

Organic Farming in Ireland

NOREEN GIBNEY

Contents

1	Where we have come from: History, Development of Organic Agriculture in Figures, Organisations	162
1.1	Certifying bodies in Ireland per 31.12.1999	162
2	Implementation EU-Regulation 2092/91	163
3	State Support for the Organic Sector	163
4	Economic Aspects.....	164
5	Marketing	165
5.1	The Market.....	165
5.2	Marketing Channels	165
5.3	Demand	165
5.4	Challenges in Marketing	166
6	Processing	166
7	Training.....	167
8	Advisory Service.....	167
9	Research	167
10	What does the future hold?.....	167
11	References.....	168
12	Author	169



1 Where we have come from: History, Development of Organic Agriculture in Figures, Organisations

Up until the implementation of EEC Regulation 2092/91, developments related to organic production in Ireland were in the hands of a small group of pioneering dedicated organic operators, who worked mainly on a voluntary basis to develop a high quality of standards for organic production.

The Irish Organic Farmers' and Growers' Association (IOFGA, <http://www.irishorganic.ie>) was established in 1981 by 6 growers. Today it is the biggest of the three organic organisations. In 1991 the second body, Organic Trust Ltd. (<http://www.ireland.iol.ie/~organic>), came into existence, followed by a third in 1992, the Bio-dynamic Agriculture Association of Ireland (<http://www.kihe.com/demeter>), who trade produce under the Demeter Symbol.

1.1 Certifying bodies in Ireland per 31.12.1999

Irish Organic Farmers' and Growers' Association (IOFGA)
E-Mail: iofga@tinet.ie,
internet: <http://www.irishorganic.ie/>
Founded in 1981, Magazine: *Organic Matters*



Demeter Standards/ Bio-Dynamic Agriculture Association of Ireland (BDAAI)
E-Mail: bdaai@indigo.ie,
Internet: <http://www.kihe.com/demeter>
Founded in 1991, Magazine: BDAAI-Newsletter



Organic Trust Ltd.
E-Mail organic@iol.ie,
Internet: [HTTP://IRELAND.IOL.ie/~organic/trust.html](http://IRELAND.IOL.ie/~organic/trust.html)
Founded in 1991, Magazine: *Clover*



The level of organic production in Ireland has progressively increased, and available statistics indicate that in 1993 238 holdings were registered with a total of 5,459 hectares under organic/conversion management. In 1999 this figure had increased to 1,058 holdings (0.7 %) with a total of 32,478 hectares under organic/conversion management (0.73 %). This represents an increase in excess of 400%.



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In 1997 Ireland was in eleventh place out of 19 European countries in terms of hectares under organic production and placed fourteenth out of 19 countries in terms of the number of organic farms. (The comparison with other European countries is based on 1997 figures due to the unavailability of 1998 and 1999 figures for all European countries. Source: Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau).

2 Implementation EU-Regulation 2092/91

In 1993 EU Regulation 2092/91 was implemented encompassing minimum standards primarily for products intended for human consumption composed essentially of one or more ingredients of plant origin. To service the legal obligation to have in place a recognised and approved organic inspection & certification service applicable to products/process encompassed within the scope of the regulation, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development approved the three existing private organic certification bodies in Ireland to carry out the necessary work.

The adoption of the EU Regulation 2092/91 and the further inclusion of livestock specifications within this regulation (livestock and livestock products up to this time have been certified by the private organic certification bodies according to the Standards for Organic Food and Farming operated by each) assures the development of the organic sector. In an Irish context, however, a demonstrable level of commitment to the progression of the organic sector at Government level is a basic requirement.

3 State Support for the Organic Sector

Under the Operation Programme for Agriculture, Rural Development and Farming 1994-1999 for the first time monies had been allocated specifically to organic agriculture, but funds from the scheme were re-allocated to other programmes without the knowledge of the organic farming sector.

In 1994 the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (<http://www.irlgov.ie/daff/default.htm>) introduced the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS), Ireland's agri-environment programme (EU-Regulation 2078/92). It encompassed a specific measure for the development of the organic sector, i.e. Supplementary Measure 6.

The Supplementary Measure 6 of the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) has particularly assisted the development of the beef and lamb sector. Changes will, however, be required in any new scheme in the horticultural and cereal sectors which have seen little development under the current Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS).

There has been little or no uptake of horticultural production. Apart from increasing the volume of available organic vegetables the horticultural sector can provide supplementary income for farm families and additional employment prospects with the processing and preparation of value added products.



Incentives for cereal production are also needed as an aid towards the construction of storage facilities and for the extension of existing storage facilities.

