Dear Reader,

Researchers and other stakeholders within the organic worldwide movement look forward to the upcoming 4th ISOFAR scientific conference and 18th Organic World Congress in Istanbul in mid-October 2014.

ISOFAR will arrange its general assembly on Sunday October 12, and invitations will be sent to all members and supporters. Members are encouraged to apply for a position in the ISOFAR board of directors, more info here. Those interested should get in touch with Daniel Neuhoff before September 15. To realize our ambitions to be a truly global network, we need members from all parts of the world. Northern Europe currently has too many members.

Board members work voluntarily, and there is no salaries for staff to carry out the organizational work. We need people who like to share practical organizational duties between them, to bring ISOFAR forwards.

The format of the 4th ISOFAR scientific conference is intended to be more interactive than before, with shorter presentations structured to underline the importance of the findings for bridging and balancing uneven levels, e.g. between rich and poor, gender inequalities and otherwise unfair conditions.

Posters are often neglected at scientific conferences. In Istanbul we expect 200 posters to be presented. ISOFAR has launched a poster competition, and will hand out up to 10 prizes a 200 Euro for excellent posters at the gala dinner of the OWC. Many ISOFAR members have volunteered to participate in the poster jury. Be inspired, and try to achieve the prize with YOUR poster!

Another upcoming event is the 3rd West Africa Organic Congress in February 2015 in Abuja, Nigeria.

Organisers are the Association of Organic Agriculture Practitioners of Nigeria (NOAN) and the African Organic Network (AfrONet), supported by the Federal ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development of Nigeria. More details are found here. ISOFAR will support the event as a strategic partner.

Around the same date, organic researchers in North America will get together for the bi-annual Organic Agriculture Research Symposium in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. More details are found here.

This event is the largest organic farming conference in North America, and will be held in LaCrosse for two days before the annual MOSES Organic Farming conference, arranged by the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service. During this conference, an Organic Research Forum will be arranged with invited speakers sponsored by the Ceres Trust. The LaCrosse event will hopefully contribute in the process of establishing a North American version of TP-Organics and/or TIPI.

We hope to utilize the upcoming ISOFAR general assembly to increase our contact to the organic research movement in Africa, America and other parts of the world where ISOFAR is currently not well established.

Sweden was chosen as the country of this newsletter to describe the development and current research activities within organic agriculture. Thanks to Maria Wivstad at EPOK, SLU! In addition, this newsletter presents recently established international organic research projects, networks and initiatives.

As always - contributions to the newsletter are welcome!

Anne-Kristin Løes
Vice president of ISOFAR and editor of the newsletter
Organic agriculture and research in Sweden

By Maria Wivstad, EPOK – Centre for Organic Food and Farming, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

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National objective: 20 % organic by 2020
National objectives for the development of organic farming have existed in Sweden in 20 years and the current objective is that 20 % of total agricultural land should be certified organic by 2020. The aims of the national objectives and the related public subsidies are the environmental and societal benefits of organic production.

Recently, the Swedish Board of Agriculture concluded that organic production contributes to increased biodiversity, and decreased use of chemical plant protection products which reduces accompanied environmental and human health risks.

In addition, it was concluded that organic production is for the benefit of animal welfare and rural development. Societal and environmental benefits of organic agriculture have scientific support, although there are drawbacks and a need for improved performance.

In Sweden there are currently 480 000 hectares of certified organic land, which comprises close to 16 % of the total agricultural area. In some Swedish counties, the goal of 20 % organic farmland has already been reached, but in the most fertile plains with intensive agricultural production in the south of Sweden only about 6 % is farmed organically. Public subsidies for organic farming have been in place since the mid-1990s, which has been an important driver for organic farming growth.

Integration of organic agricultural research
For the past 15 years, Swedish research on organic food and farming has to a large extent been funded by directed calls for research in organic food systems. Public funding dominates, but there are also a few private funding bodies that have had designated organic research calls, e.g. the Swedish Farmers’ Association for Agricultural Research.

