

# Organic Agriculture in France

MICHEL REYNAUD AND WANDA SCHMIDT

## Contents

1	Development.....	98
1.1	Historical Development.....	98
1.2	Statistical Development.....	98
1.3	Action Plan for Organic Agriculture.....	98
2	Regional Distribution of Farms and Land Use.....	99
3	Organic Agriculture Organisations.....	100
4	Inspection and Certification.....	101
5	State Support.....	101
6	Marketing.....	102
6.1	The Market.....	102
6.2	Product Range.....	102
6.3	Consumers.....	103
6.4	Imports.....	103
6.5	Exports.....	103
6.6	Marketing Channels.....	103
6.7	Processing.....	104
7	Training.....	104
8	Advisory Service.....	104
9	Research.....	105
10	Outlook.....	105
11	Sources.....	106
12	Authors.....	107



Reynaud, Michel and Wanda Schmidt: Organic Agriculture in France  
<http://www.organic-europe.net>, 14.4.2000;  
© Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL), Bad Dürkheim, Germany, 2000.

After years of stagnation, organic agriculture in France – once Europe’s leader - is on the rise again. This is due to an action plan launched by the French government in December 1997. The objective of the five-year plan is to make France Europe’s leading supplier of organic foods and raw materials by the year 2010. Presently, even domestic demand cannot be met with French production.

## 1 Development

### 1.1 Historical Development

In contrast with other European countries, organic agriculture in France developed furthest in the nineteen-eighties, particularly in areas of quality level of the products, number of organic farms and level of information amongst the population.

The first standards for organic agriculture were published in 1972 by the producers’ association Nature & Progrès. Legislation on organic agriculture was passed in 1981. The state logo for organic products, the AB-Logo (Agriculture Biologique), was launched in 1988. This high level of state recognition led to the wide acceptance of organic agriculture in France and across its borders and at the time France was the most important European supplier for organic products, and 40 per cent of the European organic land was located in France.



Development stagnated however at the end of the nineteen-eighties. According to the associations, this was due to half-hearted support by the government and the unsatisfactory implementation of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 ([http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/fr/lif/dat/1991/fr\\_391R2092.html](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/fr/lif/dat/1991/fr_391R2092.html)).

### 1.2 Statistical Development

From the nineteen-eighties until the mid nineteen-nineties, the number of organic farms stagnated and the area of organically farmed land grew only very slowly. Since 1996, however, an accelerated development of organic agriculture has been achieved.

Per 31.12.1999 there were 8,140 organic farms with 316,000 hectares (one percent of the farms and 1.1 percent of the total agricultural area). Within the span of two years the land under organic management had doubled.

### 1.3 Action Plan for Organic Agriculture

In 1993 the budget provided by the French government for conversion aids was still very modest in comparison with other EU-countries. In the year 1998, however, the French Ministry of Agriculture (<http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr/accueilv3.htm>) had allocated 60 million Francs (approximately 9 million Euro). These monies are distributed by the regions.



In December 1997, because of the growing domestic demand (20 percent annual increase), the then agricultural minister, Louis Le Pensec, announced an action plan - *Plan Pluriannuel de Développement et la Promotion de l'Agriculture Biologique* (<http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr/alim/sign/agri/welcome.html>) - to support organic production.

The plan involves subsidies totalling 60 million Francs (10 million Euro) to stimulate and improve organic production, distribution and sales. The goal requires converting one million hectares of farmland and increasing the number of organic producers from approximately 6,500 (end of 1998) to 25,000 by the year 2005.

