

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE AS PART OF A GREENER EUROPE

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Abstract Today, climate change requires an urgent response from the European institutions, by implementing the various measures adopted at the political level. European instruments aim to combat climate change and support ecology. In this article, organic farming is analyzed in terms of its low environmental impact and by contributing to the achievement of the objectives set for greener Europe.

Key words: Organic, farming, future, Europe, contribution

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic brought the necessity and the opportunity to change the economies and the societies and through these to design a new Europe using the NextGenerationEU which is more than a recovery plan [1]. The targets for the next period are to convert the European Union to greener economy, more digitalized, healthier, stronger and equal. For each of these objectives are established several specific actions to be carried in order to achieve them in a specific period of time. Climate change is one of the preoccupation of the European Union and the target is set that the production of greenhouse gases not to overcome the natural capacity of the ecosystems to absorb the greenhouse gases till 2050, in order to become climate-neutral. Within the plan NextGenerationEU, are mentioned as future action directions: the sustaining the greener technologies in vehicles and public transportation, transforming the buildings and the public spaces to more energy efficient ones. Also, there are some action directions related to the environment, more precisely to water quality, water pollution, planting more trees and supporting the bees, encouraging the use of renewable energy and make more green spaces in the cities, and make food healthier through the use of more environmental-friendly technologies in agriculture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the plan for a greener Europe are mentioned several area directions for the future. One of the most important direction is represented by reducing the carbon footprint [9]. The high levels of greenhouse gases affected the environment and now there must be made efforts in order to mitigate the climate change. These efforts must cover all the sectors, in order to climate neutral till 2050 [3].

Another important sector that is at the center of attention is energy, namely clean energy from renewable sources that is safe and affordable. An important aspect is the transformation of housing and public institutions into buildings with better energy efficiency, but also the support of the population to allow the largest number of people to heat their homes. At the same time, energy efficiency is also desired in public lighting activities, contributing along with thermal efficiency, water supply and waste management to the transformation of localities into smart localities.

Much of the pollution is due to tourism and implicitly to the transport it involves. As solutions to these problems, it is desirable to develop public tourism and cycling networks, along with investments in the development of zero-emission means of transport [11]. The use of electric cars can have a positive impact on the current situation and in this respect it is aimed to encourage the purchase of electric cars, but also to develop the network of charging stations.

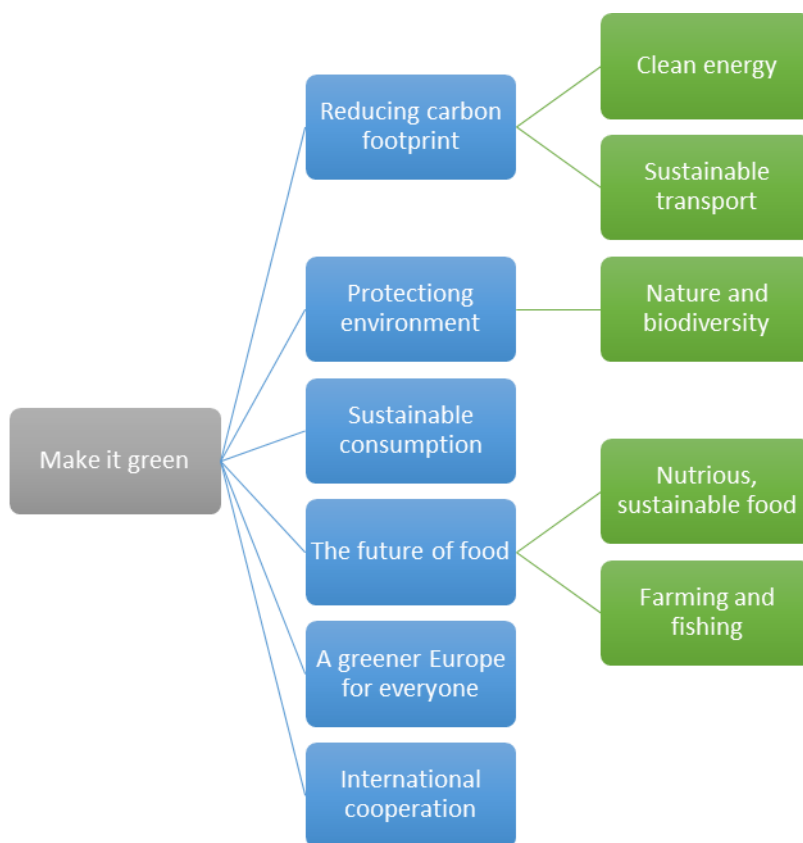


Figure 1. Actions from NextGenerationEU plan

Source: NextGenerationEU, 2022 [13]

These measures will not only impact the environment, but they will contribute by creating new jobs to the development of the economy. Thus, it can be concluded that they will have a positive influence on the quality of life.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The production of quality food through production systems with low environmental impact greatly influences the development of a sustainable food production system [12]. If in 2019, the share of organic area in total utilized agricultural area was only 7.921%, the aim is to achieve 25% of land used in the organic farming in 8 years, more precisely till 2030.

