

CORE ORGANIC – Coordination of European Transnational Research in Organic Food and Farming (www.coreorganic.org)

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Summary: CORE Organic is a 3-year FP6 ERA-NET cooperation project between the public bodies responsible for the national funding of research in organic food and farming in 11 EU countries, AT, CH, DE, DK, FI, FR, IT, NL, NO, SE and UK. The overall objective of the project, which started in 2004, was to enhance the quality, relevance and utilisation of resources in European research in organic food and farming by gathering a critical mass and establishing a joint research programme. Project activities have focused at:

- Increased exchange of information and establishment of a common, open web-based archive (Organic Eprints: www.orgprints.org)
- Coordination of existing research and integration of knowledge
- Sharing and developing best practice for evaluating organic research
- Identification and coordination of future research

In 2007 the CORE Organic partners launched a pilot call for joint transnational research projects in organic food and farming, and 8 research projects were selected for transnational funding by means of a virtual common pot approach. The overall funding budget for the 8 projects, which will be running for 3 years, is about 8.2 million EUR.

Keywords: core organic, CORE Pilot Projects, European transnational organic research funding, organic Eprints, organic food and farming

Introduction

Research in organic food and farming is a fairly new, but rapidly expanding discipline on the European research scene. One of the problems faced by authorities seeking to initiate research programmes in organic food and farming is that the present research effort in Europe is characterised by small research communities; often scattered and fragmented both geographically and institutionally. Therefore there is a need for gathering the dispersed expertise to a critical mass in order to increase the competitive quality and relevance of the research.

CORE Organic is a 3-year FP6 ERA-net Coordination Action on organic food and farming, which was funded by the European Commission, and carried out by the public funding bodies of 11 partner countries, AT, CH, DE, DK, FI, FR, IT, NL, NO, SE and UK. The overall objective of the project, which ended in September 2007, was to gather a critical mass and enhance quality, relevance and utilisation of resources in research in organic food and farming in the partner countries, and to establish a joint pool for financing of transnational projects selected by means of a pilot within the project period.

Increased exchange of information and establishment of a common, open web based archive (Organic Eprints)

In the project a common open source project database, www.orgprints.org was established to increase transparency and easy access to information regarding research priorities, programmes, funding mechanisms and ongoing research projects as well as publications on organic food and farming, a tool, which has been greatly demanded by various stakeholders. Documents and files and all necessary information can be uploaded to the database via theme specific web interfaces. A detailed instruction manual on how to use the database was also made. Organic Eprints contains more than 200 descriptions of research organisations, programmes and facilities, 500 descriptions of research projects and more than 10.000 research papers, and it has 200-300 thousand visits

per month. The reports of the CORE Organic project may be found at <http://orgprints.org/view/projects/eu-coreorganic.html> or on the project webpage www.coreorganic.org.

Coordination of existing research and integration of knowledge

The project has produced reports and analyses on the organisation and conduction of research programmes, research facilities and the weighting of organic food and farming research topics in the 11 partner countries.

The organisation and funding of organic research is organised in different ways in the 11 partner countries. Some countries mainly fund organic research through universities or public/private research centres (DE, CH and FR), while others fund organic research through general research funding schemes or specific organic funding schemes with either irregular or regular calls every 1 - 5 years up to several times a year (NO) (Lange et al. 2006).

As concerns research facilities, all countries except IT and NO had organic research farms (76 in total). Besides, a large number of experimental fields were identified, especially in IT and NO. Long term experiments were established in all countries except for NL, while leaching fields for nutrient leaching experiments were established only in the Nordic countries (DK, FI, NO and SE). Seven countries (AT, CH, DE, DK, FI, NO, SE and UK) had organic animal research facilities, of which 3 for beef production, 14 for dairy production, 7 for pig production, 7 for poultry production and 5 for sheep production. The most important research topics identified among the partners for 5 year periods within 2000 – 2007 were within the categories, "crop husbandry", "animal husbandry", "farming systems" and "food systems", while less important research topics were "environmental aspects", "values, standards and certification", "knowledge management" and "soil science" in the period 2000 to 2007 (Nykänen and Canali, 2006).

Sharing and developing best practice for evaluating organic research

An objective of the project was to assess to which extent the evaluation criteria and procedure used for the CORE Organic pilot call were satisfactory and to provide recommendations to improve future call procedures. This was examined by means of a questionnaire investigation involving the different target groups taking part in the CORE Pilot Call and by means of a literature review. The survey showed that the proposed set of nineteen evaluation criteria clustered within six main categories fulfilled the expectations of most target groups. However, interdisciplinarity and innovative aspects should be addressed in a more appropriate way. The handling of the gap between the scientific evaluation and the final selection of the CORE Pilot Project should be improved and made more transparent, and the way national priorities are integrated in the decision-making process should also be considered in more detail.

Identification and coordination of future research

Seven topics were identified as common high priority research topics, of which the following 3 topics were selected for the joint transnational pilot call:

- Animal disease and parasite management, including preventive and health improvement therapies to reduce reliance on antibiotics.
- Quality of organic food – health and safety.
- Innovative marketing strategies. Identification of successful marketing methods. Local markets.

In total 37 proposals were received corresponding to a total funding of 35 million EUR. These were peer reviewed by a panel of international scientific experts and 17 project proposals, corresponding to 19 million EUR passed the scientific threshold figure. Of these, 8 projects corresponding to a total transnational funding of about 8.3 million EUR were finally selected based on various relevance criteria. The 8 CORE research pilot projects, which are transnationally funded

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by means of a virtual common pot approach, started in July 2007 and ends in 2010. The projects are:

- **AGTEC-ORG**: Methods to improve quality in organic wheat. <http://agtec.coreportal.org>
- **ANIPLAN**: Planning for better animal health and welfare. <http://aniplan.coreportal.org>
- **COREPIG**: A tool to prevent diseases and parasites in organic pig herds. <http://corepig.coreportal.org>
- **FCP**: How to communicate ethical values. <http://fcp.coreportal.org>
- **iPOPY**: Innovative public organic food procurement for youth. <http://ipoppy.coreportal.org>
- **PathORGANIC**: Assessing and Reducing Risks of Pathogen Contamination in Organic Vegetables. <http://pathorganic.coreportal.org>
- **PHYTOMILK**: What makes organic milk healthy? <http://phytomilk.coreportal.org>
- **QACCP**: How to assure safety, health and sensory qualities of organic products. <http://qaccp.coreportal.org>

In order to follow up on the above mentioned CORE Pilot Projects and to deepen and broaden the collaboration a CORE Organic Funding Body Network has been established by the partners. The network will be open to new participants and it is an important aim to include funding bodies from other countries, which are interested in research programmes for organic food and farming, in the future activities. More information on the project and the project reports may be found on www.coreorganic.org

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Nykänen, A. and Canali, S. (2006): Analysis of OFF research topics in CORE Organic participating countries.