

POLICY BRIEF 2026: Supporting national funders' cooperation towards organic R&I

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Focus on Increasing Organic R&I Funding Opportunities

Increasing public Research & Innovation (R&I) funding to support organic and agroecological food systems is a strategic lever for Europe's resilience and competitiveness.

European Farm to Fork Strategy (2020) has set a target of at least 25% of EU agricultural land to be under organic farming by 2030 and continuous growth of the sector, including aquaculture, aiming to create a sustainable, healthy and environmentally friendly food system (fn.1).

To achieve 25% target and help the organic sector reach its full potential, the Commission has put forward the EU Organic Action Plan (2021-2027) (fn.2).

Public funding organisations and stakeholder partners from CORE Organic Pleiades network, hosted by OrganicTargets4EU project, have provided a coordinated policy support based on their previous ERA-NET experience towards an increased dedicated R&I funding for organics in the Horizon Europe funding instruments.

Introduction

The organic sector is widely acknowledged as a sustainable food and farming system (ECA Special Report 19, 2024). Therefore, the European Commission, in its Farm to Fork Strategy (2020), aims at 25% organically farmed land in the EU in 2030. To achieve this, the EU, in its Organic Action Plan (2021)¹ sets the target of minimum 30% of the budget in Horizon Europe (HEU), Cluster 6, Area 3 'Agriculture, forestry and rural areas' to topics '*specific to*' or '*relevant for*' the organic sector. The EU Organic Action Plan also aims to strengthen coordination of national organic food R&I programmes via the Horizon Europe mission, A Soil Deal for Europe, and via the partnerships on Agroecology, FutureFoodS, and Animal Health and Welfare.² Research & innovation (R&I) in organic and agroecological food systems are strategic levers for Europe's resilience and competitiveness.

Hence, the key question the OrganicTargets4EU project partners addressed was the meaning of 25% target in practice for the organic sector? How would the sector need to change? What kind of R&I is needed to support the growing sector, and is to be provided by whom?

The project is also hosting a network of European public institutions, CORE Organic Pleiades, that focus on transnational coordination of organic R&I since 2004. This policy brief highlights relevance of European joint programming and the need for strengthening dedicated organic R&I funding in the Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HEU).

¹ EU Organic Action Plan (2021) [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0141R\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex](#) .

² Ibid.

Key issues

- The CORE Organic Pleaides Network, covering 26 European countries and 42 partners, gathers around the idea of a strong organic policy support based on transnational cooperation and alignment efforts. The network is a continuation from ERA-Net CORE Organic that has funded 62 organic research projects for 61.9M EUR in the period 2004-2022. Since 2022, the contributes with advice to organic research policy in the EU, because transnational funding for organic R&I in Horizon Europe (HEU) is channelled through European Partnerships (HEU PS), e.g. AGROECOCLOGY, FutureFoodS, Animal Health and Welfare, or even Missions with overarching broad themes, where the point of concern is that the research for 'organic' can be overlooked.
- Research and Innovation in organic food and farming systems are one of the most important tools for further development and innovation in organic food and farming (Gernert et al., 2025). Besides, R&I are strategic levers for resilience, sustainability and competitiveness - not only of the organic sector but of European farming and aquaculture in general.

Policy context

- During the transition from H2020 to Horizon Europe R&I Framework Programme, the European Commission (EC) decided to end the ERA-NET funding scheme, hence ERA-NET CORE Organic (CO) network partners, instead of funding transnational research activities, developed a new networking approach dedicated to organic policy alignment as a part of OrganicTargets4EU project. Under the HEU funding instruments, the transnational calls for R&I in organics are envisaged horizontally under several newly created European Partnerships, particularly the HEU Partnership AGROECOCLOGY.

Key findings

- Work carried out as part of OrganicTargets4EU project has shown that **nearly all National Organic Action Plans include sections on research**, such as dedicated research funds, national priority setting and material for knowledge exchange. Topics commonly mentioned in 16 OAPs are: organic market (11), technology of production and processing (9), climate change (7), biodiversity (7), soil health/ carbon sequestration (6), breeding (5), animal welfare (4), circular agriculture (3)).
- International Centre for Research in Organic Food Systems (ICROFS), as the CORE Organic network Programme Secretariat, has conducted an **impact assessment study with the relevant HEU funding instruments supporting organics R&I**, as Partnerships AGROECOCLOGY and FutureFoodS, and CSA Green ERA Hub. The study covers the period from January 2024, and it focuses on organic R&I opportunities in the current framework programme. These Partnerships were chosen for their intended relevance to organic and because they have been specifically mentioned in the Evaluation report for the Organic Action Plan (2023). Based on the preliminary results of ICROFS impact assessment study of HEU funding instruments using the publicly available information, such as the Partnership SRIAs, call texts, evaluation procedures, and selected projects, the study has indicated a risk that research for development of organic food and farming may be overlooked in the overarching broad themes of the partnerships/ missions/ other relevant funding instruments.

- In the analyses of transnational research calls, evaluation procedures, and research projects, there is a **challenge with definitions of organics**, meaning that currently we can attribute relevance of HEU Partnerships research results, in terms of 'specific to' or 'relevant for' the organic sector, to a limited extent.
- The ICROFS study of the HEU Funding Instruments also posed a relevant question 'Is funding of organic R&I in partnerships and missions with overarching themes the most efficient way to develop the organic sector to **reach the 25 % goal for organically farmed land in 2030?**'
 - The CROFS study showed that despite the Partnerships are supposed to contribute to the **30% goal for funding of organic under HEU Cluster 6, Area 3**, it is not possible to assess if this is reached because of lack of criteria and more specific information on the partners involved, the work carried out and the funding spent on the projects funded through the Partnerships.
 - The **change in funding instruments from ERA-NETs (such as CORE Organic) to HEU Partnership instruments has also required thematic and budgetary realignment at national level, with national organic topic priorities not necessarily aligning well with overall Partnership R&I topics.** Therefore, together with an overall shift in policy outlook of European funding institutions embracing more focus towards agroecology and other sustainable farming methods, we can consider that some national/ regional funding bodies are not in a position to fund organic through new dedicated HEU instruments.