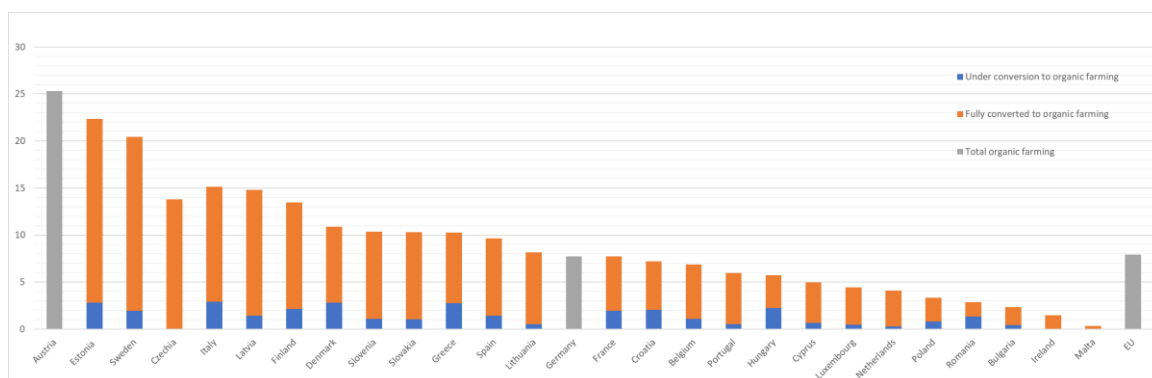


Figure 2. Share of organic area in 2019

Source: www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat, 2022 [15]

In order to achieve the proposed objectives regarding organic farming, an organic action plan has been established. Through its three axes, the Action Plan closely follows the structure of the food supply chain and the sustainability objectives proposed through the Green Deal [2,4].

AXIS 1. ORGANIC FOOD AND PRODUCTS FOR ALL: STIMULATE DEMAND AND ENSURE CONSUMER TRUST

- 1.1. Promoting organic farming and the EU logo
- 1.2. Promoting organic canteens and increasing the use of green public procurement
- 1.3. Reinforcing organic school schemes
- 1.4. Preventing food fraud and strengthening consumer trust
- 1.5. Improving traceability
- 1.6. The contribution of the private sector

AXIS 2. ON THE WAY TO 2030: STIMULATING CONVERSION AND REINFORCING THE ENTIRE VALUE CHAIN

- 2.1. Encouraging conversion, investment and exchange of best practices
- 2.2. Developing sector analysis to increase market transparency
- 2.3. Supporting the organisation of the food chain
- 2.4. Reinforcing local and small-volume processing and fostering short trade circuit
- 2.5. Improving animal nutrition in accordance with organic rules
- 2.6. Reinforcing organic aquaculture

AXIS 3: ORGANICS LEADING BY EXAMPLE: IMPROVING THE CONTRIBUTION OF ORGANIC FARMING TO SUSTAINABILITY

- 3.1. Reducing climate and environmental footprint
- 3.2. Enhancing genetic biodiversity and increasing yields
- 3.3. Alternatives to contentious inputs and other plant protection products
- 3.4. Enhancing animal welfare
- 3.5. Making more efficient use of resources

Figure 3. Action plan for organic farming

Source: www.agriculture.ec.europa.eu, 2022 [8]

Through the 23 actions included in the Action Plan, it is intended to continue the successful actions in the period 2014-2020, together with new actions and the involvement of different sources of funding [5,7]. The new common Agricultural Policy is the framework for the implementation of the Action Plan, facilitating access to finance through rural development commitments and eco-schemes. Financial support is only part of the support package for organic farming. Technical assistance and the exchange of best practices are also an integral part of this package, along with consulting services.

In order to complete the image provided by these support measures, it is necessary to mention that at least 30% of the research and innovation budget will be directed to the aspect of agriculture, forestry or rural areas that are specific or relevant to organic farming [3, 10].

To substantiate Axis 1, it is sufficient to mention that in the period 2009-2019, sales of organic products increased by 145%, which is equivalent to an increase from 18 billion to 41 billion euro. This increase in sales led to a greater awareness of the presence of this category of products on the market, and thus in 2020, 56% of European consumers recognized the organic farming logo [6].

However, organic products enjoy greater appreciation among the population, both in terms of the environmental impact of their production process and in terms of animal

welfare standards. In order to encourage more farmers to convert to organic farming, it is essential to increase the consumption of organic products along with increasing consumer confidence in this product category. Improving traceability, combating fraud, facilitating the supply of organic products to public institutions are just some of the actions that can be taken to support demand for organic products and increase consumer confidence [11].

If the above measures concerned in particular the demand for organic products, the analysis must also be completed with regard to the supply of products [14]. A key role plays in local production and the encouragement of short supply chains, so that the added value generated along this distribution chain returns to a greater extent to the producer, and so that this is encouraged in their work [10]. In just 10 years, the area destined for organic agriculture at EU level increased by 66%, reaching 13.8 million hectares in 2019, or 8.5% of the agricultural area used in the European Union [9]. The measures contained in the Action Plan are geared toward supporting conversion, facilitating investment and the exchange of good practices, market transparency is supported by sector analyzes. Supply chains are also an important point of the action plan, along with small processing units.

The action plan established to contribute to the development of organic agriculture and thus to a greener Europe also includes actions relating to animal nutrition and aquaculture development. Organic farming contributes to a very important extent to supporting sustainability through its effects in protecting the environment and combating climate change. In addition to increasing soil fertility in the long term, the impact on biodiversity must also be underestimated, so there is about 30% more biodiversity on land destined for organic agriculture than on land associated with conventional agriculture. The main limitations of organic farming are the prohibition of the use of chemical pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, GMOs, radiation or antibiotics. Organic farming is expected to contribute to increased sustainability by increasing production, increasing biodiversity, developing alternatives for plant protection products under more resource-efficient use, and at the same time giving importance to animal welfare.

CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic was a crucial moment in the history of the European Union, it can be appreciated that it was the key to encouraging a major change in all sectors of life and thus, A recovery plan has been established, but it also represents the opportunity to influence Europe in issues such as climate change and green projects, digitalisation, health, resilience and equal opportunities. . Organic farming through inputs and used technologies contributes to greener Europe, but a full package of measures to cover production, disposal and have a positive impact on sustainability is needed. These measures materialize in various actions that receive financial support and cover many aspects.

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