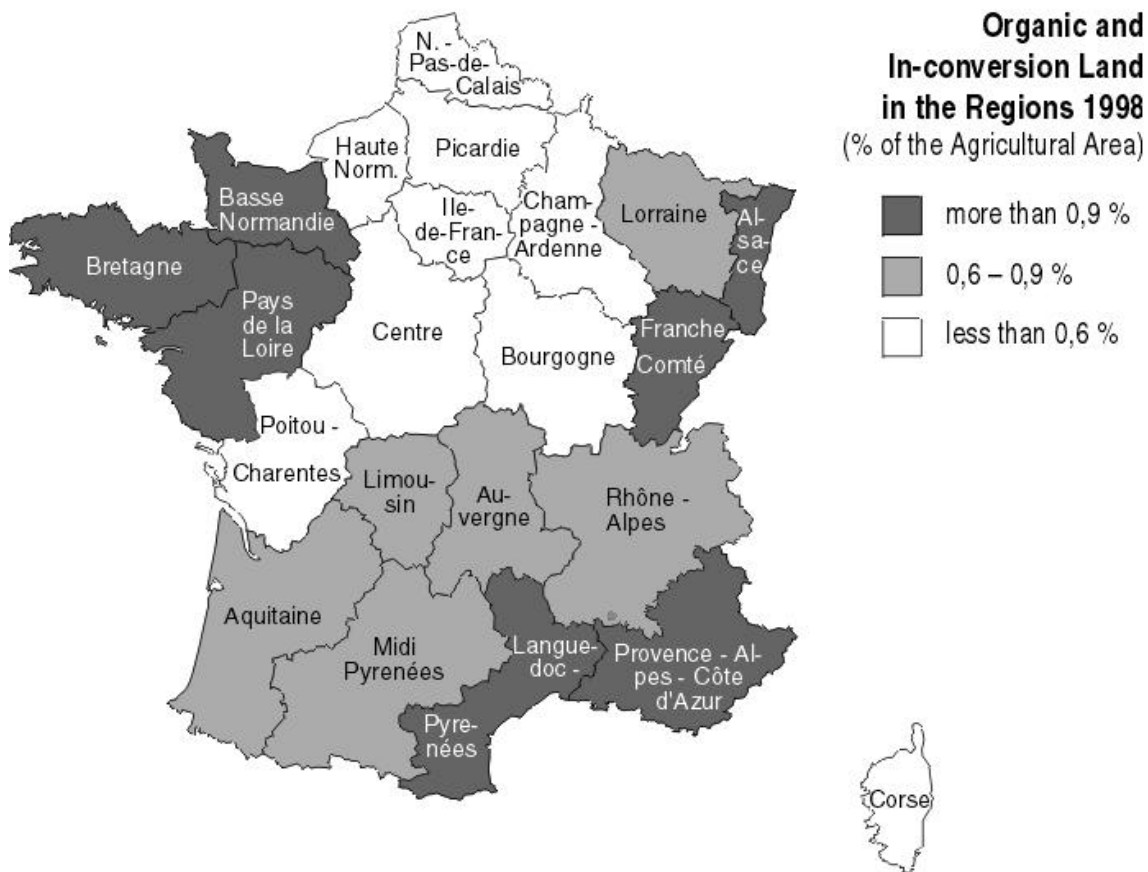
In order to achieve this goal, financial support for farm conversion was increased, and support was extended to marketing initiatives as well as to training and research.

## 2 Regional Distribution of Farms and Land Use

Much of organic farming is located in the south of France. In 1998 the organic and in-conversion land was more than 20,000 hectares in three regions: Midi-Pyrénées, Pays de la Loire and Languedoc-Roussillon. More than 60 percent of the organic land is located in the six regions of Basse Normandie, Bretagne, Pays de la Loire, Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrénées and Rhône-Alpes, which account for less than 40 percent of the French agricultural area (see map and <http://sunsite.informatik.rwth-aachen.de/Maps/europe/France.GIF>).

The majority of converted land is grassland, and within organic animal-production a big increase can be recorded. Organic arable land is growing at a slower rate. Because of the discrepancy between the development of the animal and plant sectors and the growing demand for organic products on the part of the consumers, the import of organic products from other countries rose by 40 percent in 1998 over the previous year.





### 3 Organic Agriculture Organisations

The logos of the producer associations are not used for labelling organic products. The organic agricultural organisations represent the organic sector on a political level: *Interprofession Bio* represents the producers,



*Bioconvergence* and *Syndicat Européen des Transformateurs de Produits de l'agriculture Biologique (SETRAB)* the processors.



They are competent partners of the Ministry of Agriculture (<http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr/accueilv3.htm>) in questions relating to standards, inspection and certification.

Another producer association is *Demeter France* (<http://www.bio.cospro.com/Demeter.html>), the association for the biodynamic farmers.



