Organic agriculture: Short communication on the current situation

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Abstract. A wide range of international reports and scientific papers value organic agriculture as an innovative farming system that encompasses various sustainability goals (e.g., "Good Health and Well-being", "Decent Work and Economic Growth", "Climate Action"). The present communication highlights the role of organic agriculture in building a sustainable society, bringing to the fore the upward trends in the agricultural land dedicated to organic farming and the evolution of the organic market.
Key Words: organic, farming, market.

Intensification of agriculture has increased food availability over recent decades, but has led to adverse environmental impact (Muller et al 2017). A wide range of international reports and scientific papers (Bilalis et al 2017; Cidón et al 2021; FiBL 2021; Petrescu et al 2017; Petrescu & Petrescu-Mag 2015) value organic agriculture as an innovative farming system that encompasses various sustainability goals (e.g., "Good Health and Well-being", "Decent Work and Economic Growth", "Climate Action").

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) defines organic agriculture as "a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity, and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation, and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and good quality of life for all involved" (IFOAM 2008). Therefore, organic agriculture can be seen as a mediator capable of reducing the conflict between what people need and take from nature and what nature has to offer (Petrescu et al 2015). Understanding the attitudes, knowledge, and actions of citizens is a prerequisite to build a sustainable society (Petrescu-Mag et al 2019). Based on a 2020 Eurobarometer survey on EU agriculture, the interviewed people believe that organic products are more environmentally friendly (81%) and are produced with greater respect for animal welfare (80%) (European Commission 2020a).

The role of organic farming as a means of food production that meets the demands of sustainability is recognized at European level through the Council Regulation (2007) on the production, control, and labelling of organic products (with amendments) and the Commission Regulation (2008) on detailing the rules on production, labelling, and control. Recently, a Regulation (2020c) was adopted laying down certain rules for the application of Regulation 2018/848 as regards the documents needed for the retroactive recognition of periods for the purpose of conversion, the production of organic products, and information to be provided by Member States. At the level of the European Union (EU), the European Commission aims to develop an action plan on organic agriculture that will enable us to reach the goal of at least 25% of agricultural land in the EU in organic agriculture by 2030 (European Commission 2020b).

In the EU, the total area under organic farming is on an upward trend, and, in 2019, it covered almost 13.8 million hectares of agricultural land, which represents 8.5% of the total agricultural land of the EU (EUROSTAT 2021), with Spain ranked on the first

place in the EU (Figure 1). From 2012 to 2019, an increase of 46% in organic area occurred.

	Organic area (ha)		2012–19
	2012	2019	(% change)
EU-27	**9 457 886**	**13 793 665**	**45.8**
Belgium	59 718	93 119	55.9
Bulgaria	39 138	117 779	200.9
Czechia	468 670	535 185	14.2
Denmark	194 706	285 526	46.6
Germany	959 832	1 290 839	34.5
Estonia	142 065	220 737	55.4
Ireland	52 793	73 952	40.1
Greece	462 618	528 752	14.3
Spain	1 756 548	2 354 916	34.1
France	1 030 881	2 240 797	117.4
Croatia	31 904	108 127	238.9
Italy	1 167 362	1 993 225	70.7
Cyprus	3 923	6 240	59.1
Latvia	195 658	289 796	48.1
Lithuania	156 539	242 118	54.7
Luxembourg	4 130	5 814	40.8
Hungary	130 607	303 190	132.1
Malta	37	55	48.6
Netherlands	48 038	68 068	41.7
Austria	533 230	671 703	26.0
Poland	655 499	507 637	-22.6
Portugal	200 833	293 213	46.0
Romania	288 261	395 228	37.1
Slovenia	35 101	49 638	41.4
Slovakia	164 360	197 565	20.2
Finland	197 751	306 484	55.0
Sweden	477 684	613 964	28.5
Iceland	:	5 740	:
Norway	55 260	45 312	-18.0
Switzerland	121 213	169 030	39.4
United Kingdom	590 011	459 275	-22.2
North Macedonia	:	3 711	:
Serbia	:	21 266	:
Turkey	:	551 718	:

Figure 1. Total organic area (fully converted and under conversion), between 2012 and 2019 (EUROSTAT 2021).

At the global level, organic agriculture is practiced in 187 countries, on 72.3 million hectares of agricultural land (Willer et al 2021), with Australia ranked first in terms of agricultural land dedicated to organic agriculture (Figure 2).