The rates for organic farming under REPS are:

- £146 per hectare for those in conversion (ca. 112 Euro)
- £73 per ha for converted land (ca. 56 Euro)
- £193 per ha for horticultural production under 3 ha and in conversion (ca 149 Euro)
- £98 per ha for horticultural production under 3 ha and of symbol status (ca 75 Euro)

Under Agenda 2000 REPS will be continued, and it is likely that the same rates as up to 1999 will apply. There will also be a support package for the marketing of organic products, but it is not clear yet, what amounts will be available. It is anticipated, that under this new marketing scheme mainly large scale enterprises will be supported.

A dedicated Organic Unit under the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (<http://www.irlgov.ie/daff/default.htm>) is in charge of REPS and also acts as competent authority under EU-Regulation 2092/91. It operates from Johnstown Castle Estate, Johnstown, Co. Wexford, and supports the organic sector with one full-time and two part-time staff.

In November 1999 the Organic Certification Bodies put a report - „Blueprint for the Development of the Organic Sector in Ireland (2000 - 2006)“ - to the Department of Agriculture, which contains several suggestions of how the organic sector can be supported. (See chapter what does the future hold). This blueprint states among other things that funding should be made available to agencies such as Bord Bia, Bord Glas (semi state bodies in charge of promoting agricultural products) and organic certification bodies such as IOFGA to develop infrastructure in order to be prepared for market growth.

4 Economic Aspects

Increasingly Irish farmers are looking at organic farming as an option, as organic farming can provide extra income through

- Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS)
- Production of a premium product
- Lower inputs
- Sustainable system

On average Irish organic farmers receive a premium of 23% for their organic product. During 1998 the average price for organic beef was IR£ 1.06 per pound (ca. 0.8 Euro) and lamb IR£1.20 per pound (ca. 0.9 Euro). In comparison, during this time non-organic beef and lamb suffered with prices for beef as low as IR£ 0.72 per pound (ca. 0.55 Euro).



5 Marketing

5.1 The Market

The organic market is growing by 40% per annum. According to Bord Glas (the Horticultural Development Board) in 1998 3.5% of the fresh fruit and vegetable sector was organic, worth IR£7 million (ca. 5,4 million Euro). According to Irish Country Meats organic lamb production in 1999 stands at 1 to 3% of conventional sales with a medium target of 4 to 5% (Irish Country Meats). In 1999 the premium for organic lamb was 30-50%.

None of the existing four major retailers can meet demand – organic beef supply will be below demand for at least 15 years (WD Meats).

There is no recent study of the Irish organic meat market and its potential for development both at home and abroad. Bord Bia (The Irish Food Board) have commenced a study of the Irish organic meat market (January 2000).

5.2 Marketing Channels

Presently most of the organic products are sold via supermarkets. Market stalls and box schemes play a major role in the marketing of vegetables.

Supermarkets, restaurants, hotels and specialist food processors are increasingly interested in organic food production. This is as a direct result of the larger media attention given to organic food and the result of consumer surveys.

Similar to other European countries the Irish organic market is set to see the development of :

Specialist Retail outlets – already there are two butchers registered to sell organic beef and lamb. A further two butchers are in the process of registering. Specialist grocers and or a supermarket will become a reality.

Catering – further uptake by restaurants and hotels of organic meat, milk, vegetables and fruit.

Processors – value added organic products will be a further natural development as a result of the increase in production. These will include dairy products, products containing meat ingredients, ready-made meals, tinned and confectionery goods.

Supermarkets – with the growth in the supply base, supermarkets have already shown a keen interest in stocking a larger range of organic products. As has been the case overseas, supermarkets are set to play a bigger role in the Irish organic market. There will be a need to supply products such as chicken, bacon, pork, vegetables and fruit, to add to the current range of beef and lamb. The former are currently in very short supply.

5.3 Demand

According to surveys 30% of consumers are prepared to pay a 20 to 25% premium for organic food.



The demand for organic produce is growing at a remarkable rate. The Irish consumer is more educated than ever before and now wants to know what he/she is eating. The An Bord Glas Surveys of 1992 and 1997 have shown an increase in the consumption of organic fruit and vegetables in Ireland. The 1997 survey showed that 25% of consumers buy organic fruit & vegetables regularly in comparison to 12% in the 1992 survey - an indicator of the interest and demand for organic produce. There is no similar survey available for organic meat.

In addition to the above increasingly the media is becoming interested in organic food. In January 1999 a full page of the Irish Times Saturday supplement was given over to organic food with another half page on organic wine. The Irish Times (<http://www.irish-times.ie>) is Ireland's biggest daily newspaper.

5.4 Challenges in Marketing

The low level of production is hindering market development in organic horticultural production. The majority of producers are small scale and while clusters of growers in particular areas of the country ensure that the local market is well supplied, produce in general, is neither available on a large scale nor on a well organised basis to cater for the growing needs of the market place. Greater amounts of organic horticultural produce are continually being imported to meet growing market demand.

Continuity of supply and distribution are two areas requiring substantial thought and improvement. To meet increasing requirements for organic arable and vegetable products, more organic conversion will be needed in the South East and East. Organic beef particularly is gaining in the market place with new initiatives and competition.

