

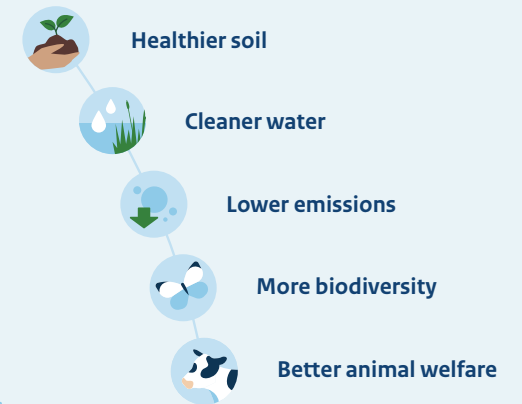


## Action plan

# Growth in organic production and consumption

Organic agriculture can play an important role in the Netherlands' transition to sustainable, future-proof farming practices. In this action plan, we – the government of the Netherlands – set out our ambition to increase organic production and consumption significantly. The actions outlined in the plan are a starting point for cooperation with other actors in the sector.

Organic production on 15% of agricultural land by 2030



### More organic production



Maintain and expand production



Cooperation and commitment in production chains



Access to land that is suitable and affordable



### Promote knowledge and innovation



Research



Learning from each other



Continuous innovation

### Increase organic consumption and expand the market



Ensure that organic products become more familiar



A wider range of choice across more sales channels



Better prices for farmers and consumers

# Foreword

Every day, thousands of people in the Netherlands work hard to help put food on our tables: farmers and greenhouse growers, processors and wholesalers, supermarkets and food outlets. Within this ecosystem, organic food has a unique position. Motivated by respect for people, animals and the environment, organic farmers and greenhouse growers are making the sometimes risky transition to sustainable, future-proof farming. The consumers who buy and consume these products help to ensure that organic farmers get a good price for their products, even if they pay more for their food.

I take great pride in that. Organic farmers deserve acknowledgement for making the switch to organic production. They are at the forefront of the transition to sustainable agriculture because organic food production can help us to address many of the challenges that we face, including climate, nature, animal welfare, water, soil and health.

I hope that their example will inspire others to follow in their footsteps. Because organic agriculture needs to become a fully-fledged part of the food market. Neighbouring countries, such as Austria and Denmark, are showing that this transition is possible. In this action plan, I will set out how we are going to do the same in the Netherlands.

## Organic farming in context

Organic farming occupies a unique position. There are detailed European regulations that specify the rules for organic production. Organic products are easy to recognise due to the green EU label in the shape of a leaf. This is the only government-recognised quality label for sustainability, and it covers the entire production chain. The organic quality mark is an important element in the business model of entrepreneurs.

People who purchase organic products are making an important contribution to that business model. Higher demand for organic products means that more farmers can start producing organically. The role of supermarkets, wholesalers, retailers and the hospitality sectors in promoting organic produce is therefore essential. I therefore call urgently on these actors to do their bit. This is vitally important. Further measures on this will be included in the Agriculture Agreement.

At the same time, the organic sector is part of a larger system. It has links with nature-inclusive and regenerative agriculture sectors, which, like the organic sector, seek to work in harmony with nature. These forms of agriculture can reinforce each other. And organic and conventional farmers can also learn from one another.





## EU Green Deal and Farm to Fork

This action plan is our response to the Organic Action Plan, which the European Commission published in March 2021. The Organic Action Plan is the Commission's plan for implementing the European Green Deal and the Farm-to-Fork strategy. Both specify the goal of climate-neutrality by 2050, which means that the European food system needs to become sustainable. Europe's ambition to produce more organic food is part of this transformation. The aim is that by 2030, 25% of agricultural land in the European Union should be used for this purpose. Every member state has been asked to draw up its own national strategy and set its own ambitions for organic farming, and to develop measures appropriate for the national context.

## Outlook for the future

I understand that this action plan is being published at a time of significant uncertainty. The war in Ukraine continues, along with the impact on the prices that we pay for food and energy. There is also uncertainty about the role of agriculture in our country, which continues to face significant environmental challenges.

But this is exactly why we need to look to the future now. The increase in the amount of land being used for organic agriculture may not solve all of today's problems, but it can enable us to make our agriculture future-proof. Farmers are entitled to expect this, and we will all enjoy the benefits.

## From action plan to action

The course has been set. Now it is time to start working on delivery. In drawing up this action plan, I have taken account of the input received from over 400 meetings with farmers, consumers, trade associations, sellers, other actors in the production chain, educational institutions, governments, financiers and researchers.<sup>1</sup>

My ambition is to increase organic production to 15% of agricultural land by 2030. That's a big ambition. This action plan is the first step towards achieving it. Over the coming years, I will monitor, modify and add to this plan with whatever measures required.

I have every confidence that we will make this work. And I look forward to achieving this goal with farmers, consumers, actors in the sector and everybody else in our country who supports organic agriculture.

*Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality,  
Piet Adema*

1. Final report stakeholder consultation action plan growth for organic production and consumption: February - May 2022



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# 1. The ambition for organic

*Towards 15% by 2030*



## 1.1 Some urgent challenges

Dutch agriculture faces some urgent challenges relating to climate, nature, water quality and animal welfare. These will require a transition to sustainable and future-proof agriculture. An agricultural sector that relies less on external inputs such as concentrates, fertilisers and chemicals, and produces fewer harmful emissions. An agricultural sector that coexists more harmoniously with nature.

