

Lessons learnt from ORGAP Project – planning, implementation and evaluation of Action Plans for Organic Food and Farming

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Abstract

Within the EU funded project ORGAP, a toolbox was developed for the evaluation of the European as well as national action plans for organic food and farming. Also recommendations and a resource manual for policy makers and stakeholders were developed. These were based on the analysis of national Organic Action Plans as well as stakeholder and expert consultation. The analysis showed that several EU member states have emphasised the need to balance supply-push policies with more market-focused demand-pull policies. An integrated approach is required and this has been to differing degrees through the formulation of multi-functional Organic Action Plans (OAPs), which also address the dual roles of organic farming (from a policy perspective) to provide public goods and satisfy consumer demand. Eight Organic Action Plans, reviewed in the ORGAP project, vary with regard to the elaboration process, targets, objectives and the emphasis of measures on certain areas (e.g. market versus environment orientation). This variation is due to quite different political and socio-economic framework conditions for organic farming in these countries. It revealed that the weaknesses identified in the status quo analysis of the organic sector have only partly been translated to the targets and measures included in the action plan documents. Definition of the priorities for development of organic agriculture must be agreed by all relevant stakeholders. The priorities, and hence the programmes, will depend on correct analysis of the issues (and conflicts) that need to be addressed and clear objectives with measurable outcomes (for effective evaluation). For more information on the project, on the practical project manual and the evaluation toolbox for Organic Action Plans see project website www.orgap.org

Introduction

Already in 1995 the Danish Ministry of Agriculture launched the first Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming. Several European Countries have in recent years elaborated and implemented such Action Plans. The European Commission released in June 2004 the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming (EU-OAP). In May 2005 the EU funded 3-year research project with the acronym ORGAP started. In

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the project 10 partners from 9 countries (CH, UK, DE, IT, DK, SI, CZ, NL, ES) participated, as well as the European umbrella organisation of the Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM EU Regional group).

Materials and methods

The overall objective of this project was to give scientific support to the implementation of the EU-OAP by the development of an evaluation toolbox (ORGAPET), which can be found on the website of the project (see www.orgapet.org). The designed toolbox (Lampkin et al. 2008) was tested in eight countries, which had national Organic Action Plans. These OAP's were analysed and described in a report (Stolz et al., 2006). With stakeholder workshops areas of synergies and of conflict between national and EU-OAP were identified. Finally a policy analysis and recommendations, including a practical OAP resource manual for the organic farming sector (Stopes et al., 2008), were made.

Results – lessons learnt

The lessons to be learnt described in this paper are focussing mainly on national Organic Action Plans and not specifically on the EU-OAP.

Why Organic Action Plans?

For policy makers, the challenge is to support a multi-functional organic farming systems approach on national and European level, which can satisfy the varied goals of a diverse range of interest groups, each with different priorities. Government policy and market mechanisms must work together to meet the dual role of organic farming (Dabbert et al., 2001):

- Organic **land and farm management** – providing public goods/benefits
- Organic **food market** – responding directly to consumer demand

Evaluation of early policies revealed that the initial emphasis on area-based direct income payments, as provided for under agri-environment measures, could distort the potential of the market also to support the development of organic farming. Consequently EU member states have emphasised the need to balance such supply-push policies with more market-focused demand-pull policies. An integrated approach is required and this has been more or less achieved through the formulation of Organic Action Plans. Some national OAP's have a more overtly market focus while others give a higher weighting to public goods issues. EU member states have also recognised the need for information-related measures (including research, training and advice) to improve the performance of organic farming systems and quality of outputs at both production and market levels and, thereby, to enhance the potential contribution of organic farming to broader policy goals.

The group discussions with stakeholders involved in the eight OAP's have shown, that if Organic Action Plans are to be judged a success; they must positively influence the development of organic food and farming by political means. Definition of the priorities for development must be agreed by the relevant stakeholders (see below). The priorities, and hence the programmes, will depend on appropriate selection of the issues that need to be addressed and clear objectives with measurable outcomes (for effective implementation and evaluation). However as more multifaceted an OAP's is, the more difficult it might be to implement them,

Organic Action Plans – tailored packages of policy measures

Organic farming action plans normally include targets for adoption (typically 5-10% by 2000/2005 or 10-20% by 2010), as well as a combination of specific measures such as: a. Direct support through agri-environment/rural development programmes. b. Marketing and processing support. c. Producer information initiatives. d. Public procurement initiatives. e. Consumer education/promotion and f. infrastructure support.

