



Joining resources to improve research in organic food and farming

Organic farming and food production are addressing a number of the challenges faced in the development of agriculture and rural areas in Europe. Most obviously in terms of reducing environmental pressure, supporting ecosystem functions, and improving food safety, food quality and animal welfare, but also in terms of maintaining activities in rural districts.

In order to make full use of the perspectives in organic farming a comprehensive research effort is necessary. CORE Organic is a transnational partnership where resources within research are joined. The aim is to enhance the quality, relevance and utilisation of resources in European research in organic food and farming through coordination and collaboration.

The European challenge for research in organic food and farming

In its full perspective organic farming provides answers to many of the intentions in the agricultural policies of Europe. Most obviously in terms of reducing environmental pressure, supporting ecosystem functions, and improving food safety, food quality and animal welfare.

Moreover, as the organic production is often smaller, but more valuable and labour intensive, organic farming also provides a potential in terms of supporting rural development, in sustaining farm income, in internalising public goods produced by agriculture in the market and supporting decreased resource use in primary production (multifunctional agriculture), as well as in terms of reducing surpluses of agricultural commodities.

However, in order to make full use of the potentials in organic farming a comprehensive research effort is needed. The development of appropriate research methodologies in organic farming is essential and it is necessary to focus on a development of research that is holistic, relevant and of high quality.



The need for joining resources

Research in organic food and farming is a 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. There is therefore a need for gathering the dispersed expertise to a critical mass in order to increase the competitive quality and relevance of the research.

Transnational cooperation

Collaboration and coordination is essential in strengthening the overall performance of European research in organic farming. Among others, it is important to establish networks and it is important to utilise possibilities for cooperation between national research programmes. Collaboration in education and extension as well as participatory or farmer-driven research should also be possible.

Finally, identification of common evaluation procedures that are relevant to organic farming is seen as crucial for safeguarding and enhancement of research quality.



CORE Organic objectives

The overall objective of CORE Organic is 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.

The four specific objectives are:

1 Increased exchange of information and establishment of common, open web-based archive

Initially, the project will carry out mapping and analysing of existing research programmes, activities and facilities in partner states. The information will partly be used for establishing a web-based project databases, and partly to develop the open access archive for research documents on organic food and farming (www.orgprints.org).

A web site for exchange of information is already established (www.coreorganic.org). Besides access to databases and archives, the site will offer access to an Internet portal with links to national and regional research programmes and other issues relevant to research in organic food and farming.

2 Coordination of existing research and integration of knowledge

A thorough description of the current situation in member states and the institutions participating in organic farming research will be produced. The data will be used for identification of barriers, gaps and possibilities for increased cooperation as well as for identifying new research areas suitable for cooperation.

3 Sharing and developing best practice for evaluating organic research

Objective three will focus on the joint development of best practice of evaluation and quality assurance in new research areas within organic food and farming. For evaluation of projects and programmes, a set of criteria, as well as a list of excellent experts, will be developed. Training schemes for research personnel and experts will be developed.

4 Identification and coordination of future research

A list of prioritised research topics and plans for future coordination will be developed and a range of procedures for transnational funding will be agreed.

By the end of the project, the goal is to establish a joint research programme and a joint pool of at least 3 million euro per year for transnational research.

Facts on CORE Organic

CORE Organic (*Coordination of European Transnational Research in Organic Food and Farming*) is a three-year Coordination Action in organic food and farming. The project is initiated as a part of the European Commissions ERA-NET Scheme, which intends to step up cooperation between national research activities.

Project duration

The project was commenced on October 1st 2004 and it will last for three years.

Partners

CORE Organic is to increase cooperation between ministries, agencies and other bodies funding and managing research programmes within organic food and farming. Initially, the initiative comprises 11 countries but it is open to include all European countries with a national research programme for research in organic food and farming. The partners are:

Austria	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
Denmark	Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming (DARCOF) / Danish Directorate for Food, Fisheries and Agri Business
Finland	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
France	Ministry of Agriculture
Germany	Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture
Italy	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

Norway	The Research Council of Norway
Sweden	Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Science and Spatial Planning
Switzerland	Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture
The Netherlands	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality
United Kingdom	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Project Coordinator

Dr Erik Steen Kristensen, Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming (DARCOF)
Ms. Margrethe B. Høstgaard, administrative matters

Follow the progress of CORE Organic

The CORE Organic web site and the free electronic newsletter will inform on activities and conclusions in the project, for instance workshops, conferences and new publications. Please visit the CORE Organic website at: www.core-organic.org

The website will also include a discussion forum where examples of bilateral cooperation can be given together with suggestions on future cooperation.

CORE Organic will also organize workshops for representatives of user groups. In May 2006, the project will participate in a major organic congress to be held in Odense, Denmark. The congress will be held in collaboration with two other EU funded projects; QualityLowInputFood and Organic Revision.