Policy recommendations for organics R&I funding

Recommendations for the EC and European Policy Makers:

1. **Allocate funding for a dedicated funding instrument** supporting transnational R&I projects *specific to organic* (i.e., <https://projects.au.dk/coreorganicpleiades/organic-action-plans>) and **further development and running of existing European knowledge platforms and archives** on organic and agroecology research and innovation (i.e. <https://www.orgprints.org>; <https://www.aeprints.org> and <https://organic-farmknowledge.org>). Collaborate with relevant HEU projects, partnerships and missions to make them use these platforms and archives for dissemination of their R&I results to make it easier for researchers and end-users to find information relevant for development of the organic sector.
2. **Coordinate with all HEU Partnerships and Missions that may be relevant for organic R&I** on how to reach the ambition of 30% funding to organic food and farming and how to document that this ambition has been reached (i.e. the partnerships, Agroecology, Future Foods, Animal Health and Welfare, Agriculture of Data, Sustainable Blue Economy, European Biodiversity, Water4 All).
3. **Evaluate the impact of the Horizon Europe programme (including partnerships, missions etc.) in 2027** as regards the development of the organic sector in relation to the 25 % goal of the Farm to Fork Strategy for the organic area in 2030, and the minimum 30 % of the HEU funding budget for Cluster 6, Area 3 set aside for organic food and farming R&I.

Recommendations for the HEU Partnerships and other relevant funding instruments:

1. **Include specific reference to organic** in the vision and mission of the partnership/ mission. **Clarify the meaning of terms** by outlining commonalities and differences of practices and principles of organic farming and related concepts, such as 'agroecology' and 'regenerative farming', to

ensure that research is appropriately addressing the organic sector-specific needs. Define criteria for projects '*specific to*' or '*relevant for*' the organic sector to be used in Horizon Europe and its instruments and in FP10.

2. **Development of the SRIA:** Make stakeholder consultation with relevant Units of the European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (Unit for Research and Innovation and Unit Organics) and the stakeholder umbrella organisation, TP Organics, to ensure that the SRIA of partnerships/missions or other funding structures includes the subjects most relevant for the organic sector. Include specific information on objectives in relation to development of organic food and farming to reach the goal of 25% organic area in the EU in 2030.
3. **Call text and proposal template:** Include more specific references to organic challenges and EU policy targets for organic in the call text, which the proposals are expected to address. Include a ticking box in the proposal template for indication if the R&I proposal is '*specific to*', or '*relevant for*' the organic sector.
4. **Planning and administration of calls:** Negotiate possibilities within the partnership/mission to set aside a certain percentage of the call budget for research '*specific to*' or '*relevant for*' the organic sector.
5. **Selection of experts:** If the project is '*specific to organic food and farming*' at least two of the experts should have documented knowledge on organic food and farming, and if the project is '*relevant for organic production*', at least one of the experts should have relevant documented expertise within organic food and farming.
6. **Evaluation procedure:** Include a ticking box in the evaluation form for indication of the R&I proposal as regards its relevance to the organic sector, i.e. '*specific to*', or '*relevant for*' the organic sector. Include relevant criteria in the proposal evaluation material for project relevance and impact on organic food and farming.
7. **Selection of projects:** Include an estimate of the budget set aside to research '*specific to*' or '*relevant for*' the organic sector in the selection procedure to ensure that the 30% funding of research '*specific to*' or '*relevant for*' organic food and farming will be reached by the selected projects.
8. **Evaluation of research programmes/ calls** funded by Partnerships/ Missions/ relevant funding instruments (e.g. the CSA Green ERA Hub): Define indicators for evaluation of the funding programme as regards the impact on development of the organic sector. Compile a list of R&I projects '*specific to*', respectively '*relevant for*' the organic sector, and estimate the percentage of total call/ programme funding that has been spent on R&I for the organic sector compared to the total spending on R&I projects. Create procedures and benchmarks for how to reach the ambition of the EU Commission to reach at least 30% of total funding in Cluster 6, Area 3 on organic food and farming R&I.
9. **Recommend or urge funded projects specific to or relevant for organic to use the existing European knowledge platforms and archives** on organic and agroecology R&I for dissemination of R&I results/project deliverables (i.e. <https://www.orprints.org> ; <https://www.aeprints.org> and <https://organic-farmknowledge.org>).

Publication list:

Action plan for organic production in the EU (2021): https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-action-plan_en; EUR-Lex - 52021DC0141R(01) - EN - EUR-Lex

CORE Organic Pleiades Network (2022-2026): <https://projects.au.dk/coreorganicpleiades/about>

ECA Special report 19/2024: Organic farming in the EU – Gaps and inconsistencies hamper the success of the policy. <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR-2024-19>

Gernert, M., Jouhari, K, and Moeskops, B. (2025): Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for Organic Food and Farming, TP Organics, https://tporganics.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/TPO_RnI_SRIA_2025.pdf

STOA (2016): Human health implications of organic food and organic agriculture, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/581922/EPRS_STU\(2016\)581922_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/581922/EPRS_STU(2016)581922_EN.pdf)

Melby Jespersen, L. and Trkulja, I. (2026): Impact of Horizon Europe (HEU) partnerships and other HEU instruments on research and innovation (R&I) specific or relevant for the organic sector. ICROFS/ CORE Organic: <https://orgprints.org/56867>