



EU organic logo.

## Organic ambition

The EU wants more organic farming and has set a big target to grow the sector.

### Overview of EU plans for the organic sector

A target of 25 % land area under organic management by 2030 has been set by the EU under the new Farm to Fork Strategy. This target is very ambitious and gives a clear indication of the important role organic farming will play in moving towards a “fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system” as envisaged under the Strategy. The Commission says that it wants to focus on the sustainable economic development of the organic sector and on increasing consumer demand for organic food.

### Organic targets for Ireland and Europe

Individual targets for member states have yet to be decided. The target of 25 % organically managed land is an average for the EU as a whole, and all countries will have to contribute. It is envisaged that member state Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategic plans will set appropriate, country-specific targets, based on the current status and scope for organic market development (Table 1). The average organic land area in the EU is 7.5 % (2018). Organic land area in Ireland remains proportionally small at just over 2 %, but has seen a 50 % increase in size since 2014 (Figure 1).

### What is organic farming?

Organic farming is an overall system of farm management and food production that combines best environmental practices, a high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources, the application of high welfare standards, and a production method in line with the preference of certain consumers for products produced using natural substances and processes.

### Why organics?

There are several reasons why organic farming is supported:

#### Legal backing

The organic farming system is enshrined in law from farm to fork and has the trust of the consumer. All EU operators farm to a strict set of EU standards and are inspected regularly.

#### Sustainable low-input farming

We know from the research that, in general, organic farming has a more benign effect on the environment compared to conventional farming. No artificial nitrogen or agro-chemicals are permitted, and we need to reduce levels of both in the future according to the EU. Organic production leads to increased biodiversity due to plant species diversity, crop rotations and lower input use.

#### Additional animal welfare considerations

Animal welfare and health has become more relevant in farming, and is considered of paramount importance in organic farming. On organic farms, animals are given more space if housed and are allowed to express their normal behaviour.

#### Increasing demand for organic food

The global demand for organic food is worth €100 billion and this is forecast to rise. The EU market has doubled over the last 10 years and is worth almost €40 billion. According to Bord Bia, organic retail sales amount to €250 million, which is about 1 %

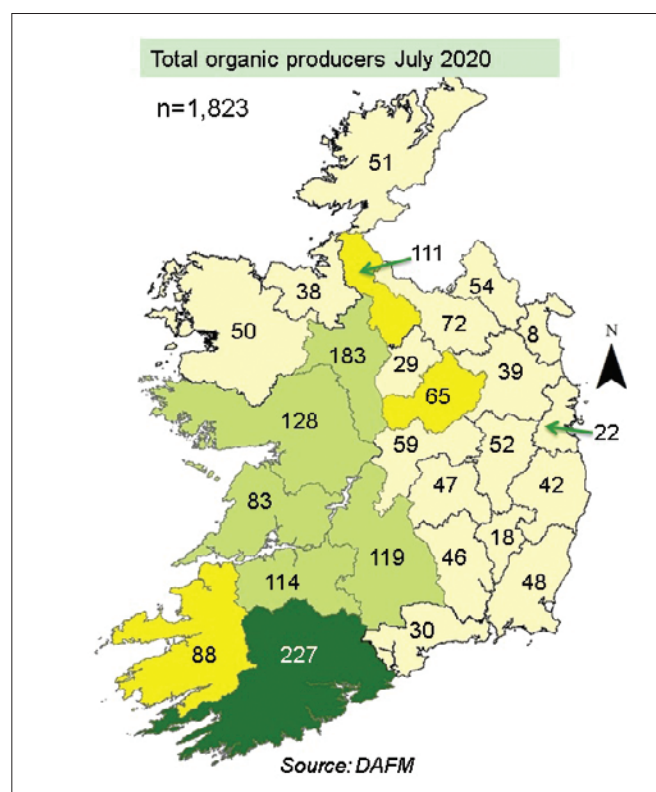


FIGURE 1: Total organic producers to July 2020. Top six counties: Cork – 227; Roscommon – 183; Galway – 128; Tipperary – 119; Limerick – 114; and, Leitrim – 111.

of total food sales. The EU wants to invest in growing the demand for organic food further.

## Farmer lifestyle choice

Younger farmers especially are looking at their farms with ‘new eyes’, free from the stigma that their parents may have associated with organics. Some may have spent time abroad and learned about organic farming then. Some see it as a way of cutting back on inputs and labour while still returning a good income.

## Increasing rural viability

Organics can be a profitable option with the potential to boost investment in the local economy and create jobs. This can be the case for all types of organic enterprises. In particular, small horticulture enterprises, many of which employ local people, can have a very positive economic effect on the locality.

## Where are the market opportunities?

In Ireland, markets exist for the majority of organic products. In particular, demand exists for tillage, horticulture and dairy products, much of which have to be imported. Large companies including Glenisk (organic milk), Flahavans (organic porridge

Table 1: Organic enterprises in Ireland (latest figures 2019).

	<b>CATTLE</b> ~1,400 farmers; ~18,500 suckler cows
	<b>SHEEP</b> ~600 farmers; ~65,000 ewes
	<b>TILLAGE</b> ~160 farmers farming ~2,500 ha (mainly oats)
	<b>HORTICULTURE</b> ~300 farmers produce vegetables on ~520 ha
	<b>DAIRY:</b> 62 farmers milking 5,000 cows

Source: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

oats), Good Herdsmen and Slaney Meats (organic beef), and Irish Country Meats (organic lamb) are involved in the organic business and buy product from farmers. Contracts may also be available from some processors. Many organic farmers also avail of short supply chains and like to sell directly through farmers’ markets, box schemes and farm shops.

It is envisaged that market opportunities for organic produce will continue to grow and will be aided by the EU’s plan to invest in promoting the benefits of organic production and food as part of the overall Farm to Fork Strategy.

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