Current funding of research on organic food systems in Sweden amounts to 3.3 million Euros per year, including national funding of new projects in 2015 within CORE Organic Plus. Research relevant for organic farming is also funded by open national research calls and by international funding bodies, e.g. the EU framework programs.

There are no specific research institutes or departments that conduct organic agricultural research in Sweden. Instead this research is integrated within many different
departments at universities and research institutes. The main part of agricultural research is conducted at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), the only agricultural university in Sweden.

Present and recent research activities cover a wide range of topics within organic crop and animal production as well as food quality and marketing of organic products, even though research within primary organic production dominates.

Animal health and welfare issues in organic pig, poultry, dairy and meat production systems are high research priorities in Sweden. Optimizing the production of protein feed crops is also a central issue.

Production of high quality forage and grazing are crucial for organic dairy production. Research on crop and animal breeding has attained increased interest to meet the need of specific traits and breeding goals in organic farming systems. This is important to build robust farming systems.

Effective weed control, both direct weed regulation and preventive measures, not least of perennial weeds, is central in both agricultural and horticultural cropping systems. Pest and disease control with biological and preventive methods is another strong research area in Sweden.

On landscape level, the potential for biological control linked to conservation measures such as vegetation strips to decrease pests and diseases is of high relevance. The general effects of organic farming on biological diversity and ecosystem services on landscape level are also studied. A number of research projects are conducted on how to achieve high nutrient use efficiency of organic fertilisers, manure as well as a wide range of rest-products from society. Timing of fertiliser nutrient release in relation to crop nutrient needs to avoid environmental harmful emissions is also a challenging problem that needs research.

2013: New research agenda

During 2012, EPOK developed a research agenda for organic agriculture by an open process with stakeholders in the food chain. The main aim was to provide an overview of knowledge needs of different stakeholders, which will facilitate prioritizing for decision makers and funding bodies in future research calls.

The agenda addresses future challenges of the organic food chain as well as challenges for our food system as a whole, to increase knowledge of farming and food systems that enhances sustainability, efficiency and environmental and societal benefits.

The main agricultural research funders in Sweden welcomed the research agenda, which has been used as a steering document in several national calls for organic farming research during 2013 and 2014.

Cross-cutting topics

Three cross-cutting themes were identified in the agenda:

- Robust systems
- Added value for the environment and society
- Competitiveness and rural development

Five focal areas

Further, five focal areas were described, including examples of specific research questions:

- High productivity with maintained sustainability
- Innovative production systems with many functions
- Closed-loop cycles and renewable resources
- Sustainable enterprises and market development
- Healthy food with added value

The need to strengthen stakeholder cooperation was strongly addressed. Stakeholder involvement has the potential to promote innovation and implementation of research results, which significantly increases the benefits of research to the society. Also the need for larger interdisciplinary projects was stressed, to solve problems on a higher system level to better achieve long-term sustainable solutions.

More international research cooperation is one option to make better use of research resources and strengthen interdisciplinary research. Hence, in cooperation with a large number of Swedish researchers, EPOK currently emphasizes international cooperation within organic research, not the least to build consortia for projects within Horizon 2020 including upcoming ERA-nets.
MORE SWEDISH ORGANIC RESEARCH

A brochure where recent and ongoing research projects in Sweden within organic food and farming are presented is available here.

A Swedish research agenda for organic agriculture was developed in 2013, and is available here.


References

Agri benchmark Organic Network

Agri benchmark is a German initiative to analyse the economics of agricultural production systems worldwide. With rapidly increasing consumption and trade of organic commodities, a special focus on organic production is required to understand and promote driving forces and remove obstacles. Since 2013, farm data for typical organic farms have been collected in Brazil, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Romania, Russia, Switzerland and Ukraine. Cereals, oilseeds and pulses are the first three analysed commodities. Supported by the German Thünen-Institute and FiBL Switzerland, the Agri benchmark Organic Network will be officially founded during the 18th OWC in Istanbul. More details are found here. A pre-conference, “Understanding organic farming worldwide” will take place on October 12. Interested participants for this event and/or the network in general should get in touch with Jürn Sanders.

