



## OWC 2020 Paper Submission - Science Forum

*Topic 3 - Transition towards organic and sustainable food systems*

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### ORGANIC SHARE OF TOTAL FARMLAND AND OF TOTAL RETAIL SALES AS INDICATORS TO MEASURE PROGRESS TOWARDS SDGS 2 AND 12

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**Abstract:** Globally, organic farming continues to grow and has reached wide acceptance amongst farmers, consumers, market actors, and policymakers. According to the latest available data (per 31.12.2017), almost 70 million hectares are under organic agricultural management, and this constitutes 1.4% of the global agricultural land. The indicators “share of the organic area of total agricultural area” and “share of organic retail sales of total retail sales” are used in some countries to show the progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In order to enhance the use and reliability of the indicator “organic area share” and “organic retail sales share”, better data are needed. Better support for data collection from governments and international institutions could help to improve the situation.

**Introduction:** Organic farming, which emerged in the first decades of the past century, continues to grow globally and has reached wide acceptance amongst farmers, consumers, market actors, policymakers and the public in many countries. Organic agriculture has garnered increasing official attention and support in the past years, in particular since 2000. Among other reasons, governments support organic farming because it responds to consumer demand for high-quality food and environmentally-friendly farming practices. The annual FiBL survey on organic agriculture worldwide, which is funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), the International Trade Centre (ITC), NürnbergMesse, and the Sustainability Fund of Coop Switzerland shows where organic farming stands in a global context.

**Material and methods:** The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL has been compiling and publishing data on organic agriculture based on national data sources and data from international certifiers annually since 2000. The data are published in a yearbook (Willer and Lernoud 2019a) and online (FiBL 2019). The data are widely used and quoted by governments drawing up action plans for organic agriculture, researchers, market actors, market research companies, and the media.

Whereas in the beginnings of FiBL's data collection activities, only data on the organic area and the number of producers were collected, the scope has been expanded in the past few years to cover also production and trade data. Data collection is carried out in collaboration with many partners, using a standardized questionnaire (for metadata on the FiBL

survey (see Willer & Lernoud 2019b). The network includes 200 data providers: private sector organisations, market research institutes, certification bodies as well as governments, many of which have established collection systems. Governmental data collection is often linked to the establishment of regulations/laws about organic agriculture, such as the European Union's regulation on organic agriculture, which describes what data should be provided to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union (Council of the European Union 2007). Eurostat publishes data annually, covering a wide range of indicators such as area, livestock numbers, production, and operators. Data are provided by the Member States of the European Union, its Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries, as well as the countries of the European Free Trade Association. Globally, FAOSTAT publishes global organic surface area/land use data online, based on the annual FAO land use survey, however, where countries do not supply these data, the FAO dataset is supplemented with data from FiBL (FAOSTAT 2019).

**Results:** According to the latest FiBL survey on certified organic agriculture worldwide as of the end of 2017, data on organic agriculture was available from 181 countries. There were almost 70 million hectares of organic agricultural land. The countries with the most organic agricultural land were Australia (35.7 million hectares), Argentina (3.4 million hectares), and China (3.0 million hectares). In 2017, 1.4% of the global farmland was organic. Many countries attained far higher organic shares: Liechtenstein (37.9%), Austria (24.0%), and Estonia (20.5%).

Current market trends observed over the past years include continued growth, rising organic market shares, increasing imports, and general retailers gaining importance as a marketing channel. Organic food and drink sales reached 92 billion euros in 2017. Globally, European countries account for the highest shares of organic food sales as a percentage of their respective food markets. Denmark has the highest organic market share globally (11.5%) and is the first country to pass the 10 percent mark. After Denmark, Switzerland (9.9%) and Sweden (9.6%) reached the highest shares in 2018, Other relevant developments are that organic area and market shares are increasingly used to demonstrate progress towards SDGs 2 (zero hunger) and 12 (sustainable consumption). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, aims to give a new impetus to global efforts to achieve sustainable development (United Nations 2015). Many countries are playing an active role to maximise progress towards the SDGs and regularly monitor this progress. A recent study found that adopting organic agriculture is crucial to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Based on more than 50 scientific publications, the study concludes that organic agriculture can play an important role in achieving eight of the SDGs (de Schaetzen, 2019).

In the European Union, the progress towards Goal 2 “Zero Hunger” is measured (among many other indicators) with Indicator 2.4.1 “Proportion of land under sustainable production,” specifically using the share of the total utilised agricultural area occupied by organic farming. According to the Eurostat (2018), the EU considers organic farming as “a method of production, which puts the highest emphasis on environmental protection and, with regard to livestock production, animal welfare considerations. It avoids or largely reduces the use of synthetic chemical inputs such as fertilisers, pesticides, additives and medical products.” Eurostat concludes that with an organic area share of almost 7%, the European Union has made good progress towards SDG 2.

Goal 12 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. In Germany, this indicator is measured with the market share of products with governmental eco-labels, which includes the organic label (Bundesregierung 2016), and the target to reach a share of 34 % for all environmental labels by 2030 has been set.

**Discussion:** It would be good if more countries used the organic area and the organic market share to measure and show their progress towards the SDGs. In order to be able to use these indicators, more and better data are needed.

From the experience of FiBL's long-standing data collection, there are a number of challenges related to organic data collection that needs to be tackled. These include lack of data and incomplete data, lack of common classifications, lack of common definitions, and inconsistent data. The OrganicDataNetwork project, funded under the 7th Framework programme for research and technological development in the European Union, has developed recommendations for organic market data in Europe.. If applied to the global situation, with a specific focus on the organic area and retail sales data, the following recommendations emerge (for more details on these recommendations see Willer et al. 2016):

- Recommendation 1: Strengthen existing collection efforts and set up national data collection where not yet in place
- Recommendation 2: Improve and harmonize methods to increase the accuracy of data collection
- Recommendation 3: Harmonise nomenclature and definitions
- Recommendation 4: Establish a system of routine quality checks
- Recommendation 5: Strengthen collaboration at the national, regional and global level and improve data

access

On a global level, the availability of data on organic agriculture has improved considerably in the past years, including data on organic retail sales. In order to enhance the use and reliability of the indicator "organic area share" and "organic retail sales share" by policymakers in order to assess the environmental performance of agriculture, better data are needed. Better support for data collection from governments and international institutions could help to improve the situation.

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**Disclosure of Interest:** None Declared

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