



Official Participant

Rapporteur Template for Scientific Events

Event Title :	"Organic production, Research and Innovation: setting priorities for the future"	Date:	28-29 May 2015
Event Organiser:	European Commission – Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development		
Event Target Group:	Farmers, farm advisors, researchers, civil society, upstream and downstream industries		
Rapporteur:	European Commission – DG Agriculture and rural development – Unit B4 (organics)		

1. Which research themes are concerned? (Tick all relevant areas)

- A: Improve public health through nutrition – healthy and sustainable consumption
- B: Increase food safety and quality
- C: Reduce losses and waste – more efficient food chain
- D: Manage the land for all ecosystem services – sustainable rural development
- E: Increase agricultural outputs sustainably – sustainable intensification
- F: Understand food markets in an increasingly globalised food system
- G: Increase equity in the food system

2. What are the challenges and why do they exist?

The overall challenge faced by the organic sector is to ensure a steady growth of supply and demand, while maintaining consumers' trust. It is essential to guarantee the credibility of the scheme and the added value in a long term perspective.

There has been — and still is — a great need for research and innovation in organic food and farming because of its relatively recent development and it is an alternative which is very knowledge intensive: a knowledge that cannot always be covered by results from mainstream agricultural research. In order to follow the principles of organic agriculture as laid out in the legislation, it is necessary to further develop the research-based knowledge on agro-ecological methods and on careful processing in practice. Moreover, research is needed to assess the degree to which organic agriculture complies with the principles and — in a wider perspective — delivers on the promises regarding important societal goals (e.g. reducing environmental costs).

Organic producers face a number of technical gaps. Some of these fundamental challenges include the availability of seeds, breeding animals and aquaculture juveniles in organic form, availability of organic protein feed, soil fertility, plant health, coexistence of organic agriculture with non-organic agriculture, availability of substances and techniques in processing which are compatible with organic production.

3. What will happen if the challenges are not addressed?

- Short Term Consequences
- Long Term Consequences

If the above-mentioned challenges are not addressed, technical obstacles to the conversion to, and maintenance of, organic farming will remain. This will hamper the further development of the sector, and represent lost opportunities to improve the environment, growth and jobs.

5. What were the suggested solutions, research insights and/or policy proposals? Were specific new research or development actions identified?

To respond to the challenges ahead and improve the identification of research and innovation needs, further involvement of all concerned stakeholders, especially farmers, is crucial. Hence the organisation of this conference.

5 parallel workshops (WS) were organised, on respectively plant production, seeds, animal production, processing and means of improving the exchange of knowledge.

Each workshop identified specific as well as cross-cutting research challenges and priorities.

- WS 1: plant production

The following main research/innovation priorities have been identified:

- for cereals: weed control, multifunctionality of the farm
- for protein crops: weed and disease control
- for permanent crops: managing low fertility of soil, copper replacement
- for horticulture: greenhouse production, soil fertility/fertilisation
- as cross-cutting issues: understanding agro-ecosystems diversity and complexity, maintaining productivity and fertility

Detailed outcome available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/expo-milano-2015/cap-events/organic-farming/workshop-1-report_en.pdf

- WS 2: seeds

The following main research/innovation priorities have been identified:

- developing sufficient varieties for organic farming (including local varieties)
- developing adequate traits for organic farming
- improving the understanding of what organic breeding means and improving specific techniques
- as cross-cutting issues: improving traceability to maintain consumer confidence, and enhancing sustainability (biodiversity, nutrients efficiency, economic sustainability, decreasing negative externalities)

Detailed outcome available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/expo-milano-2015/cap-events/organic-farming/workshop-2-report_en.pdf

- WS 3: animal production

The following main research/innovation priorities have been identified:

- for dairy, beef and sheep: reduction of antibiotics, sustainable/natural alternatives to antibiotics, reduction of concentrate use as a strategy for better climate and health
- for pig and poultry: animal health and welfare (herd size, labelling), environmental impact of confinement
- for bees and feed: bee health in organic beekeeping (*Varroa* free systems, conservation areas for pure breeding of bees), forage quality, sources of protein feed
- as common issues for all sectors: work on genetics and systems, work on breeds and breeding systems
- as cross-cutting issues: wide range of issues, including knowledge transfer, promotion of organic agriculture, link with processing and agroforestry, social benefits of local food chains

Detailed outcome available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/expo-milano-2015/cap-events/organic-farming/workshop-3-report_en.pdf

- WS 4: processing

The following main research/innovation priorities have been identified:

- wide range of issues discussed as regards food, feed, wine and common issues from farming practices to consumer expectations
- Research areas identified in technologies, product quality, traceability, socio-economic research (competitiveness of organic production, education, consumer information)

Detailed outcome available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/expo-milano-2015/cap-events/organic-farming/workshop-4-report_en.pdf

- WS 5: means of stimulating the exchange of knowledge

The following elements emerged from the discussion:

- reasons for stakeholders not participating in R&I actions: e.g. time consuming, lack of openness for innovation, no practical feedback
- reasons for participating in R&I actions: e.g. co-ownership of agenda setting and results, cross-fertilisation among actors, recognition of existing knowledge and local experience
- tools to improve involvement of stakeholders in R&I actions: e.g. discussion platforms, networks, involvement of all stakeholders in project proposal evaluations and project life-cycle, simple language to be used in R&I actions
- recommendations to improve dissemination, through e.g. advisors, farmer-to-farmer methods (farm visits, field days, demonstration farms), use of simple and adapted language, efficient combination of tools, making learning funnier.