The more elaborated plans contain evaluations of the current situation and specific recommendations to address issues identified, including measures to resolve conflicts between different actor groups related to policy measures.

Overview of national and regional Organic Action Plans

The analysis of eight national Organic Action Plans (completed as part of the ORGAP project) reveals clear priorities for development in different countries around Europe. Each of the Action Plans were developed differently and at different times, either as 'bottom-up' or 'top-down' initiatives – as summarised in the table 1 below (Stolz et al., 2006).

Table 1: Development of eight Organic Action Plans in Europe

General information	AND	CZ	DK	DE	ENG	IT	NL	SI
Start of elaboration	2001	2002	1998	2001	2002	2001	2004	2004
Implementation	2002	2004	1999	2001	2002	2005	2005	2005
Bottom-up initiative	✓	-	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-
Top-down initiative	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓
Stakeholder participation	high	high	high	high	high	high	high	high
AP includes evaluation and monitoring	✓	-	✓	✓	(✓)	-	✓	✓
AP has been evaluated	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
Quantitative targets: OF area	-	10 %	12 %	20 %			10 %	20 %
Target year	-	2010	2003	2010	2010	-	2010	2015

✓ = yes, (✓) = restricted, - = no

Source: Stolz, et al., 2006; Key: AN – Andalusia, Spain CZ – Czech Republic DK – Denmark DE – Germany ENG – England IT – Italy NL – Netherlands SL - Slovenia

Organic Action Plans respond to the different development needs for the sector in each country. The eight Organic Action Plans reviewed in the ORGAP project vary with regard to the elaboration process, targets, objectives and the emphasis of measures on certain areas. This is due to quite different political and socio-economic framework conditions for organic farming in these countries. The organic action plans of Andalusia, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Denmark address a very broad portfolio of areas and measures. In contrast to this the Dutch, Italian and English action plans put a high focus on measures targeted at market development and consumer information. The German Federal Organic Farming Scheme has a clear priority on

measures related to consumer information and education as well as to the support of applied research for the organic sector. Additional information on other Action Plans can be found in the ORGAP newsletters on the project website.

The comparison of national OAP's revealed also that the weaknesses identified in the status quo analyses have only partly been translated to the targets and measures included in the Action Plan documents. This is on the one side a result of the national priority and budget setting and on the other side on the inter-dependency between EU policies and national policies (Stolz et al., 2006).

Successful planning, implementing and evaluation of Organic Action Plans

Policy development involves a series of linked phases or stages from Design of the policy (D), the policy formulation (P), the implementation (I) to evaluation (E), following a "policy cycle". Each of these phases does not necessarily occur in an orderly sequential process. It is important to see that.

Effective development, implementation and evaluation of Organic Action Plans involve the following key elements and considerations, which are described in detail in the practical manual (Stopes et al. 2008) and in the ORGAP evaluation toolbox (Lampkin et al. 2008). A selection of some elements outlined below, are general for Action Plans whereas others are specific for organic agriculture. However organic plans often are part of a wider set of policies; not all measures can be covered by an Organic Action Plan.

- D1. The **characteristics of the process** for setting the agenda (the policy making process), in particular the definition of the specific issues/problems leading to the policy initiative, if any?
- D2. The **extent of the OAP** (type, scale and policy orientation) of prior policy initiatives in support of organic food and farming (if any) have been taken into account including their evaluations.
- D3. The method of analysis (if any) of the **needs of the organic food and farming sector**. The definition of the needs is the precursor to the definition of objectives.
- D4. Summary of the **programme content** (e.g. Action Plan Action Points) and relevant regulatory (legislative) framework such as the new EU Council Regulation (EC) 834/2007.
- P1. Definition of the **motivations and mechanisms** of the policy objectives and measures (the 'programme theory') and their relevance to solving the original problem.
- P2. Setting clear and specific **objectives**, which should be 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound) but also take into account of the complex systems and multiple objectives inherent to the organic farming system. These should be differentiated in global objectives, sector level objectives and societal objectives.
- P3. Chosen **indicators** (elaborated through defining and clustering impact statements in a participatory process) must be relevant for decision-makers and should be closely linked to the goals and objectives of stakeholders. They need to be described and possibly quantified. However, their choice is also influenced by the costs of obtaining data relative to the benefits that the data will yield
- P4. An analysis of the **conflicts and synergies** (coherence) of the possible policy measures and risk of failure, including due attention to the different emphases that will be placed on these by different stakeholders (e.g. ethical value orientation versus purely market orientation)
- P5. An assessment of the **relevant alternative** (complementary or exclusive) policy options that could have been implemented (could the desired results have been achieved by different or additional policies?).