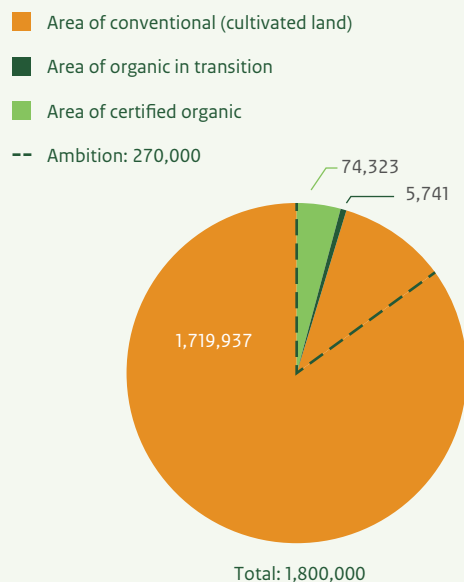


Figure 1: Use of agricultural land in the Netherlands by the Dutch agricultural sector, 2022.

Source: Statistics Netherlands [CBS](#)

The task of making agriculture more sustainable is clear. Organic agriculture – along with, for example, nature-inclusive agriculture, circular agriculture and agroecology – can help us to address this challenge while also providing a good revenue model for farmers.

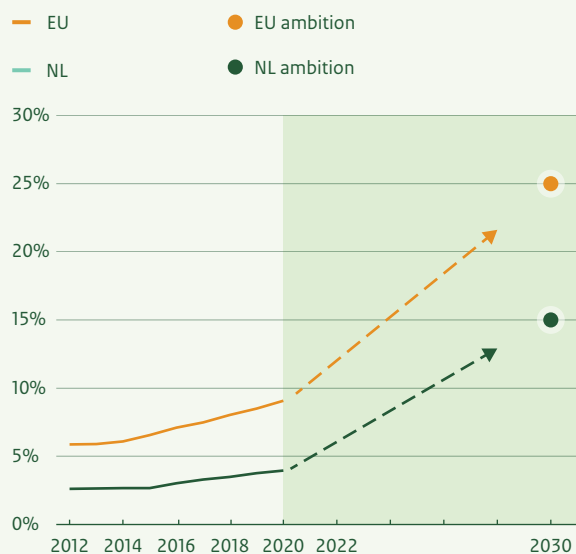


Figure 2: Growth of the organic sector in the Netherlands in recent years, compared to rest of EU.

Source: [Eurostat](#)

*The aim of organic farming is to produce food within natural limits.*



## 1.2 Organic is high-value

Organic production methods offer a high-value and future-proof way forwards. This is due to the principles on which organic production is based, its legal grounding and its proven added value. Granted, organic production methods are no panacea. The organic sector itself still has room for improvement when it comes to sustainability, respecting nature and establishing connections with societal initiatives and regional developments.

The legal foundation of organic farming is as follows:

- European regulations aim to guarantee the principles of organic production methods.<sup>2</sup>

- European organic regulations state how products must be produced in each sector. All products that are sold as organic must meet certain requirements. This concerns all agricultural sectors and the entire production chain, from producer to consumer.
- Organic products carry the official European quality mark. This is the only quality mark recognised by the government, and it is also monitored by a public supervisory authority.<sup>3</sup>

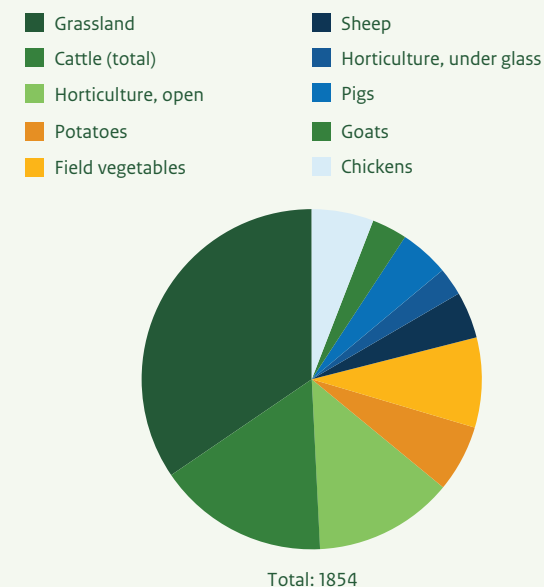


Figure 3: Distribution of organic agriculture in the Netherlands by sector, 2022. Source: Statistics Netherlands [CBS](#)

### The principles of organic production:

- Organic is an extensive form of agriculture based on the principles of care, ecology, health and fairness.
- It uses a system-based approach that begins with the natural health, fertility, resilience and carrying capacity of the soil.
- It uses no artificial fertilisers, synthetic chemical pesticides or genetically modified organisms in the production of food and feed.
- Its aim is to achieve circular production wherever possible.
- Animals are treated ethically.

2. EU Regulation 2018/848

3. As well as the statutory quality mark, there are also privately run, non-statutory quality marks such as EKO and Demeter that are based on organic production but involve even stricter standards.

- Both the quality mark and the word 'organic' are legally protected. If the European Biolabel appears on a product, you can be sure that it is organic.
- The status of organic products is monitored throughout the whole production chain. The strict system of controls is an important guarantee of consumer confidence. The Netherlands has designated Skal Biocontrole as the only public control authority for this purpose.