Reynaud, Michel and Wanda Schmidt: Organic Agriculture in France  
<http://www.organic-europe.net>, 14.4.2000;  
© Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL), Bad Dürkheim, Germany, 2000.

*FNAB - Fédération Nationale de l'Agriculture Biologique* - is the Federation of the regional producer organisations and represents the organic sector at the administrations and the trade unions.

#### 4 Inspection and Certification

Five inspection bodies are accredited according to EN 45011 by the Ministry of Agriculture (<http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr/accueilv3.htm>). These are:

- Ecocert SARL  
(<http://www.bio.cospro.com/Doc.Ecocert.html>, from May 2000: <http://www.ecocert.fr>)
- Qualité France
- Afaq-Ascert International
- Qualité Nord – Pas de Calais
- Usale.



These five organisations are authorised to certify organic plant and animal products. The Ministry of Agriculture (<http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr/accueilv3.htm>) as well as the Ministry of Economic Affairs function as competent authorities according to Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 ([http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/fr/lif/dat/1991/fr\\_391R2092.html](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/fr/lif/dat/1991/fr_391R2092.html)).

France has a national logo for organic products - the AB-Logo (AB = Agriculture biologique) -, which is owned by the French state.



Organic products can be labelled with this logo when they contain more than 95 percent organic components, were produced or processed within the EU, and were certified by one of the inspection bodies accredited according to EN 45011.

#### 5 State Support

In France, organic farms are supported financially only while converting (table 1). Long existing organic farms do not get any special subsidies for this kind of agriculture. They payments altogether have an upper limit of 500,000 French francs (75,770 Euro) per farm during the conversion period.



Table 1: Payments for farms converting to organic agriculture

Type of production	French francs / Euro per hectare	Duration of payment (years)	Duration of agricultural measure (years)
Annual crops except for pulses	1,190 / 181	2	5
Pulses	1,995 / 304	2	5
Permanent grassland	700 / 107	2	5
Citrus	4,700 / 717	3	5
Olive groves	3,000 / 457	3	5
Standard fruit trees or extensive top fruit meadows	2,000 / 305	3	5
Vineyards (for pieces of 10ha, upper limit at 50ha)	5,500 / 839	3	5
	3,850 / 587		
	2,695 / 411		
	1,886 / 288		
Other permanent crops	1,320 / 201		
	5,500 / 839	3	5

Source: Ministry of agriculture and fisheries, <http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr/alim/sign/agri/welcome.html>, 12.4.2000

## 6 Marketing

### 6.1 The Market

„Organic” is still a niche market in France in terms of value, representing only 0.5 percent of total retail food sales in comparison with other European Union (EU) countries such as Denmark, where the share is three percent. However, the market has been growing at a rate of twelve percent per year, and that rate is expected to reach 20 percent per year in the future. In 1998, sales of organic food products in France were estimated at 700 million Euro. Current French production cannot meet demand (Piason, 1999).

Growing demand, coupled with the government action plan which aims at stimulating domestic production and improve distribution, is expected to boost organic food sales to about 2.6 billion Euro by the year 2003 (Piason, 1999).

### 6.2 Product Range

The range of organic foods available in France is still relatively limited. Major domestically produced organic products include grains, prepared cereals, dairy products, fresh and processed fruit and vegetables, baby foods, meat, and poultry (Piason, 1999).



### 6.3 Consumers

Consumers of organic products fall into three main categories: the politically or ideologically motivated who are concerned about the environment and animal rights; the health conscious; and the switchers, who are easily swayed by the media and influenced by price and availability. About half of consumers of organic foods are managers or self-employed professionals between the ages of 25 and 49 (Piason, 1999).

### 6.4 Imports

In 1998, organic imports into France were valued at 50 million Euro. The main organic imports from non-EU countries included exotic fruits (avocado, mango, bananas), coffee, tea, citrus fruits and cereals from African, South American and Asian countries as well as from North America. From countries within the EU fruit juices, dried fruit, cereal bars, muesli and other processed, new-to-market products such as ready-to-eat frozen foods and vegetarian meals are imported. Within the last few years, milk and meat came from Germany as the home production still was not high enough. Besides Germany, the Scandinavian countries were the predominant country sources, although 40 percent of the imports came from non-European countries. Total imports accounted for about ten percent of the organic food market (Piason, 1999).

