

TP Organics is the European technology platform for organic food and farming. It works to unite farmers, consumers, enterprises and civil society organisations active in the organic value chain, from production, inputs and supplies, to food processing, marketing and consumption. Representing the views of the organic sector and civil society on research and innovation, it seeks to leverage the contribution of organic and other agro-ecological approaches to sustainable food and farming, by advocating for more funding. To this end it works to identify the research and innovation priorities, and communicate them to policymakers, whilst informing the organic sector and civil society about funding opportunities.

NATIONAL RURAL NETWORKS AND EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

National Rural Networks (NRNs) and the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) are EU-funded networks that bring together rural stakeholders and administrations involved in rural development policy. The networks enable the participants to exchange information about various initiatives and processes at regional, national and EU levels. Both the NRNs and ENRD are responsible for involving stakeholders in implementing rural development programmes and for informing the public about the various policies and funding opportunities. They also play an important role in sharing best practices and promoting stakeholder involvement by organising events and producing a variety of publications and communication tools on rural development. Supported by a dedicated Contact Point, the ENRD also creates additional opportunities for all organisations and people interested in evaluating and improving rural development policies. Many organic farming associations are engaged in their respective NRN, while IFOAM EU is active within the ENRD.

EIP-AGRI NETWORK

The new EIP-AGRI network seeks to bring together different rural stakeholders and administrations interested in research and innovation and the implementation of the new European Innovation Partnership for *Agricultural Productivity* and Sustainability. It aims to increase the flow of information and exchange of knowledge and experience between researchers and practitioners on the development of national and regional operational groups, while also creating space for networking. To this end an EIP-AGRI Service Point has been established to support the development of the network. A key part of its remit is to identify future research needs and to share information on policy measures and initiatives to support innovation. Over the last few years, the Service Point has facilitated a number of focus groups with the aim of brainstorming ideas for stakeholder-led innovation. It also promotes funding opportunities and research results, as well as lessons learnt through research and innovative practice on the ground.