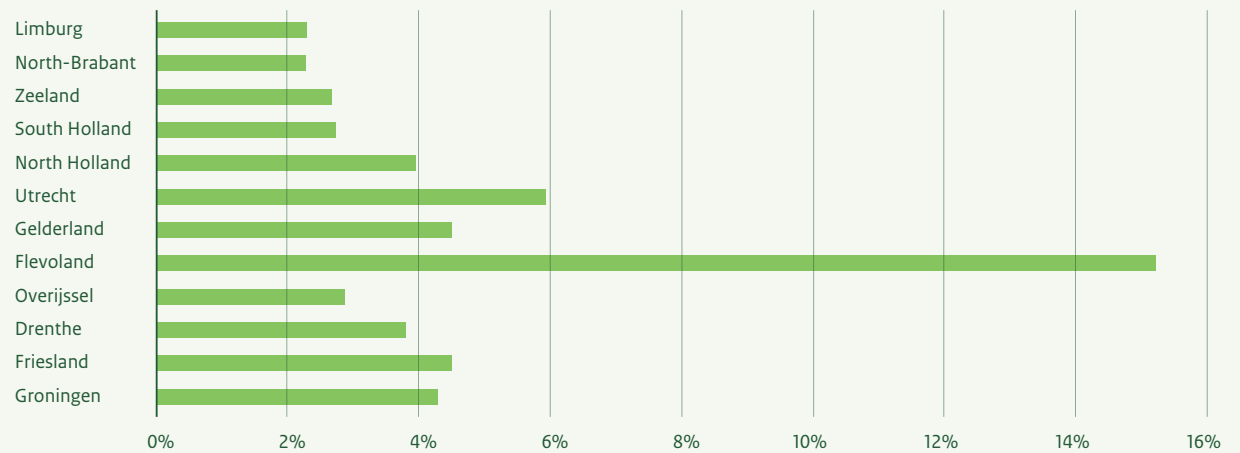


Figure 4: Distribution of organic production across provinces, 2022. Source: Statistics Netherlands [CBS](#)

### The added value of organic:



For farmers, organic production methods provide an opportunity to charge higher prices for their products.<sup>4</sup>



For consumers, choosing organic provides certainty that they are choosing the most sustainable option.



Organic farming leads to more biodiversity on farms in the form of plants, herbs, animals, insects and micro-organisms, partly as a result of better soil and water quality. Soil life is richer, because artificial fertilisers and chemical-synthetic pesticides are not used.



Organic food production can help us to achieve climate and nature ambitions.<sup>5</sup>



When it comes to the treatment of animals, organic livestock farming plays a pioneering role in many respects.

4. One of the findings of the 2022 Agro-Nutri Monitor: For the majority of organic products studied, producers (farmers and greenhouse growers) are compensated for the higher costs of organic production. The higher prices paid by the consumer largely end up in the pockets of producers.
5. Ongoing research by WUR has charted the impact of organic dairy farming and arable farming on climate and nature. Organic arable farming and organic dairy farming emit fewer greenhouse gases per hectare than other forms of farming. The environmental impact of nitrogen-based pollution from organic arable farming and organic dairy farming is also lower per hectare.



### 1.3 Organic is pioneering and part of a wider transition

Not all agriculture needs to become organic. Major steps are already being taken towards a more sustainable system in conventional agriculture, too. Organic production can play an important pioneering role for the agricultural sector as a whole through knowledge development and exchange. The growth of organic farming is part of the accelerating move towards more sustainable food production. In order to retain its leadership status, the organic sector needs to take on the challenge of continuing to improve – by further integrating nature management into its operations, for example. In principle, organic farming is possible throughout the Netherlands. But it can be particularly beneficial in those areas that are facing major challenges in terms of nature, water and soil, as identified in the National Programme for Rural Areas (NPLG). These include areas close to protected nature reserves, for example. In areas where conventional agriculture is no longer possible, organic agriculture can reduce nitrogen-based pollution and provide a way forward for the future. This localised, area-based approach enables the local situation to be taken into account.

