

PRESS RELEASE

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GOVERNMENT ORGANIC ACTION PLAN WELCOMED

BUT CAMPAIGNERS CALL FOR ACTION TIMETABLE

Friends of the Earth and the Organic Targets Campaign have welcomed today's commitment by the Government for British organic producers to supply 70% of the domestic market – the same level as conventional producers. The pledge is contained in a 21-point Organic Action Plan unveiled by Organic Farming Minister Elliot Morley today. But the campaigners also called on the Government to set a timetable for achieving the target, and for UK organic farmers to be adequately rewarded.

The Organic Targets Campaign, which includes Friends of the Earth, has been calling on the Government to set a 70% market share target by 2010, and is now calling on UK supermarkets to follow suit. Only 30% of organic produce currently sold in the UK is home-grown. According to a report today from the NFU, nearly a third of British organic farmers are currently losing money.

Catherine Fookes, co-ordinator of the Organic Targets Campaign, and Organic Action Plan advisory panellist, said:

"After three years hard campaigning I am delighted that the Government has agreed to ensure that seventy per cent of organic produce sold in this country should come from UK farmers, and produced an action plan to help them achieve it. With Government support our organic farmers can now begin to compete with the rest of Europe. But the Government must also produce a timetable for reaching its organic target, and ensure that UK farmers are adequately rewarded for the organic food they produce."

Sandra Bell, Food Campaigner at Friends of the Earth said:

"At long last the Government is proposing the sort of action needed for UK farmers to really benefit from the organic boom. This is good news for British farmers, consumers and the environment. But we need adequate funding to make it happen. Supermarkets also have a crucial role to play. They must pay farmers a fair price for the organic food they produce, and follow the lead of Waitrose and Sainsbury's by setting targets for reducing their use of imported organic food."

MORE>>>

"GM crops remain a threat to organic farming. The Government must not undo its good work by allowing GM crops to be commercially grown in the UK."

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Key features of the plan include:

- An objective for British organic producers to achieve similar market share levels to conventional producers (currently around 70 per cent);
- On going payments to organic farmers who have completed conversion;
- Encouraging public sector consumers, such as schools and hospitals, to buy more locally-supplied organic produce.

Sandra Bell (FOE), and Catherine Fookes (Organic Targets Campaign) will be available for comment on Monday. Catherine will be at the launch of the Action Plan.

The Organic Targets Campaign is a coalition of over 100 organisations including Elm Farm Research Centre, Friends of the Earth, Henry Doubleday Research Association, Pesticides Action Network-UK, Soil Association, Transport & General Workers Union (RAAW), UNISON, WWF-UK. The Secretariat is: Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming.

The campaign calls for an action plan for organic farming and a target of 30% of land to be organic by 2010 in the UK.