- P6. Ensuring that **monitoring and evaluation issues** were addressed appropriately from the outset and are fully integrated into programme planning and management.
- I1. Definition of the **institution(s) responsible** for the implementation of the Action Plan (describing the type and affiliation, e.g. governmental/non-governmental) and main characteristics of the institution(s) in terms of their **comprehension, willingness and capabilities** regarding the agreed policy objectives.
- I2. Allocation of a separate **budget** and staff resources to the implementation of the Action Plan.
- I3. Understanding the specific **administrative issues/constraints** for the implementation.
- E1. Using not solely a general accepted evaluation standard but also elaborates and build-up **specific, tailored indicators** (standards) adequate to the national action plan; here ORGAPET provides both a procedure for selection as well as examples.
- E2. Clear differentiation between **facts and areas more open for interpretation** through inclusion of stakeholder and to ensure **sufficient data availability** and resources for data search.
- E3. Review who were the **main actors involved** in decision making.
- E4. How strong was the level of **political commitment** to the plan (very low, low, moderate, high, and very high)?
- E5. Consideration of the situation that might have existed if the Action Plan or other policies had not been implemented (**'counter-factual' analysis**).
- E6. Evaluating whether the Action Plan was relevant to the original problem, if no longer relevant **review the factors that have changed**.

It is important to carefully consider also the social and institutional preconditions and the policy context under which the Organic Action Plan will operate. These conditions may include the peculiarities of the organisation of the food market, farmers and food processing firms, and agriculture policy priorities in relation to specific policy areas.

Particularities for stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement helps improving the information basis and the legitimacy of public policies. This is especially important on complex issues such as Organic Action Plans, which involves actors at the same time with stakes related to three different perspectives: a. the values of organic food and farming (which implies the definition of basic principles of Organic Farming); b. the market perspective (as main driver of the market development) and the public goods perspective (which is seen the main reason for promoting organic food and farming by means of public support). These three perspectives are all relevant when identifying stakeholders that should be involved in developing Organic Action Plans. Since Organic Action Plans are produced by governments (EU, national or regional), as part of a political process, then it is essential that politicians and policy makers find effective ways to engage with all of the relevant stakeholders, both inside and outside the sector to ensure that the priorities for development are clearly identified. This can then help to ensure that the policy measures can be effectively met.

From the preliminary analysis of existing Action Plans and policy programmes for organic agriculture, in some cases involvement was limited to certain phases/stages of the process only. Involvement could be on a permanent basis (e.g. through a permanent group or advisory committee for organic agriculture, e.g. the Danish Organic Food Council) or on a temporary/ad hoc basis (e.g. ad hoc expert commission for the design of the German Action Plan, or the consultations held during the development of the European Organic Action Plan).

Stakeholder involvement thus demands careful preparations and sufficient time of consultation with stakeholders to include at any stage of the policy process and of the methods used to promote participation. Stakeholder involvement is successful if it uses several methods and runs throughout the development, implementation and evaluation of a Action Plan (Dabbert/Eichert, 2006, Michelsen et al. 2007).

Discussion

Future policies and action plans on national level and EU level

Organic action plans at EU, member state and regional level provide a mechanism for an integrated and balanced policy with strong link to the new Rural Development Plans with their potential for exploiting cross-axis synergies. While the EU Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming is focussed on the reform of the EU Reg. 2092/91 in the first place, there is the need for a new focus on mainstreaming Organic Farming in the EC. In the longer term, a new EU-OAP might be needed to deliver the key environmental and sustainability goals (Stolze et al., 2007). On national level it would be desirable that in the future Organic Action Plans focus more on capacity building, more support for information campaigns for consumers and other actors and public-private partnerships in market driven approaches.

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