### 6.5 Exports

Exports represent about 17 percent of all French organic products and consist mainly of added value grain products. The major French organic product exports are bulk cereals to Germany and Scandinavian countries. Most exports of dairy products, meat and poultry, and fruit and vegetables go to EU neighbouring countries (Piason, 1999).

### 6.6 Marketing Channels

Sales via small specialised natural food and health food shops were important up until the nineteen-nineties. Today, however, supermarkets are gaining more and more importance for the marketing of organic products. Furthermore, the Superettes, small specialised bio-supermarkets with self-service and a surface of 200 to 500 square meters, partially replace, but also supplement the small specialised shops. Many of them and other sales persons are members of the association *Biocoop* which organises the distribution of organic produce in France. It has 170 selling points in the whole country and gave itself special standards. *Biocoop* is the successor-organisation of Food-Coop since 1987.

Today nearly half of the organic food is sold through supermarket chains, whereas the rest is sold through health food stores, direct sales, and open-air organic food markets (table 2). Retail prices for organic products are on average 25 to 35 percent higher than conventional foods.

Most of the supermarket chains have their own organic food label, carrying an array of products from dry foods to dairy products to meat and fresh products.



Table 2: Estimated Shares of Major Channels of Retail Organic Foods Distribution in France 1998 (in percent)

	Percentage
Supermarkets	45
Health food stores and open air markets	35
Other grocery outlets	10
Direct sales	10

Source: (Piason, 1999).

([http://www.fas.usda.gov/scripts/attacherep/gain\\_display\\_report.asp?Rep\\_ID=25545926](http://www.fas.usda.gov/scripts/attacherep/gain_display_report.asp?Rep_ID=25545926))

## 6.7 Processing

The organic food-processing sector traditionally consists of small and medium-sized artisanal enterprises, which produce one to two speciality products and sell them locally. Large agri-food companies are investing in organic foods and using their names to launch brands available nation-wide.

There are around 700 organic food processors most of which process milk or grains. Grain processors include millers, bakers, breakfast cereal producers and cookie manufacturers. The organic food-processing sector is growing at an average annual growth rate of 17.5 percent.

## 7 Training

On national level, training is co-ordinated by *FORMABIO – Réseau des établissements de formation à l'agriculture biologique* (<http://www.educagri.fr>), a network which was founded in the late 80's. At several institutions for education of adults it is possible to make a so called Brevet Professionnel, a diploma (<http://www.educagri.fr/recherche/reseaux/themageo/thema/agribio/adultes1.htm>), which takes 1200 hours of courses with a possible concentration on organic agriculture at some schools or with some organic modules at some others. The diploma includes a practical training as well. Some technical high schools offer modules on organic farming.

## 8 Advisory Service

Organic advice is offered both by state bodies and by the organic organisations. The chambers of Agriculture support organic agriculture with ca. 40 advisors. FNAB and the federation of those advisors, who are employed by the farmers directly - *Fédération Nationale des Centres d'Initiatives pour Valoriser l'Agriculture et le Milieu rural*, FNCIVAM (<http://www.civam.org>) - employ advisors specifically for organic agriculture. Altogether, there are ca. 100 advisors supporting organic farmers.



The *Assemblée Permanente des chambres d'Agriculture, APCA*, is a national working-group, in which the state advisors for organic agriculture meet regularly to discuss current questions.

## 9 Research

In order to develop organic agriculture in France, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (<http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr/accueilv3.htm>) together with the National Association of Agricultural Development and the *Institut Technique de l'agriculture Biologique ITAB (Technical Institute of Organic Agriculture)*, decided in 1998 to transform a former regional resource centre (Centre de Resource de Brioude-Bonnefont) into a national centre for organic farming. The responsible committee of the *Centre National de Ressources en Agriculture Biologiques, CNRAB* (<http://www.agribio.com>) met for the first time on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1999. Members of this committee are members of the three supporting organisations as well as several national institutions in charge of the development of agriculture. Its aims are the collection, documentation and dissemination of technical information suitable for organic agriculture.

