The EU's organic food market: facts and rules (infographic)

Learn key facts about organic food and farming in Europe and how new rules will improve the quality further.

New EU rules on organic production will guarantee food quality, environmental protection and animal welfare along the whole supply chain.

More and more EU consumers are buying products that are produced with natural substances and processes. Organic food is no longer a niche market, even though it still only accounts for a minor proportion of the total agricultural production in the EU. But what does "organic" mean exactly?

EU definition of organic farming

• Organic production means a sustainable agricultural system respecting the environment and animal welfare, but also includes all other stages of the food supply chain
WHAT IS ORGANIC FARMING?

Organic production is an overall system of farm management and food production that combines best environment practices, a high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources and the application of high animal welfare standards.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- The use of chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilisers is banned
- Antibiotics are severely restricted
- GMOs are not allowed
- Crops are rotated

The EU’s organic logo guarantees EU rules on organic farming have been respected

Sources: EPRS, Eurostat, Eurobarometer

EU rules for production

The EU regulation on organic production and labelling of organic products ensures that the same high quality standards are respected all over the EU. The rules refer to agriculture and aquaculture farming practices, food processing and labelling, certification procedures for farmers as well as to the import of non-EU organic products.
Organic farmers in the EU use energy and natural resources in a responsible way, promote animal health and contribute to maintaining biodiversity, ecological balance and water/soil quality.

Organic farming practices in the EU include:

- Crop rotation for an efficient use of resources
- A ban of the use of chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilisers
- Very strict limits on livestock antibiotics
- Ban of genetically modified organisms (GMOs)
- Use of on-site resources for natural fertilisers and animal feed
- Raising livestock in a free-range, open-air environment and the use of organic fodder
- Tailored animal husbandry practices
THE ORGANIC FOOD MARKET

WHO CONSUMES THE MOST ORGANIC FOOD?
Retail sales (€) in 2016

EU 30.7 billion
France 6.7 billion
Germany 9.5 billion
China 5.9 billion

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EU’S ORGANIC MARKET

Sales +47.7%  
€20.8 billion 2012  
€30.7 billion 2016

Organic farmland +18.7%  
10,047,896 hectares 2012  
11,931,589 hectares 2016

WHAT DO EUROPEANS THINK ABOUT ORGANIC FOOD?

2017

79% They are produced with a very restricted use of pesticides, fertilisers or antibiotics
78% They are produced using better environmental practices
76% They respect higher animal welfare standards
72% They are of better quality
70% They are safer

Sources: EPRS, Eurostat, Eurobarometer, FBL

Click on the image for a larger version

Organic labelling and logo

Article
The EU's organic logo on food products guarantees that EU rules on organic production have been respected. It is compulsory for pre-packaged food. In the case of processed food, it means that at least 95% of the ingredients of agricultural origin are organic. Super markets and other retailers can label their products with the term organic only if they comply with the rules.

**Organic market and farmland**

The EU's organic market has constantly expanded and is now worth about €30.7 billion per year. Although the EU’s organic farmland has increased over the years, it still only uses 7% of the total agricultural area. The difference between demand and production is covered by increasing imports.
Main points of the new rules

Click on the image for a larger version
The EU is working on an update of existing rules on organic production and labelling in response to major changes that have transformed the sector. Proposed alterations include:

**Stricter controls**: all operators throughout the food supply chain (farmers, breeders, processors, traders, importers) are checked at least once a year.

**Fairer competition**: producers from non-EU countries who want to sell their products in the EU need to comply with the same rules as producers in the EU.

**Prevention of contamination with pesticides**: farmers must take precautionary measures to avoid accidental contamination with non-authorised pesticides or fertilisers. A product loses its organic status if the contamination is due to fraud or negligent behaviour. EU countries that have thresholds for non-authorised substances in organic food can continue applying them, but they must allow other organic foods from other EU countries in their markets. The European Commission will assess the anti-contamination rules in 2025.

**Better supply of organic seeds and animals**: a computer database on the availability of organic seeds and animals is set up in every EU country.

**Mixed farms**: farmers are allowed to produce conventional products in addition to organic ones, but need to clearly separate their farming activities.

**Certification procedures** for small farmers are made easier.

**New products** such as salt, cork and essential oils are included. Others can be added later on.

MEPs adopted the new rules on 19 April 2018. The agreed text still needs to be formally approved by the Council before it can enter into force. German Greens/EFA member Martin Häusling is the MEP responsible for steering the proposals through Parliament.

Read our overview explaining how the EU improves public health.

Find out more
Organic farming in the EU
Survey: Europeans, agriculture and the EU's common agricultural policy
Procedural steps
Check out progress on the proposals
Briefings

Organic farming legislation (March 2018)
Organic food: helping EU consumers make an informed choice (May 2015)
Organic production and the EU (February 2015)