

## Organic Food and Farming Research in Finland

*In Finland we have had a tendency of increasing activities in organic food and farming (OFF) research during last 5 years. At the moment we are facing a challenge to maintain that level under the situation of decreasing financing for agricultural research in Finland. Several organisations have gained good expertise under OFF research during recent years due to the first ear marked research programme on OFF from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.*

### Third research programme on-going

The first research programme on OFF in Finland was launched in 1991. This programme was called 'Research Programme on Organic Production of the Agricultural Research Centre of Finland 1992–95' (updated for 1995–97). The most important topics concerned plant production (composting, biological nitrogen fixation and soil), animal husbandry (feeding as well as behaviour of animals and production environments). Economic research was involved in all studies. The second programme was called 'Research Programme on Organic Food and Farming 1998–2002' and it also included a 'Research Programme on Agricultural Engineering in Organic Farming'. Research topics of this programme were aimed to cover the whole food chain.

At the moment there is a research programme funded by the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry 2003–2006.

The programme consists of 15 projects on different themes covering the whole food chain. Projects are organised under the following priority areas for research: quality and risks of organic food, consumer oriented product development, maintenance of soil fertility, safe recycling of organic waste, improved production of seeds, improved production of organic milk and meat, animal welfare and organic farming, local food systems, and the role of organic farming in multifunctional and pluriactive agriculture. Projects can be found on the Internet: [www.agronet.fi/luotu](http://www.agronet.fi/luotu) or [www.orgprints.org](http://www.orgprints.org)

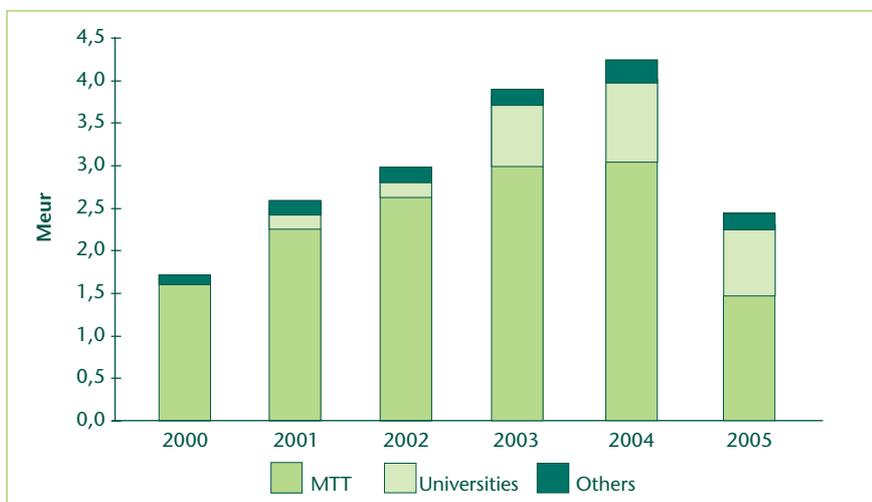
### Financing of OFF research

The first two research programmes on OFF were financed by different financing bodies and the projects competed for money with research projects concerning conventional farming. The main financier for agricultural research in Finland has been the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, either through the budgets

of its research institutes (mainly MTT Agrifood Research Finland) or through financing research projects from its non-committed research budget. The Academy of Finland, Ministry of Environment and Tekes – the National Technology Agency – have also supported research on organic farming, but only in a small number of projects. EU-funded projects are becoming more common in Finland, too.

Most of the OFF research in Finland, about 70–95 per cent is carried out at the MTT Agrifood Research Finland. The rest is done at the universities (mainly Helsinki University) and other Institutes. (See Figure).

In Finland we have several research facilities connected to OFF research: three experimental farms, three tile-drained leaching fields, one animal research facility for dairy cattle, and one greenhouse (see [www.orgprints.org](http://www.orgprints.org)). The maintenance and financing of these facilities takes place through the institutes' own budget money. The actual research activities with the related facilities are financed through research projects financed mainly by external money.



*The amount of OFF research funds (MEUR) in Finland from 2000 according to institutes.*

### Coordination and planning of the research

In 2001 Finnish researchers in the field of organic farming set up a network, the Finnish Research Network on Organic Agri-Food Systems (ReNOAF, [www.agronet.fi/luotu](http://www.agronet.fi/luotu)). The aim is to promote the interaction between researchers, establish the research topics for research programmes in Finland and to have joint research projects. One important aim is to have extensive communication between research and interest groups. The work is voluntary and there is no separate financing for it. The communication in

ReNOAF operates via an e-mail list and meetings of theme groups (society and environment, products and markets, plant production, animal production, soil science). In the network there is close interaction between organic and conventional agri-food research, which benefits the whole research field. This is an example to be extended to the whole field of Finnish agri-food research as well as international research.

In other respects, the organisation and coordination of organic agri-food research is embedded in the regular planning process of the research organisations involved.

### Main research organisations

MTT Agrifood Research Finland is the largest research institute in Finland, carrying out agricultural and food research, plus economic and environmental research related to agriculture. It is also the largest Institute in OFF research. Organic production, marketing and consumption of organic products are also studied in Finland at the Helsinki University, University of Joensuu, the National Consumer Research Centre, VTT Technical Research Centre, National Veterinary and Food Research Institute and the Work Efficiency Institute. ■

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