Collecting market data

The EU-FP7 funded project Organic Data Network arranged a successful project meeting in Tallin, Estonia in mid-May 2014. For two days, 24 representatives, representing 15 project partners discussed the Code of Good Practice for the collection of Organic Market Data (OrMaCode). Along with the manual for data collection, this code will be the main outcome of the project.

A first draft of the manual was developed by Helga Willer (FiBL Switzerland), Diana Schaack (Agricultural Information Company AMI), Corinna Feldmann (Kassel Uni, Germany), and Daniela Vairo and Francesco Solfanelli from the Polytechnic University of Marche, Italy. A central part of the project is discussions between team members and stakeholders on how to provide better data. As stated by project coordinator Raffaele Zanoli, “the project aim is not to provide new data, but to collect and check data in order to compile them properly”. The manual and Code of Practice will be published as the project ends in the autumn of 2014, by a final project meeting during the 8th OWC in Istanbul.

Several actors collect data about the organic market, and a webinar is under construction to demonstrate a useful construction of a database and required tools for data processing. Project output will be presented at a stakeholder workshop in Bari, Italy in July 2014, where key challenges of collecting organic market data and solutions will be discussed.

The project Data network for better European organic market information, which began in January 2012, aims at improving the transparency of the European organic food market through better availability of market intelligence about the sector, to meet the needs of policy makers and actors involved in organic markets. Contact Raffaele Zanoli or Kai Kreuzer.
Economic growth in European Organic Aquaculture: OrAqua

Together with her 12 partners, Prof. Ingrid Olesen from the Norwegian food research institute Nofima succeeded in the hard competition of funding a research project on organic aquaculture within the EU FP7. The kick-off meeting was held in January (photo), and scientists and stakeholders from 8 countries are involved in the consortium. The overall vision of the OrAqua project is the economic growth of the organic aquaculture sector in Europe, supported by science based regulations in line with the organic principles and consumer confidence.

OrAqua will suggest improvements for the current EU regulatory framework for organic aquaculture based on a review of the relevant available scientific knowledge, a review of organic aquaculture production and economics, and consumer perceptions of organic aquaculture. The project will focus on aquaculture production of relevant European species of finfish, molluscs, crustaceans and seaweed.

To ensure interaction with all relevant stakeholders throughout the project a multi stakeholder platform will be established. The project will assess and review existing knowledge on fish health and welfare, veterinary treatments, nutrition, feeding, seeds (sourcing of juveniles), production systems, including closed recirculation aquaculture systems (RAS), environmental impacts, socio-economic and aquaculture economic interactions, consumer aspects, legislations and private standards for organic aquaculture. The results will be communicated using a range of media and techniques tailored to involve all stakeholder groups. Further, Multi Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) and SWOT analysis will be used to generate relevant and robust recommendations. A wide range of actors from several countries will participate and interact through a participatory approach.

The 13 OrAqua project partners form a highly qualified and multidisciplinary consortium that includes four universities, five aquaculture research institutes, three research groups in social science, a fish farmer organisation, a fish farmer and two organic certification/control bodies.

The main outcomes of the project will be recommendations on how to improve the EU regulation, executive dossiers and a Policy Implementation Plan. Further the project will deliver recommendations on how to enhance economic development of the European organic aquaculture sector.

The first stakeholder event in the project will be arranged during the OWC as on Saturday and Sunday October 11-12. If you want to participate, please contact Jean Paul Blancheton.

