

The Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill Campaign

c/o Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming
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PRESS RELEASE

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Government's lack of organic strategy hampers UK farmers – Organic Action Plan launched

The Government's failure to develop policies to meet the enormous increase in demand for organic produce has prevented UK farmers from exploiting new market opportunities. Today, the Organic Targets Campaign [1] is launching its own outline *Organic Action Plan* [2] in order to kick-start the Government into action.

The campaign is calling on the Government to produce an Organic Action Plan in order to improve its performance on organic farming and ensure that UK farmers benefit from the same levels of support that their European neighbours enjoy.

Commenting on the need for an action plan, Catherine Fookes, Organic Targets Campaign Co-ordinator says:

"It is no coincidence that countries with the highest percentage of organic land in the EU have taken a more strategic approach to organic farming by putting an action plan, with targets, in place for organics. The UK must now do the same or our farmers will miss the boat.

Many of the measures we recommend are common sense and do not involve spending more money. They are about giving farmers the confidence to convert, by, for example, ensuring farmers have thought about where they will sell their organic produce when they have converted. The Government needs to act swiftly to enable the organic sector to reach its potential in the next decade."

The outline *Organic Action Plan* recommends many measures the Government could instigate immediately to help farmers to go organic. It also tackles some of the bottlenecks in the sector that result in around 75% of our organic produce being imported. The outline *Organic Action Plan* calls for policies in six areas to ensure that the risk is taken out of organic conversion:

- Information
- Supply Chain
- Market Development
- Financial Support
- Standards Development
- Social and Institutional.

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Steering group: ● Elm Farm Research Centre ● Friends of the Earth ● HDRA – the Organic Organisation ● Pesticides Action Network-UK ● Soil Association ● Transport & General Workers Union (RAAW) ● UNISON ● WWF-UK ●
Secretariat: Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming

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Notes to editors

1. In the last parliament, the Organic Targets Bill (OTB) was the second most supported Private Members' Bill in Parliament, with 268 supporting MPs. The OTB will be reintroduced to Parliament in Autumn. The OTB also has the support of over 100 organisations including retailers, trade unions and environmental groups. For more information see www.sustainweb.org
2. See attached briefing paper for summary of measures suggested in the outline *Organic Action Plan* and for EU league tables showing the UK's position vis-a-vis funding on organics.
3. The outline *Organic Action Plan* (if not attached) is available from Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming by emailing otb@sustainweb.org

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Organic Targets Campaign Briefing Paper – August 2001

1. Summary of outline Organic Action Plan recommendations

Information

- An increase in the organic research budget to 30% of the government Research and Development budget.
- The national supply of organic market information.
- Identification of training needs for farmers.
- Making market planning, advice and training an integral part of organic conversion.

Supply chain

- The development of a network of local abattoirs.
- Regional initiatives for the development of marketing co-operatives.
- Amendment of EU fruit and vegetable standards to take account of organic farming.

Market development

- Adoption of organic purchasing policies for public bodies such as schools, hospitals, prisons, civil service and local authorities.
- Initiatives for local and regional distribution of organic produce.
- Further development of organic demonstration farms for school and public visits.
- The inclusion of food production and nutrition on the national curriculum.

Financial support

- Sufficient funding for conversion to enable 30% of land to be organic by 2010.
- Different support rates for different sectors (e.g horticulture) to reflect the cost of conversion.
- Continuing support payments.

Standards development

- Improvements to the decision-making processes for legal standards development.
- Development of a network on standards within EU Member States.
- Public education and information on the organic standards.

Social and institutional

- Government and policy makers should be encouraged to learn more about organic farming via secondments, seminars and visits to organic farms.
- Regional organic centres to provide examples and support for farmers considering conversion.

The outline Organic Action Plan also suggests that the linkages between the different barriers must be a feature of the Government plan including:

- Keeping production and market growth in balance.
- Production and standards development.

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2. EU league tables on organic food and farming

Table 1: European Union % Organic Land Area¹

Position	Country	% Organic Area
1	Austria	7.96
2	Italy	7.01
3	Finland	6.79
4	Sweden	6.25
5	Denmark	6.15
6	Germany	3.20
7	U.K.	2.55
8	Spain	1.49
9	Belgium	1.47
10	Netherlands	1.39
11	France	1.31
12	Portugal	1.31
13	Luxembourg	0.81
14	Ireland	0.75
15	Greece	0.71

The UK is 7th in terms of the percentage of land converted in the EU, with our organic land area constituting 2.55%.

Table 2: EU Targets and Action Plans for Organic Farming

Position	Country	Target	Action Plan
1	Austria	Yes	Yes
2	Denmark	Yes	Yes
3	Finland	Yes	Yes
4	France	Yes	Yes
5	Germany	Yes	Yes
6	Netherlands	Yes	Yes
7	Sweden	Yes	Yes
8	Ireland	Yes	Yes
9	Belgium	No	No
10	Greece	No	No
11	Italy	No	No
12	Luxembourg	No	No
13	Portugal	No	No
14	Spain	No	No
15	U.K.	No	No

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¹ Source: http://www.organic-europe.net/europe_eu/statistics.asp. Data from 2001.

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Out of 15 EU countries, the UK is among the seven without a target and an action plan. Others include Belgium, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain. These countries, nevertheless, give their farmers continuing payments after conversion.

Table 3: Continuing payments to farmers once converted ²

Position	Country	Continuing Payments
1	Italy	Yes
2	Finland	Yes
3	Sweden	Yes
4	Greece	Yes
5	Belgium	Yes
6	Germany	Yes
7	Portugal	Yes
8	Austria	Yes
9	France	Yes (in 3 regions)
10	Spain	Yes
11	Denmark	Yes
12	Netherlands	Yes (for 5 years)
13	Ireland	Yes
14	Luxembourg	No data available
15	U.K.	No

The UK is the only EU country that does not contribute any payments on a continuing basis, for the environmental benefits they provide, to their organic farmers. Average payments in other countries are as high as £439.5/hectare/year (Italy).³

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² Soil Association, A comparison of organic aid rates in the UK and other EU member states, Supplementary memorandum to House of Commons, Second report of session 2000-01, HC 149-II, Organic Farming, 24 January 2001, London: The Stationary Office

³ Soil Association, A comparison of organic aid rates in the UK and other EU member states, Supplementary memorandum to House of Commons, Second report of session 2000-01, HC 149-II, Organic Farming, 24 January 2001, London: The Stationary Office

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