Further research is done by the *Institut Technique de l'agriculture Biologique, ITAB*, which does practical research together with the producer associations, and by the *Groupe de Recherche en Agriculture Biologique (GRAB; http://perso.wanadoo.fr/grab/grab/)*.

Grab-Logo:



GRAB has existed for more than 20 years and conducts experimental work in organic cultivation techniques particularly in organic vegetable and tree growing. These results are then translated into agricultural practise. GRAB concentrates on scientific and technical publications, and expert reports at a national level.

The French Institut National de Recherche Agronomique INRA (<http://www.inra.fr>) has made a start to co-ordinate its organic farming research in 1999. In January 2000 an analysis of the French organic agriculture situation and a research programme was published by <http://www.inra.fr/Internet/Directions//ACTUALITES/Agribio/Agribio.htm>.

## 10 Outlook

While the previous French agricultural policy was almost exclusively production oriented and geared towards the increase of exports, the emphasis is now placed on how to produce „better”.

The draft of a new law, the „Loi d'Orientation Agricole“, LOA, was accepted by the national assembly in April and now must pass the senate. In this bill, the indisputable functions of agri-



Reynaud, Michel and Wanda Schmidt: Organic Agriculture in France  
<http://www.organic-europe.net>, 14.4.2000;  
© Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL), Bad Dürkheim, Germany, 2000.

culture for the protection of the environment and conservation are recognised. The highest importance is given to the maintenance of the farms as well as the support of new farmers.

So-called territorial contracts with the farmers (Contrats Territeaux d'Exploitations, CTE) will make it possible to reimburse social and ecological performance of agriculture. The settlement of young farmers will be promoted systematically. Obstacles such as high social security payments for small farms and lack of production support will be removed. It is hoped in this manner to motivate in particular the young to become active in agriculture.

It is also good news that during the June 1999 world economy-summit in Cologne the French president Jaques Chirac rejected the increased use of genetic engineering in food production. In March 1999 at the FNAB-general assembly the minister of agriculture, Jean Glavany, had already emphasised that the French government would like to let maximum caution prevail. The new planned agricultural law (La Loi d'Orientation d'Ágricole, LOA) anticipates a detailed exploration of the risks to humans and the environment. According to Glavany, the Ministry of Agriculture (<http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr/accueilv3.htm>) supports sectors working without GMO.

## 11 Sources

- Piason, Frank J.: France – Organic Food report 1999. GAIN Report FR 9070. Date 18.10.1999, at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/gainfiles/199910/25545926.pdf>
- Reynaud, Michel: Die Situation und das Entwicklungspotential der ökologischen Landwirtschaft in Frankreich. In: Willer, Helga (Ed.): Ökologischer Landbau in Europa. Bad Dürkheim, 1998
- Schmidt, Wanda: Frischer Wind in Frankreich. In: Ökologie & Landbau, No. 4/1999



## 12 Authors

- Michel Reynaud, Ecocert International - Ecocontrol GmbH, Forster Str. 87, D-37520 Osterode, phone +49-5522-951161, fax +49-5522-951164, E-Mail: : inbfo@ecocert.de, website: <http://www.ecocert.de>
  - Wanda Schmidt, L' Escoulin, F-26400 Eygluy-Escoulin, phone +33-4 75 76 49 07, fax +33-4 75 76 44 13, E-Mail: GSCHMIDT@pyxis.kyxar.fr
- 

© by Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau, 2000. All rights reserved.

- Bibliographical Reference  
Reynaud, Michel and Wanda Schmidt: Organic Agriculture in France. In: Steffi Graf / Helga Willer (Eds.): Organic Agriculture in Europe. Results of the Internet Project <http://www.organic-europe.net>, Co-funded by the EU-Commission, General Directorate Agriculture (GD Agri), SÖL-Sonderausgabe 75, Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL), Bad Dürkheim, Germany, 2000.
- 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](mailto:info@soel.de), Internet: <http://www.soel.de>



Reynaud, Michel and Wanda Schmidt: Organic Agriculture in France  
<http://www.organic-europe.net>, 14.4.2000;  
© Stiftung Ökologie & Landbau (SÖL), Bad Dürkheim, Germany, 2000.