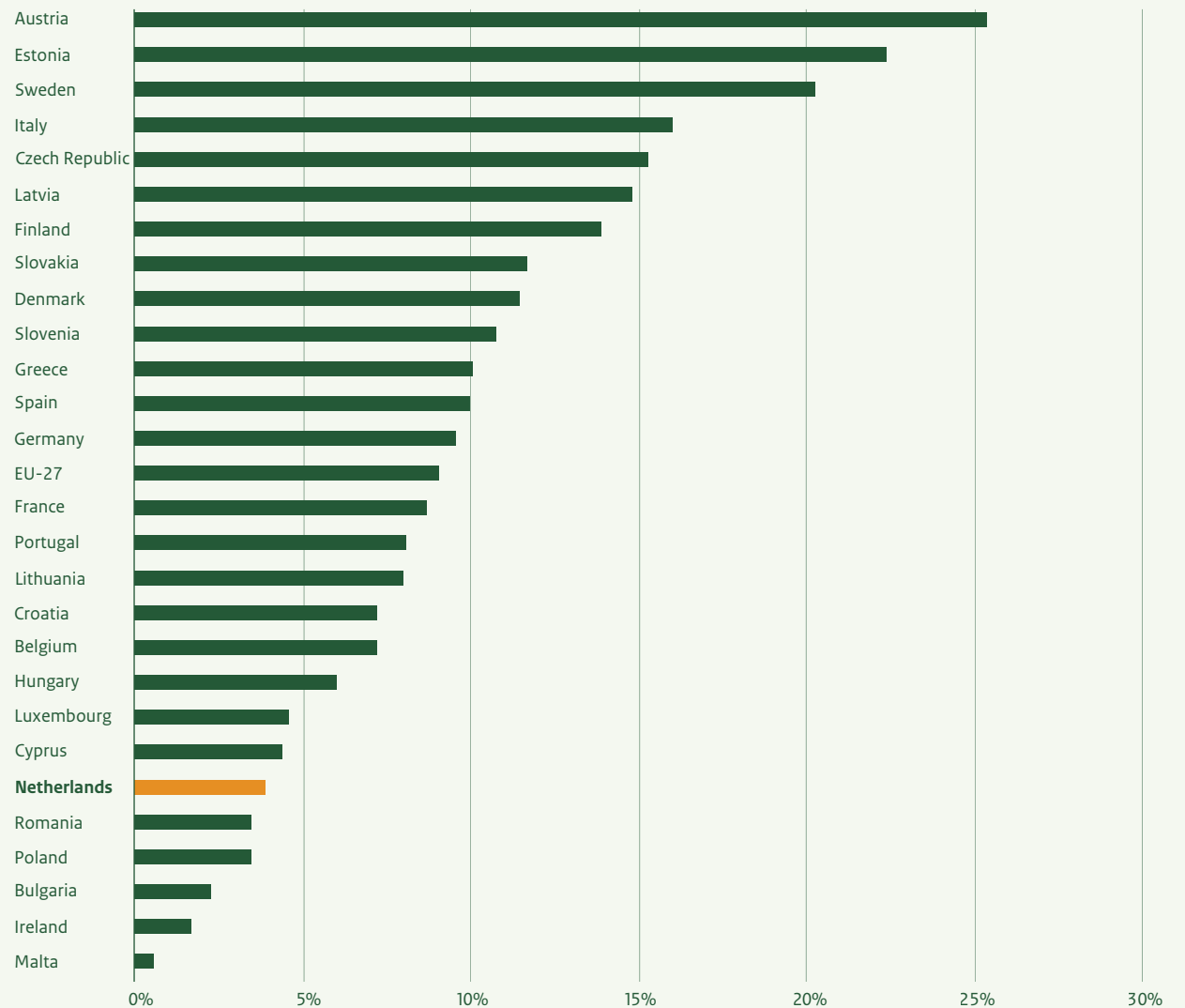


Figure 5: Share of organic farmland in the EU, 2020. Source: Statistics Netherlands CBS, Eurostat

## 1.4 Big ambitions and playing catch-up

Organic agriculture will play an important role in the Netherlands' transition towards sustainable, future-proof agriculture. But the organic sector needs to expand in order to play that role. This action plan therefore aims to achieve an acceleration in how much land is being used for organic agriculture. This was 4% of all agricultural land in 2021 and the aim is to reach 15% by 2030. That means an increase from about 80,000 hectares now to about 300,000 hectares in 2030. This is an ambitious target. This growth will mainly need to take place in dairy and arable farming – agricultural sectors that cover a large area, require a lot of land and face major challenges with respect to climate goals and nitrogen-based pollution.

But the growth of organic production in other sectors must also be welcomed. All moves towards organic production mean contributing to a more liveable countryside, more variety on our supermarket shelves and more sustainable products for the catering industry and other parts of the food industry. The ambition of 15% organic in the Netherlands by 2030 reflects the ambition of the European Commission as closely as possible. The Commission wants to achieve an increase of up to 25% in the European Union by 2030. The European average is currently 9.1% (in 2020). At 4.1% in 2022, the Netherlands is lagging behind. We are playing catch-up, and so we will need sustained and accelerated growth whereby the supply matches the demand.

*We aim to promote the growth of organic agriculture from 4% of cultivated farmland today to 15% by 2030.*



### **Organic and nature-inclusive farming**

Both organic and nature-inclusive agriculture aim to make the best possible use of the natural system and to prevent emissions into the soil, water or atmosphere. Healthy soil is the foundation, with a focus on circular production and agriculture that requires as few external inputs as possible, or none at all. In nature-inclusive agriculture, space on farms is actively set aside for nature.

Many organic farmers also adopt this practice, even though it is not required for organic certification. Both organic agriculture and nature-inclusive agriculture are consistent with the movement towards more sustainable farming practices that are within ecological and environmental limits. Both approaches adopt an integrated and holistic approach, with measures being taken in conjunction with each other. When it comes to policy, they both provide a route to achieving sustainability goals: soil, biodiversity, etc.

The biggest differences between these two forms of farming are the associated regulations and certification, which are well established in the case of organic agriculture but not in the case of nature-inclusive agriculture. Many organic farmers already use nature-inclusive practices, providing space for nature and actively taking measures to protect it. The expansion of organic farming will make it possible to contribute to the biodiversity goals set out in the EU Biodiversity Strategy.



## 1.5 Three main goals

The ambition of this action plan is to increase organic agriculture as a proportion of farmland in the Netherlands. But the plan is certainly not about agriculture alone – it involves the whole food production chain, from producer to consumer. But the goal of expanding the scale of organic production is only worth pursuing if there is a market for the organic products that are produced – this was one message that emerged very clearly from our discussions with professionals in the organic sector and the stakeholder consultation that we carried out at the ministry. In other words, farmers will only switch to producing more organic food and benefit from higher incomes if consumers actually purchase more organic products.<sup>6</sup> Expanding the sales market and encouraging farmers to switch to organic farming must therefore occur in tandem.

This is essential, and it is why this action plan is built around three goals:

1. **Increase organic consumption and expand the market**
2. **More organic production**
3. **Promote knowledge and innovation**

For each of these goals, we have identified steps to promote and accelerate the transition.

6. Part of the supply and demand equation involves organic products from third countries, such as chocolate, coffee and bananas.

### Higher consumption of organic products and larger sales market



Organic products are becoming better known



Increased supply through more sales channels



Better prices for farmers and consumers

### More organic production



Maintain and expand production



Utilize production chains



Access to suitable and affordable land

### More knowledge and innovation



Research



Learning from one another



Continuous innovation



## The context

This action plan sets out the direction, ambition and goals for the expansion of organic production and consumption. It describes the steps required in order to stimulate that expansion. It is important to be realistic here. We need to be aware of the context in which we find ourselves:

- The Netherlands is part of a dynamic international sector. Macroeconomic and geopolitical developments influence the way in which we consume and produce. Take the war in Ukraine, for instance, which has led to a shortage of animal feed and pushed energy prices upwards. As a result, the price of organic products is rising, depressing the demand for them and the growth potential of the organic market (and its revenue model).
- Price plays an important role in consumer choice behaviour. The size of the price differential between organic and non-organic products varies across product categories. For some products (such as milk) the price differential is relatively modest, but for other products, choosing organic can be a lot more expensive. There are various reasons for this, such as lower productivity, higher feed costs, higher labour costs, larger surface area per animal and the generally smaller scale of organic farming. These are factors over which the government has no direct influence. However, there are a number of indirect effects that can have an influence:
  - o Increasing the market share for organic will result in economies of scale and lower costs for processors, supermarkets, and so on. In the longer term, this could make a significant contribution to reducing price differentials.
  - o Organic agriculture is constantly developing and innovating, which could help to boost productivity and reduce production costs in the long term. In addition, prioritising healthy soil will have a positive effect on crop yields in the longer term.
  - o The Dutch agricultural sector as a whole is facing a huge challenge in becoming more sustainable, and as a result conventional agriculture and organic agriculture will gradually converge and price differentials will become smaller.