Detailed outcome available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/expo-milano-2015/cap-events/organic-farming/workshop-5-report_en.pdf

6. What are the expected benefits and risks of such initiatives?

There were several main benefits. On the one hand the conference achieved the objective of implementing a bottom-up approach for setting research priorities for the benefit of organic agriculture. The world café format was an ideal setting to enable the needed exchange of views and circulation of information and experience. The preliminary preparation that was carried out was key to the achievements.

The other main benefit was the big success of bringing together more than 180 participants with different profiles (farmers, farm advisors, researchers, NGO representatives and Commission officials) and from a very wide range of countries (30). It was a very good opportunity for interaction between people who are interested in EU policy and are ready to engage in constructive work. It was viewed as a very positive initiative of the Commission and was excellent for the image of the Institution.

A third benefit was the high proportion of practitioners (farmers and farm advisors) among the participants which is not always the case when research issues are discussed. The conference was organised in a way to favour a large participation of people working on-the-ground so that the priorities that would be identified would correspond to concrete needs of organic farmers. The results of the workshops show that this was achieved.

Another benefit was pointed out by participants: the facilitated networking that is very useful in the agricultural and research worlds where there are not that many opportunities to exchange with peers from different origins but with similar concerns and with interested players from varied horizons.

The risk was that the focus for the research priorities would not be totally perceived or respected: organic and future oriented, including innovation. Some of the identified priorities are "old" and not specific to organic agriculture. Therefore, the funding of research into such issues (soil fertility, pest and weed management, co-existence with GMOs, co-existence between different types of agriculture) could be a bit of a waste or redundant because some of these are long standing problems that have been researched for decades so it is more a question of use/dissemination of the research results rather than the need for new research. Also some research could be conducted in the framework of projects for conventional agriculture thus better allocating the funds for specifically organic projects.

Another risk was that the great number of people and the time constraints would not enable the identification of the sought priorities. In the case of this conference, the organisation and very thorough preliminary preparation ensured that everything ran perfectly smoothly. Everyone had the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions. The moderators and rapporteurs helped to keep time and to come to a result at the end of the sessions.

There was a risk that the conference would be used as a political platform for certain NGOs to engage with the Commission on subjects outside the scope of the event. This didn't happen. Everyone respected the rules and contributed constructively to the dynamics of the process.

A final risk was that the event would be so well appreciated by participants that they would want a repeat of the conference the following year/s. This was the case but it is a sign of the success of the initiative and of the appreciation of the participants of its quality.

7. Does this event address research challenges other than those in the discussion document?

The conference aimed at collecting participants' views on the needs and priorities for research and innovation in organic production in the short, medium and long-term, using a *world café* format. The starting point for the discussions was the organic Action Plan and the research needs identified therein, as well as TP organics strategic research agenda and the outcome of the EIP focus group on organic farming. No discussion document was produced.

Instead, a number of questions were asked to the participants:

For Workshops 1 to 4:

1. What are the key problems to be addressed by Research & Innovation regarding plant production/seeds/animal production/processing?
2. For the key problems identified, what are the priorities for research in the short, medium and long-term?
3. What cross-cutting and horizontal issues (social, economic, environmental) as well as links with the other workshops should be taken into account when discussing research and innovation priorities?

For Workshop 5

1. How to involve effectively farmers and stakeholders in research and innovation actions?
2. How to ensure an appropriate dissemination of material and to develop appropriate channels of dissemination?

8. Did this event point out gaps in the private and public research infrastructure/systems which should be addressed?

Workshop 5 in particular highlighted some recommendations to improve the involvement of stakeholders in research actions (e.g. R&I actions should be written in a simple language and with less bureaucratic burden, multi-actor approach during evaluation and life-cycle of project, appropriate funding conditions to be considered).

9. What best practices were mentioned at this event?

Best practices were not particularly highlighted since the purpose of the conference was to identify research challenges and priorities and to exchange views on transferring knowledge for WS5.

10. What follow-up actions emerged from this event?

Outcomes of each workshop and a general report for the conference will be made available to the public on the Commission website.

Such material will be used to contribute to a long term strategy for research in agriculture and for

establishing future work programmes of Horizon 2020.

In addition, the results of the conference can already be used to provide ideas to would-be operational groups of the European Innovation Partnership for agricultural productivity and sustainability.

11. Did this event point out gaps in the private and public research infrastructure/systems which should be addressed?

Same reply as question 8.