Participants at the OrAqua kick-off meeting at Ås, Norway in January 2014. From the left, first row: Tove Kristiansen (Nofima, Norway), Åsa Maria Espmark (Nofima), Ingrid Olesen (Nofima), Maria Teresa Spedicato (COISPA, Italy), Camilla Mathiesen (ICROFS, Denmark). Second row: Amadeo Manfrin (IZSVe, Italy), Themis Allintzogliou (Nofima), Helena Röcklinsberg (SLU, Sweden), Magnus Ljung (SLU), Johan Bakker (LEI, Netherlands), Andrea Fabris (API, Italy), Lizzie Melby Jespersen (ICROFS), Mariet van Haaster de Winter (LEI), Jan Widar Finden (Debio, Norway), Hanne Marie Nielsen (Nofima), Pirjo Honkanen (Nofima), Antonio Compagnoni (ICEA, Italy), Courtney Hough (FEAP, France). Upper row: Zdenek Adamek (USB, Czech Republic), Chris Noble (Nofima), Maria Dolores Lopez Belluga (Culmarex, Spain), Wilhelm van der Pijl (LEI), Wout Abbink (DLO, Netherlands), Marijke Poelman (DLO), Guiseppe Lembo (COISPA), Jean-Paul Blancheton (IFREMER, France), Alfred Jokumsen (DTU, Denmark), Nina Baumgartner (ICEA).
The combined effects of climate change, advancing resource scarcity and population growth are placing huge pressure on global food production. Regions such as sub-Saharan Africa are affected particularly by such developments.

Here, aridity, degraded soils, high population growth and poverty all present serious challenges to agricultural production. In a recently launched project, FiBL’s scientists are devising ways to make land uses water-efficient and nutrient-efficient, thus enhancing productivity and food security in arid zones.

More information here.

The project is a follow-up of the former study CaLas, Carbon Credits for Sustainable Landuse Systems. Climate change counts among the greatest challenges faced by farmers and food producers. Additionally, resource scarcity and growing populations in particularly vulnerable regions puts agricultural productivity and food security at risk.

In the new project, agricultural practices and cultivation systems that are both resource-efficient and well suited to smallholder production in arid zones will be identified.

There is a substantial body of knowledge which needs to be compiled and studied systematically. As was also the case for CaLas, the new project is funded by the Mercator Foundation Switzerland.

In the first phase, the project will produce a required knowledge base and analytical tools. In the second phase, outcomes will be developed in a pilot region. Findings gained by applying the natural sciences at field and activity level will be merged with findings derived by the methods of the social sciences and economics at farm and regional level.

By collaborating with renowned agricultural scientists and involving international development organisations, FiBL ensures that the solutions found are suited to the problems on the ground, and can also be implemented in the long term in the target regions. The project broadens the knowledge base with regard to the capacity of farming systems to adapt to climate change, and improves the efficiency of their water and nutrient utilisation. It enhances the conditions of agricultural production in the pilot region, and seeks to ensure that such improvements are emulated elsewhere.

Contact Andreas Gattinger for more information.
Show your opinion

In 2013 Technology Platform TP Organics launched the revision process of the 2009 Strategic Research Agenda in order to reflect a number of recent changes in the policy priorities.

Namely, the increased focus on innovation, the establishment of the European Innovation Partnership for Agriculture, the legislative proposal for a new organic regulation and the new Organic Action Plan published by the Commission in March 2014.

The revision process includes several steps:

1. An exploratory discussion on possible new topics to be covered by the revised Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda held at the Stakeholder Forum in 2013.
2. Drafting first contributions by the expert team of TP Organics from January until June 2014.
3. Collecting members and stakeholders’ feedback on the proposed topics at the Stakeholder Forum on 1 July, 2014.
4. Online public consultation from July 1 to September 1, 2014, to give everybody the possibility to prioritise the research & innovation for the organic food and farming sector.
5. Consultations with other European Technology Platforms in order to identify possible areas of cooperation in autumn 2014.
6. A workshop planned at the 18th OWC in Istanbul to get feedback from an international perspective.
7. All the input received during the consultations will be processed into a final version to be published.

Your contribution will help make the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda a broadly supported document that effectively can influence EU policy.