There has been no national study of the organic market to guide production in line with foreseeable market trends or to encourage the development of new outlets for produce.

The current problems experienced by the beef and lamb markets are continuity of supply and distribution. Other livestock products such as chicken and pork have a ready made market but are not available in any significant quantities.

6 Processing

The processing of organic food in Ireland is currently lagging far behind the rest of Europe. To develop the Irish market for organic produce, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (<http://www.irishgov.ie/daff/default.htm>) need to offer incentives to mainstream conventional food processors to incorporate organic lines.

Where grant-aid is considered for such a development, strict stipulations must be put in place to ensure that any take-up of such grant-aid results in at least 10% of overall production relating to the processing and production of organic food and food products. The issue of processing of organic food is a major area for redress in the area of import substitution.



7 Training

There is a growing demand for on-going education among farmers converting to organic production. Courses, farm walks and training days are an essential part of the learning process for farmers considering changing to organic production methods.

Currently education is offered at two centres (The Organic Centre, Country Leitrim in the North West and at Dromcollogher Community College in County Limerick). Teagasc, the state advisory service, will convert part of its demonstration farm at Athenry, County Galway. Courses for organic farmers will be offered here, too.

Projects funded by LEADER and implemented by IOFGA, have been an integral part of regional development strategies and have assisted in the development of a national training package.

8 Advisory Service

Advice is currently offered by independent advisers working closely with organic certification bodies. A backup national advisory service would accelerate the rate of conversion to organic farming. On farm advice and assistance with drawing up conversion and management plans are an essential part of an organic farming business. Monitoring farms are needed to provide on-going advice on yields, production practices and to ascertain the economics of organic farming and production systems. For the first time, Teagasc in 2000 will commence the collection of data on a cross section of organic farms.

9 Research

Education, training and advisory services need the backup of research projects.

Research on organic farming is carried out at Johnstown Castle in the South East of Ireland, a state research station with a demonstration farm. A major project looks at organic dairy farming and related issues (manure management, mastitis, breeding). At the Teagasc Centre in Athenry, County Galway, a network of organic farms will be monitored. Teagasc Oakpark will commence research on organic cereals during 2000.

Research is required in other areas such as horticulture production (both polytunnel and field scale), livestock parasite control, livestock breeding, to name but a few of the present essential needs.

10 What does the future hold?

The main proposals for the future development of the sector as set out in the Blueprint conducted by the three certifying organisations were:



- That a target of 20% of agricultural area for the conversion to organic farming by the year 2010 is set.
- That a National Policy for the Development of the Organic Sector in Ireland is put in place.
- That a regular quarterly meeting be established between the Organic Unit Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Johnstown Castle Estate and the three organic certification bodies.
- That a mechanism is put in place at Departmental level to pro-actively approach the issue of goods being fraudulently represented as ‘organic’ (in the absence of registration, inspection & certification) and penalties imposed for such fraudulent misrepresentation.
- That current and future alterations to the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) and Supplementary Measure 6 only take place after consultation and agreement with the 3 organic certification bodies in Ireland has occurred.
- That the organic certification bodies in Ireland are realistically funded to the tune of IR£1 million (ca. 0,77 million Euro) to the year 2006 in order to be able to provide the vast array of resources needed to service this important growing sector. The funding should be linked to a properly constructed contract containing all financial details pertaining to the inspection and certification process.
- That all budgetary allocations to the organic sector remain within the sector without subsequent re-allocation taking place.
- That specific budgets are allocated to Teagasc (the state advisory service), An Bord Bia and An Bord Glas (semi-state authorities) to service the requirements of the organic sector. It is suggested that a budget of IR£250,000 (ca. 191,500 Euro) per annum is allocated to each of these bodies specifically for the purpose of addressing the needs of the organic community in Ireland. The allocation of such funding must then take place in consultation with the organic certifying bodies in Ireland.
- That all of the recommendations of the „Organic Needs Study“ conducted by Teagasc (the state advisory service) in consultation with the three organic certification bodies are implemented with immediate effect.

11 References

The Organic Sector in Ireland: A jointly produced consolidated report from the three EU/DAF approved organic certification bodies in Ireland. Blueprint for the Development of the Organic Sector in Ireland (2000 – 2006). Dublin 2000

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12 Author

Noreen Gibney, Operations Manager, Irish Organic Farmers' and Growers Association (IOFGA Ltd), Organic Farm Centre, Harbour Road, Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath, Ireland, Tel: +353-506-32563, Fax: +353-506-32063, E-Mail: iofga@tinet.ie, Web Address: <http://www.irishorganic.ie>

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- Address of Editor of Internet Site
Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL)
Weinstraße Süd 51, D-67098 Bad Dürkheim
Tel. +49-(0)-6322-8666, Fax +49-(0)-6322-989701
E-Mail: info@soel.de, Internet: <http://www.soel.de>



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