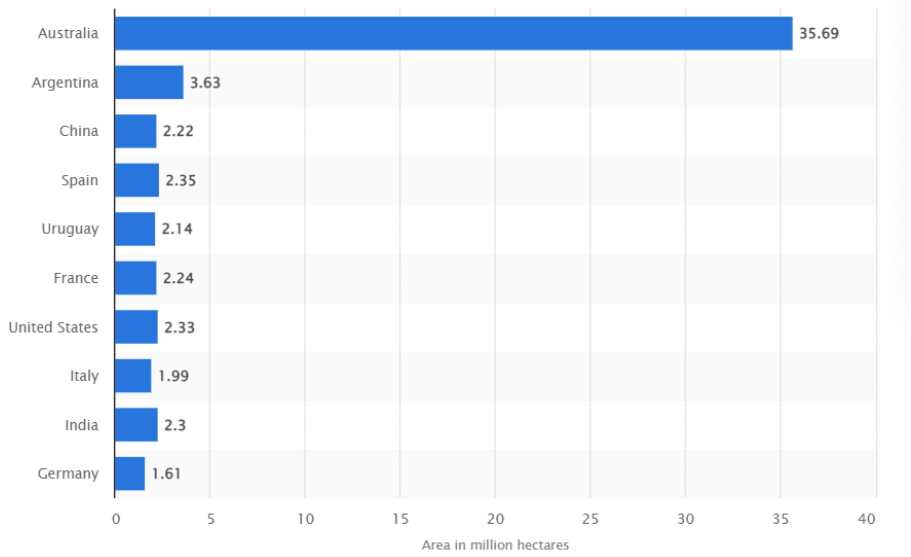

Figure 2. Organic agricultural land area worldwide (2019) (Statista 2021a).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on people's eating behavior and the organic market has known a visible upturn in many countries (Travniček et al 2021).

North America and European countries cover 90% of worldwide sales of organic food and drinks in retail channels, with an increasing role of Asia, Africa and Latin America in exporting organic products (Bazaluk et al 2020). Worldwide sales of organic food from 1999 to 2019 increased by 91 billion US dollars (Figure 3).

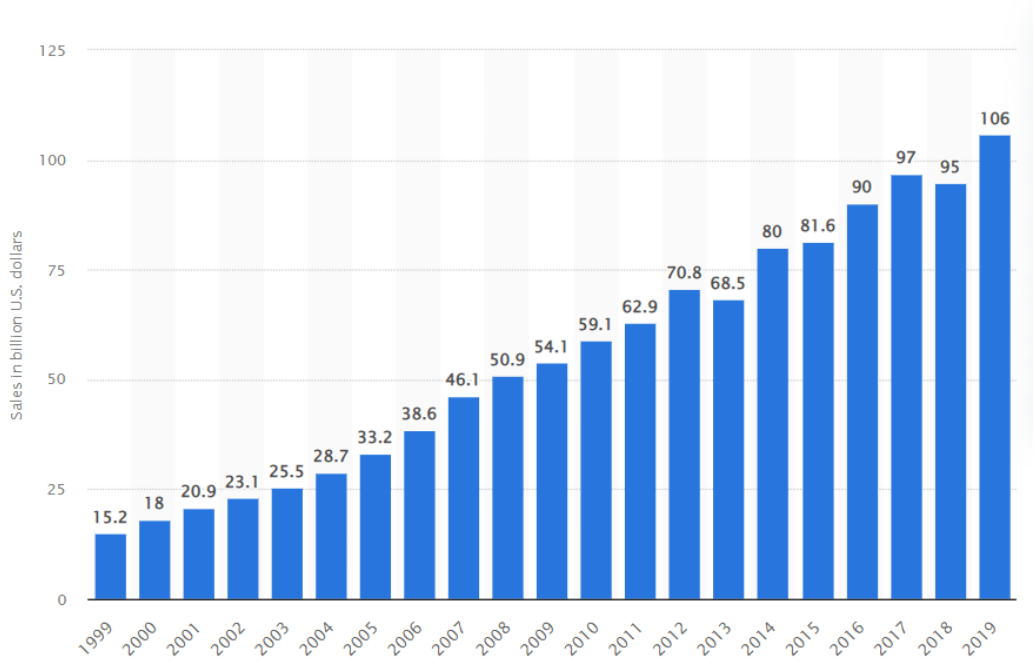

Figure 3. Worldwide sales of organic food from 1999 to 2019 (in billion U.S. dollars) (Statista 2021b).

Some of the critics of organic agriculture must also be recognized. Organic agriculture is considered to achieve on average 20% lower yields than conventional agriculture and requires more effort in weed control (FiBL 2021). Additionally, critics say that organic agriculture relies on more land to produce the same amount of food, and expanding organic farming practices on a large scale could potentially threaten forests, wetlands, and grasslands (Emsley 2001; Trewavas 2001). Neverthelss, due to the premium price consumers pay for organic products, most organic farms generate a higher income than conventional ones (FiBL 2021). Reganold & Wachter (2016) believe that despite the growing interest in organic farming and its potential role in global food and ecosystem security, a combination of organic and other innovative farming systems will be needed for future global food and ecosystem security.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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