

Organic agriculture in Estonia

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Agriculture

Organic land area has expanded 2.5 times over the last ten years. In 2016, Estonia had 1,753 organic farms and 184,754 ha of organic land, which represents about 18% of all agricultural land in use (Figure 1). This percentage makes Estonia one of the three leading countries in the EU by share of organic area. The average size of organic farm is 105 hectares. In addition, 613,138 ha of natural areas were used for wild collection.

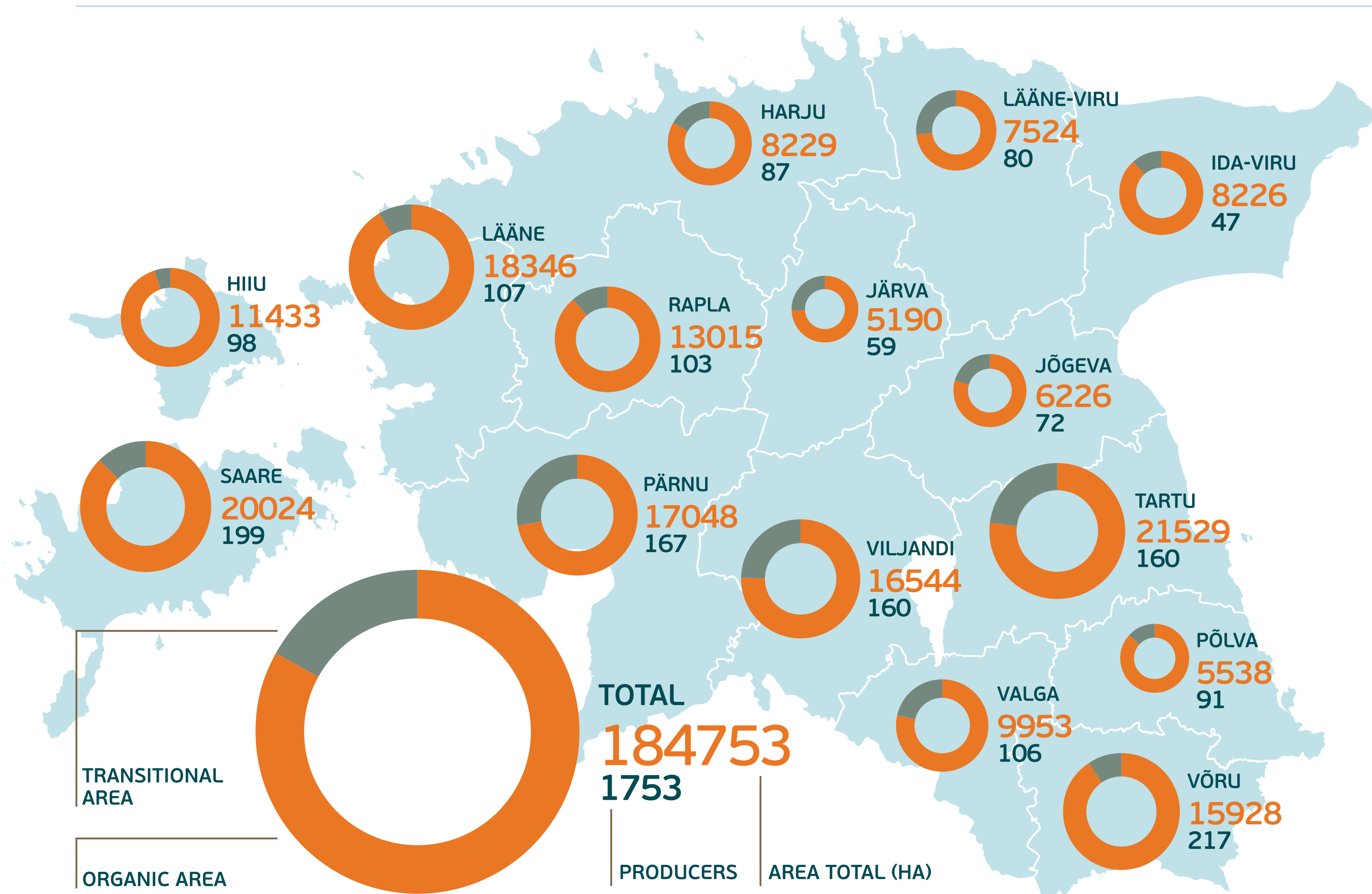


Figure 1. Location of organic farms and land by counties in Estonia in 2016.

As is characteristic of organic agriculture, 73% of organic land were grasslands and 83,834 ha was arable land. 34,318 ha of land were covered by grains (Figure 2).