## 1.6 Growing towards 2030, joint actions for the first two years

The steps set out in this plan have been developed with the close involvement of stakeholders from inside and outside the organic sector. Implementing them will also mean working together. We, the national government, are responsible for certain steps ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

From the government's perspective, we are looking at whether we should merge the initiatives that have already been launched by the provinces, market players and as part of the common agricultural policy (CAP). Together with the provinces, we will explore how organic agriculture can provide solutions in areas where agriculture needs to become less intensive, in order to reduce nitrogen-based emissions, and with respect to the ambitions stated in the National Programme for Rural Areas. In addition, we will build on the solutions-oriented approach and the creativity of commercial actors, including sector organisations, processors, supermarkets, food service and banks.

In addition, we will build on the solutions-oriented approach and the creativity of commercial actors, including sector organisations, processors, supermarkets, food service and banks. And we will also look to bring in new entrepreneurs who want to take responsibility, develop new initiatives, set up



partnerships, and learn from and inspire each other. The stakeholder consultation showed that there is a great deal of enthusiasm out there, with the potential to make a difference.

This action plan is a good start. It represents a clear statement that we intend to expand organic agriculture in the Netherlands to 15% of farmland by 2030. The list of steps that it presents is not exhaustive, but does

provide a starting point. We will be working on these steps over the next two years. As we do this, we will gain experience and learn lessons, enabling us to pinpoint more precisely what the following steps should be. Resources are available to enable these steps to be realised. Every two years, progress will be evaluated, and the plan will be modified accordingly, in consultation with stakeholders, so that we can respond better to current developments.

7. The ACM case study in the 2022 Agro-nutri Monitor shows that organic production has really taken off in Denmark, partly because at an early stage the Danish government adopted an active role in the transition from conventional to organic production and consumption. Through this action plan and the ambition of 15%, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) now wants to send a clear signal that we are ready to adopt a similar active role in the Netherlands' transition towards organic.

# *Actions*





## 2. Increase organic consumption and expand the market



Ensure that organic products become more familiar



A wider range of choice across more sales channels



Better prices for farmers and consumers



There will only be room for growth in organic production in the Netherlands if consumers purchase more organic products or sales increase in some other way. Otherwise there will be overproduction and organic farmers will not get a fair price for their products. The share of consumer spending on organic food in supermarkets, speciality stores for sustainable food products and food service has been around 3% for years.<sup>8</sup>

In order to increase sales and encourage consumers to buy more organic products, we will aim to achieve the following goals:



**Ensure that consumers and commercial actors are familiar with organic products and the European organic quality mark**



**Ensure that a wider range of organic products is available through various sales channels**



**Make organic products accessible and affordable**



## 2.1 Familiarity with organic products and the European quality mark

It is important that consumers are able to tell the difference between organic and non-organic products, and understand what this means. The fact that choosing organic is the most sustainable choice should be made clearer and more tangible. This also applies to sales channels such as supermarkets, specialty food shops, restaurants, bars and cafés, hotels, wholesalers, in-company caterers, the food industry and other food services. Currently, many of those engaged in these areas are not aware of the added value of products that carry the organic label. Various campaigns have already been launched in recent years. For example, in the spring of 2022, Bionext began a new three-year promotional campaign to increase the market share of organic: 'The best products are organic from Europe'. The European Commission is also committed to increasing consumer awareness about organic products and stimulating demand for them.

Working on public awareness requires constant effort. For this reason, this aspect of our strategy will be kept under constant review in order to decide whether any changes are needed and whether new initiatives need to be launched.<sup>9</sup>

### Actions

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is supporting Bionext in 2022-2023 in its awareness campaign among consumers and the development of a website about organic targeted at consumers. These steps should increase consumer awareness of organic products and the European quality mark.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is supporting Milieu Centraal to help consumers to tell the difference between the various logos shown on food products and to inform them about the meaning of quality marks, including the European quality mark for organic products.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is holding discussions with supermarkets about how they can contribute to information, shelf space and the supply of organic products.

8. For further details of the organic market, see the recently published [Agro-Nutri Monitor 2022: Monitor of food prices and purchasing motives for organic products](#)

9. Increasing the supply and consumption of organic products is a priority within the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality's policy on food (see: Evaluation of the 2016-2022 food agenda and food policy; 29 March 2022) and will also be included in future food policy.



## 2.2 Expanding the market

To achieve growth in organic sales, we want to increase the range of organic products available, alter the structure of the food environment and support actors throughout the sector.