Please make you voice heard by indicating your preferences for proposed topics.

Four themes have been distinguished in the proposed Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda:

Theme 1: Empowerment of rural areas and strengthening innovation
The topics of the Theme 1 propose research on how to diversify local economies in order to improve livelihoods effectively. How can organic agriculture, food processing and eco-tourism become important drivers of the empowerment of rural communities? How can the dialogue between urban and rural populations be improved to form partnerships between consumers and producers? How to foster effective and efficient innovation systems adapted to the organic farming and food sector?

Theme 2: Eco-functional intensification: the ecological challenge of farming
The research topics of the Theme 2 aim at increasing knowledge about how to manage ecosystem services in a sustainable way, how to increase yield stability, decrease the yield gap with conventional farming, and develop animal friendly livestock production systems.

Theme 3: Food for health and human wellbeing
The research topics of Theme 3 aim at investigating how the integrity of organic food chains can be tested, how organic food contributes to healthy & sustainable diets, and what processing techniques are suitable for organic food.

Theme 4: Innovation strategies to overcome challenges in organic regulations
In March 2014, the Commission published a legislative proposal for a new organic regulation. It foresees phasing out of several exceptions and derogations. The topics listed in this theme should be part of a large-scale research program needed to allow the organic sector to adapt to the new regulations and live up to the highest sustainability standards.

The online public consultation will close by 13 on 1 September 2014.
You find it here.
Download the instructions as a PDF.
Science Day at BIOFACH, February 2014

In February 2014, the Technology Innovation Platform of IFOAM, TIPI held a workshop at the Biofach 2014 Science Day to develop a vision for organic food and farming research at the global level.

TIPI council members Maria Wivistad from EPOK/SLU in Sweden, Uygun Aksoy of Ege University in Turkey, and Urs Niggli from FiBL, Switzerland presented their overviews of the current state of global organic food and farming research, and outlined future research needs. This was followed by a workshop, and the 60 participants divided into four groups to discuss the following key issues: regional adaption of research; combining farmers’ knowledge with science; collaboration with other forms of sustainable production systems, and ecological intensification versus component research.

TIPI council member Nic Lampkin of the Organic Research Centre Elm Farm, UK, summarized the discussions of the session and issues raised as follows:

• Should organic research be focused on certified systems or agreed production standards, or should it be based on the wider ideas, principles, and goals of organic farming?
• Should we separate organic and agro-ecological research, or is there significant common ground?
• Can organic farming be the solution to every problem, or do we need to recognize and find ways of working with its limitations and the trade-offs between multiple goals?
• Does organic research need to find a global solution or more locally adapted solutions?
• What is the role of stakeholders in the process – what does “participatory” really mean? Does it mean that researchers will still be leading the innovation but carrying out work on farms, or is it more about farmers leading the research process, with researchers playing only a supporting role? What about other research questions aimed at different audiences, for whom participatory approaches may be irrelevant?

The TIPI board will now compile the results of the workshop into a report, which will be presented to the organic sector at the 18th OWC in October 2014. On October 12, TIPI will arrange a workshop and a General Assembly, supported by ISOFAR.

For more information, contact: Helga Willer. Check details here.
Membership services

- Proceedings from the OWC in 2011 and the African Organic Conference in 2012 are available at our website. Members have access to the full versions by logging on to the Members’ area.

- We would like to remind all ISOFAR members, and people wanting to become members: Please send to the ISOFAR Head Office (info@isofar.org) the keywords related to your professional expertise, and contact details. The Head Office needs your information for future joint research activities among members, organising lecture requests, etc.

- All members are kindly invited to provide contributions to the ISOFAR Newsletter such as reports on your on-going activities and other interesting or useful information.

- Important: Don’t forget to inform us on any change of your address!

Newsletter contact:
Contributions (text files and separate picture files) should be sent to Anne-Kristin Løes by email. anne-kristin.loes@bioforsk.no.

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