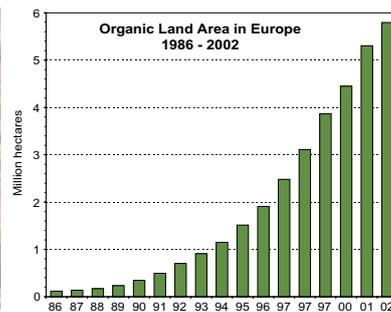


Development of a European Information System for Organic Markets – Improving the Scope and Quality of Statistical Data

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Opportunities for the development of organic data collection and processing based on Finnish experiences

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Register of organic farms geared to IASC Problems

The Plant Production Inspection Centre (KTTK) is one of the Finnish state authorities in charge of implementation of the inspection system laid down in Council Regulation 2092/91. It keeps the register of all organic farms and co-ordinates the inspection work managed by regional control bodies (the Rural Departments of Employment and Economic Development Centres). Since 1997 the register of organic farms has been geared to the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS); the database is usually used for the management and control of EU agricultural subsidies. The access to IACS is a unique tool not only for managing the control of organic agricultural production but also in serving information needs on organic production such as statistics.

Earmarking organic farms as part of general agricultural surveys

Over the years the Plant Production Inspection Centre has created a good relationship with the Information Centre of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The Information Centre has published general statistics on organic farms as part of the Yearbook of Farm Statistics - the Official Statistics of Finland - since 1997. This co-operation has led to more ambitious projects where earmarking of the organic farms has played an important role (the Plant Production Inspection Centre provides the Information Centre with the registered holding numbers).

Agricultural Census 2000 and EU Farm Structure Survey 2003

The Agricultural Census is taken at ten-year intervals as a worldwide statistical survey. As a comprehensive survey, the census seeks to reinforce the foundation of agricultural statistics and to provide a wide-ranging and clear picture of agriculture and recent trends in the sector. In the 2000 Agricultural Census information was requested about livestock on farms, use of arable land, labour force, other farm enterprises, farmer's education, and machinery and appliances. The actual data gathering took place by statistical survey and by collating the data held in registers. One of the registers used was the register of certified organic farms. The "earmarking" made it possible to take a fresh look at organic farms and farmers.

A separate report was prepared jointly by the Information Centre and the Plant Production Inspection Centre. The organic farms turned out to be bigger and more diverse in entrepreneurship than conventional farms. Organic farmers were younger and better educated than conventional farmers. Statistics showed no difference in technological advancement between the production methods, but organic more often than conventional farmers shared machinery with other farmers. The organic farms were earmarked once again in the EU Farm Structure Survey of 2003.

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Statistics on yields

The sample size of the annual yield inquiry conducted by the Information Centre is about 10 000 farmers. Since 1999 the sample has included 700 certified organic farms which are sent a questionnaire about the harvest of the most common organic crops. Therefore the Plant Production Inspection Centre has been able to publish annual yield levels and estimates of the production of organic plant products.

Organic statistics as indicators of changes in society and environment

Development of organic production reflects wide-ranging changes in society and the environment.

EU regulation 2092/91 defines one of the aims of organic production as the “the conservation of the countryside”. How do we measure that? The study *the Finnish Project for Indicators on Rural Development*, started in 1997 and implemented by Statistics Finland, set territorial indicators as the sensors for rural change and development. The indicators can be used to condense comprehensive statistical data into key figures. An indicator database was created within the project. The proportions of organic farms and area are used as indicators. Regional data on 452 municipalities has been provided by the Plant Production Inspection Centre.

One of the guiding principles of the strategy until 2010 for the sustainable use of renewable natural resources of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is that organic production has established its position in terms of both domestic consumption and exports and 15 per cent of the arable area is under organic farming. Therefore the proportion of organic area is one of the indicators of the sustainable use of renewable natural resources.

Opportunities and challenges

- Increase availability of the statistics, not only in table form but also the metadata as, for example, Excel and html files for further processing. Also the visual presentation of the statistics should be improved.
- There should be a better link between providers and users of the statistics. Regular analyses on changes and trends are urgently needed. The producers of the statistics are not always the best people to explain their meaning.
- Earmarking should be improved in order to make the data collection more effective and to avoid duplication.
- Production statistics (areas, numbers, volumes, quality) should be combined with market statistics (volumes, prices, sales).

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- Information Centre of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry: <http://matilda.mmm.fi/>