*It should become more known that the choice of organic is a sustainable choice.*

### Actions

- Launch a market development team together with the sector (and other interested parties) in order to accelerate growth in the sales of organic products through various channels. Explorations for this are underway. The sector is taking the lead in implementation.
- For its own procurement in the Consumer Services category, the government is exploring the option of applying a standard percentage of 25% for organic food in all its tenders. This includes how to incentivise other government bodies and organisations to follow suit, using the criteria for socially responsible procurement for catering for instance.
- Agreements are being made with the food processing industry and retail sector within the framework of the Agriculture Agreement, which should lead to real-terms annual growth in the volume of organic products sold. These are joint agreements regarding a package of measures, tailored to reflect the responsibilities of the various parties.<sup>10</sup>
- Supermarkets and points of sale that have not yet obtained certification to sell organic products unpackaged or to process these on-site will be encouraged to obtain this certification. This enables organic products to be sold unpackaged, just like conventional products, in order to help reduce the amount of packaging material used.
- In order to encourage children to eat more organic fruit and vegetables, the Netherlands is arguing for a share of organic fruit, vegetables and dairy products to be included in the revision of the EU school scheme. One requirement for this is that the associated EU funding is scaled up in order to maintain volume.
- As part of Dutch Food Week, a workshop was organised on how to put more organic products on the menu in the hospitality sector. There will be further exploration and follow-up based on the findings. A specific first step is asking students of the HAS Green Academy to investigate the pricing of organic products in the hospitality sector.

10. This corresponds with the findings of the ACM case study, which shows that in Denmark the government actively supports the organic quality label, and that Danish supermarkets even compete directly on organic products, helping to bring organic products actively to the attention of consumers. Through these actions, we aim to encourage actors throughout the sector to actively promote the sale of organic products.

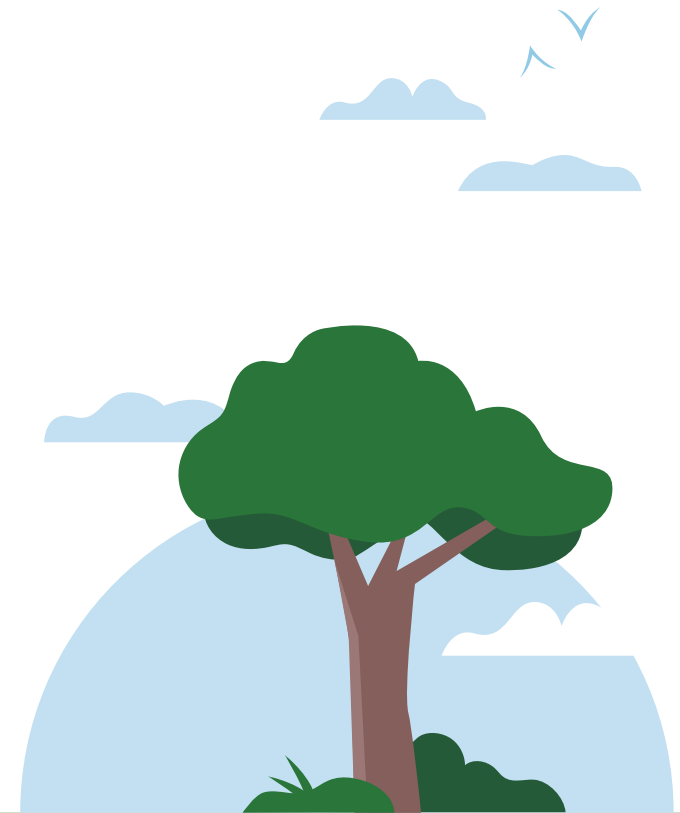


## Actions

- Commercial organisations will identify market opportunities for growth. The network of agricultural attachés will be used to identify, create and utilise opportunities for marketing Dutch organic products in other countries (inside the EU and beyond). Organic agricultural products, sales opportunities and growth markets will be highlighted at international trade missions and fairs in neighbouring countries.
- The EU is signing trade agreements with countries outside the EU. The aim is to make maximum use of opportunities for the sale of Dutch organic products during the associated negotiations.

## International sales

The market for organic products and international trade will change in the coming years. Given the effort being undertaken by all EU member states to increase the area of farmland devoted to organic production, this is expected to have repercussions on trade too. It is important to monitor developments closely so that we can respond to changes quickly.





## 2.3 The price of organic products

The price differential between organic and conventional products plays an important role in the choices made by many consumers. Higher prices discourage many consumers from buying more organic products. This is reinforced by the fact that consumers do not know enough about why this price differential exists and what they are paying extra for. The explanation can include higher production costs (e.g. more labour-intensive production), certification costs, more expensive starting materials, lack of economies of scale due to smaller production chains, and so on.

In the organic sector, actual prices are generally applied. The prices charged reflect actual production costs, while farmers are left with a good living and a better standing in society.

*Consumption determines growth of organic sector.*

### Actions

- Organic businesses are encouraged to explore whether and how price differentials in the production chain can be reduced, without losing sight of the organic principles of care, ecology, health and fairness. To do this, they can draw on the knowledge of the Enterprise Desk at the Stichting Taskforce Korte Ketens.
- Skal fees are working their way through into the price of organic products. These will be evaluated in 2023.

Working on fair prices and making production chains more sustainable goes beyond just the organic sector. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality has a broad commitment to making production chains more sustainable. This includes proposals for a chain-based approach, promoting shorter production chains, policy in the field of true pricing and discussions with the retail sector. Reducing VAT on healthy foods could help consumers make healthier choices. We are following developments at the European level with regard to reducing VAT on organic products.

# 3. More organic production



Encourage the switch to organic farming



Maintain existing organic production



Cooperation and commitment among the actors in the production chain



Access to suitable and affordable land



Remain distinctive in terms of sustainability





To increase organic production and achieve the goal of 15% organic production in the Netherlands, it is important that more conventional farmers switch to organic and that existing organic farmers are able to continue their operations. There will also be opportunities for new and existing organic farmers to grow crops that are currently imported, such as high-protein crops, and to switch certain product categories completely to organic. At the same time, the circular concept should remain front and centre – in other words, focus on creating links between arable farming and animal farming.