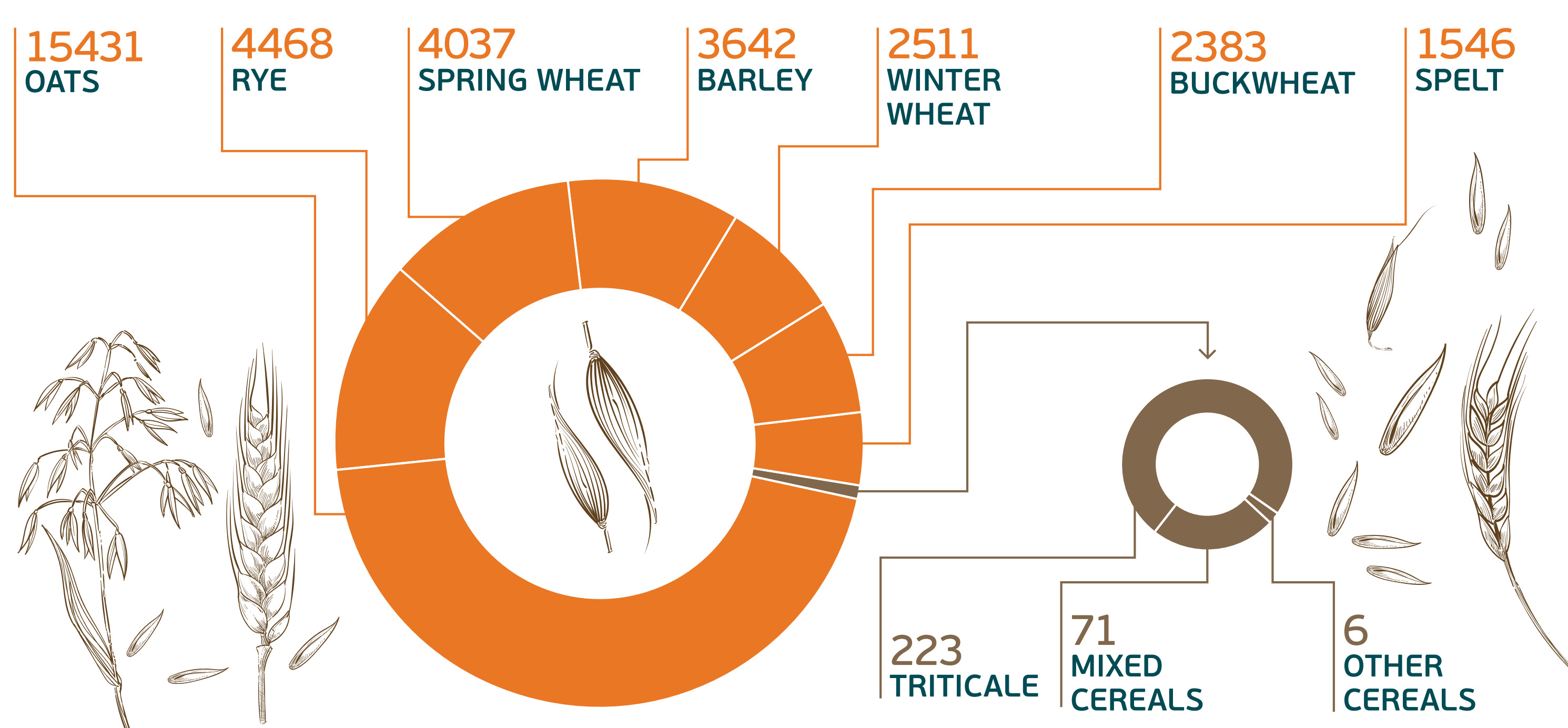


Figure 2. Organic cereal and buckwheat production in Estonia in 2016, incl. in-conversion land, ha

More than 2/3 of organic farms keep animals, foremost are organically raised sheep (51,999 and half of all sheep in Estonia were organic) and cattle (44,675).

Status of organic market and consumption

The development of organic processing and marketing has shown good growth. 314 organic food processors and traders operated in 2016 – 18% more than in the previous year. The greatest variety of organic products is available in specialist organic shops, but the total turnover is greater in conventional stores and their variety is also rapidly growing. Consumer interest in purchasing organic food has increased considerably, the main consideration is health. 8% of consumers buy organic food regularly.

National agendas and programs to promote organic

The strategic objective of the Estonian Organic Farming Development Plan 2014–2020 is to improve the competitiveness of organic farming and increase the consumption of local organic food.

The Ministry of Rural Affairs prepared simplified rules for organic caterers based on the examples of Nordic countries, to encourage restaurants to enter the organic system. New rules with 3-tier labelling showing the percentage of organic ingredients used entered into the force on 1st March 2017.



Estonian national organic labelling for caterers depending of the percentage of used organic raw material (20–50%, 50–80% or 80–100%)

Main research and development activities in organic

Research in organic farming has been conducted by the Estonian University of Life Sciences, the Estonian Crop Research Institute and the Agricultural Research Centre. Main topics: soil fertility and plant production. Budget in 2016-2017: 358 000 € (mainly ERA-Net Core Organic Plus projects and national funding).

Projects financed from Estonian RDP 2014-2020 with total budget of 2 320 000 €:

- Innovation Cluster in Organic Plant Production (2017-2020)
- Innovation Cluster to Improve Sustainability and Profitability of Grass-fed Cattle and Sheep Production (2017-2020)
- Long-term programme of knowledge transfer in organic farming (2016–2019)

Problems and challenges: project based research activities, lack of animal husbandry studies, no possibility to study organic farming at vocational and higher education level and poorly developed advisory system.