There are also opportunities for organic farmers to adopt more nature-inclusive practices, and for nature-inclusive farmers to adopt organic practices. This will contribute to the goals of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. Extensive forms of agriculture, such as organic agriculture, also help to achieve ambitions with respect to nature conservation, nitrogen-based pollution, water consumption and climate, as stated in the National Programme for Rural Areas (NPLG). This is particularly true of the Natura 2000 transition areas, the peat meadow areas, stream valley areas and groundwater protection areas. For example, the transition areas have the potential for extensive agriculture of 185,000 hectares (assuming a zone of at least 1 kilometre), while the peat meadow areas have the potential for 90,000 hectares based on climate targets. Organic and nature-inclusive agriculture are both examples of extensive forms of agriculture.

To increase organic production, the focus is on:



**Encouraging the switch to organic farming**



**Maintaining existing organic production**



**Cooperation and commitment among the actors in the production chain**



**Access to suitable and affordable land**



**Remaining distinctive in terms of sustainability**



### **3.1 Switching to organic production**

Switching from conventional to organic production is a major step for farmers and greenhouse growers. It requires a completely different way of working and thinking in terms of an organic system. The change to organic also presents time-consuming administrative challenges. When farmers are transitioning to organic, they have all the higher costs associated with organic farming (because they have to meet the various regulatory requirements) but cannot yet reap any of the benefits in the form of higher prices. This situation can persist for a number of years, and this is also when farmers have many questions about regulations and finance options. They may have to cope with setbacks, a lower income and practical problems. Partners will need time to get used to the new situation, and new networks will have to be built.

Since 2021, farmers who want to switch to sustainable agriculture and require financial support can call on the [Transition Programme for Sustainable Agriculture](#). They will also be able to use the [SABE- scheme](#) for knowledge and advice once this has been launched. These schemes are perfect for farmers who are switching to organic farming.



### **Schemes for businesses:**

*This action plan refers to various schemes that businesses can benefit from, such as schemes providing support in transitioning, providing ecosystem services or implementing nature management on agricultural land. For the latest overview of these schemes, please see (in Dutch): <https://www.rvo.nl/onderwerpen/duurzame-landbouw>*

## **Actions**

- A national helpdesk will be set up at the Netherlands Enterprise Agency for farmers who want to switch to organic farming. Working closely with Skal, this desk will share knowledge about organic regulations and requirements, how to make the transition to organic, innovation, finance options and grants.
- The Transition Programme for Sustainable Agriculture provides support for a number of issues that farmers can experience during the transition, such as finding financing for the transition, the temporary reduction in cash flow and support in drawing up a business plan.

Part of the programme is the Investment Fund for Sustainable Agriculture pilot, which businesses can use to obtain financing under favourable terms for the investment required during the transition. This pilot scheme has been extended until June 2023. In 2023, together with the provinces, we will look at how the fund can be followed up, so that there is optimum support for the area plans.

- In principle, money is available for the provinces from the rural area transition fund in order to increase the area of organic production in the area plans. In 2023, there will be a study exploring how the transition to organic farming can be promoted in these areas.

When drawing up the area plans, provinces could also consider developing bioregions. When organic farmers in a given geographic area connect with other local sectors, such as retail, catering, tourism and NGOs, this can help to improve nature conservation and the environment in that area and to improve regional economic prospects.

### 3.2 Maintain existing organic production

Pioneers in sustainable agriculture deserve credit for the steps they have already taken. They need long-term certainty about their livelihood, especially in light of the provincial area plans that are being drawn up as part of tackling the problem of nitrogen-based pollution.

For existing organic businesses, it is crucial that their revenue model remains viable, and that they can continue to grow and innovate in partnership with other players in the organic sector.

#### Actions

- The provinces have been asked to take account of the future prospects of organic agriculture in regional processes and to involve the organic sector fully.
- The National Strategic Plan (NSP), in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP, 2023-2027), focuses on financial compensation for both existing organic farmers and farmers who are transitioning to organic. This means that they are paid at the 'gold' level.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3 Cooperation and commitment in production chains

The expansion of organic production depends in part on production chains that function effectively. All actors in the production chain should see the benefits of organic in their earnings models – from the suppliers of machinery, animal feed and starting materials, to traders, transporters and processors, with sufficient capacity, exporters and effective sales channels. The organic sector is not a single discrete sector, but rather it includes elements of various sectors, each with their own production chains and their own dynamic. Every production chain is different, involves different parties, different working methods, different forms of cooperation, different needs and different opportunities and obstacles. No two production chains are the same.



11. The NSP has not yet been approved by the European Commission (as of mid-December 2022)



### 3.4 Access to suitable and affordable land

Limited access to suitable and affordable land could prove an obstacle to the expansion of organic farming in the Netherlands. Suitable land is not always available, or it may be too expensive. This is due to the limited availability of land, high demand from other farms wanting to expand and the increasing demand for land for non-agricultural purposes. In addition, the usual duration of lease contracts, especially for organic land, is widely seen as too short. From the area-specific perspective, the question is whether organic agriculture can be a good alternative in areas that are vulnerable, such as around Natura 2000 areas, and what the future options are for using landscapes differently (an intermediate form between nature and agricultural land).

#### Actions

- The lease system will be revised to make long-term leases more attractive and discourage short-term leases, so that longer-term leases can become the new standard.<sup>12</sup> Longer-term leases will help farmers to be more confident about making the switch to organic farming.
- With effect from the summer of 2023, the Central Government Real Estate Agency will include a sustainability criterion for land that they own and make available on a freehold lease, in order to increase its financial attractiveness. As a result, tenants who meet the criterion (as evidenced by a certificate) will have a financial advantage.
- Explore whether other (semi-)government agencies and land management organisations are also willing to give preferential treatment to organic and nature-inclusive farmers and offer them long-term leases when they are leasing their land for agricultural purposes. Staatsbosbeheer (the Forestry Agency) is already working on the transition to more sustainable, nature-inclusive leases, and knowledge and experience will be shared with land management organisations and governments. A number of provinces also have a system that allows organic farmers to lease their land earlier.
- The concept of ‘landscape’ areas is currently being explored. We are investigating what goals we wish to achieve through this new category of land, and how it could be useful as an instrument. This new designation refers to agricultural land that is currently not being farmed, and is returned to nature. This is a useful tool in the transition to circular agriculture, nature-inclusive agriculture and organic agriculture. Landscape seems to be the obvious designation for areas that face significant challenges, such as in the transition areas around Natura 2000 zones.

12. Chamber piece 27924, nr. 73





### 3.5 Remain distinctive in terms of sustainability

Organic farming is one of the changes that is currently leading the way towards greater sustainability and shaping the future of agriculture. Current policies in the areas of climate, nature, water and animal welfare mean that conventional agriculture will also become more sustainable over the long term. In order to continue on the path towards better sustainability, retain a leadership position and continue to differentiate itself, the organic sector will need to take further steps in the field of sustainability. The sector could choose to go beyond the requirements for organic agriculture set out in the European Organic Regulation, for example by meeting the requirements for biodynamic agriculture (Demeter quality mark) or by taking extra sustainability measures as specified in the EKO quality mark. This could also include anticipating future challenges, such as more nature-inclusive methods through nature management, the construction of landscape elements, rewetting peat meadows, reducing energy consumption (the CAP offers subsidy options for this) and cultivating more organic protein crops, which will contribute to the protein transition.

#### Actions

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality invites the organic sector to discuss how it can become even more sustainable in the future, and what it believes is required to stay distinctive as a sector and continue leading the way towards the future.
- Organic farmers are encouraged to work in a more nature-inclusive way, and nature-inclusive farmers are encouraged to transition to organic. One way in which this is being done is through financial support for managing habitats for meadow birds, farmland birds and green-blue veining by the ANLb (Agricultural Nature and Landscape Management, regulated in the Common Agricultural Policy / National Strategic Plan (CAP-NSP)). There is more scope for such management measures on extensive and organic farms.<sup>13</sup>

13. The Cooperation Scheme for peat meadows and Natura 2000 transition areas is expected to open in mid-2023. This aims at measures to raise groundwater levels in peat meadow areas and extensification in Natura 2000 transition areas. Companies that want to switch to organic production or to develop their organic operations further can use this scheme and receive government support for the measures they take.





# 4. Promote knowledge and innovation



Research



Learning from one another



Continuous innovation



Knowledge is essential to achieving the expansion of organic production and consumption. This includes knowledge regarding organic production methods, animal welfare and resilient crops, but also sharing knowledge about the value of organic food between farmers and all participants in the production chain. There are already many knowledge projects aimed at or relevant to organic production and consumption. This action plan aims to identify the steps that need to be taken in order to develop this further. We refer to sharing knowledge in practice and through education, as well as encouraging innovation; both of these relate to the goals set out in this action plan.

#### 4.1 Organic Knowledge Agenda

The Organic Knowledge Agenda for organic production and consumption will be introduced at the beginning of 2023. It will bring together and provide a structure for knowledge projects, and determine the focus on knowledge and innovation in the years to come.

***More knowledge is crucial if the organic sector is to continue developing.***

#### **Actions**

- In the autumn of 2022, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will begin work on itemising and bundling knowledge questions for the Organic Knowledge Agenda.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will provide an overview of current projects involving knowledge and innovation for organic production and consumption.
- Once the inventory has been completed, the Ministry will work with relevant stakeholders to draw up the knowledge agenda. It will also specify what actions are required from other parties.

#### **Examples of ongoing studies that are relevant to organic:**

- *The Green Breeding research programme that focuses on developing new varieties to make conventional and organic cultivation more sustainable.*
- *Research into new techniques including automation; what are the opportunities for further development in organic arable farming, such as weed control?*
- *Follow-up research into the health effects of conventional and organic feed using pigs as a model for humans: is organic food healthier?*

## 4.2 Knowledge development

For knowledge and innovation, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is working on multi-year mission and innovation programmes (MMIPs) which are referenced in the Knowledge and Innovation Agenda for Agriculture, Water and Food (KIA LWV). This is part of the government-wide Mission-driven Top Sectors and Innovation Policy.

For example, based on work done in the fields of circular agriculture, resilient cultivation systems, healthy food, sustainable livestock farming and nature-inclusive agriculture, many research projects are already underway or are being launched that are relevant to improving organic production.



### Actions

- Based on the Organic Knowledge Agenda, knowledge development will be enhanced with research that is relevant to the growth of organic production and consumption;
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will explore how the link between the organic sector and the Mission-driven Top Sectors and Innovation Policy can be improved.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is committed to improving cooperation and the exchange of relevant knowledge between various forms of sustainable agriculture, such as nature-inclusive agriculture, regenerative agriculture and organic agriculture;
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is launching an NWO-SIA call for applied research to gain more insight into how food services (such as catering, hospitals, childcare) can contribute to increasing sales of organic products. Due to the involvement of schools and students in higher professional education, this will also contribute to education;
- The European Commission will focus on partnerships, particularly in the field of agroecology and living labs, and food systems are relevant to organic. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is committed to both these partnerships, in terms of both budget and capacity;
- Within the framework of Horizon Europe, the European Commission is focusing research and innovation on yet-to-be-specified measures to help expand the organic sector. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will take part where relevant.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will take part in the CORE Organic Pleiades Network for good cooperation and coordination with other member states on knowledge.

### 4.3 Knowledge dissemination and education

A great deal of knowledge on organic agriculture is already available or under development, as a result of work done on circular agriculture, resilient cultivation systems, nature-inclusive agriculture, healthy food and earning capacity.

It is important to make this existing knowledge more widely available across the organic sector, because not all target groups are aware of it. Conversely, there is a great deal of knowledge available about organic agriculture that is also relevant to other forms of sustainable agriculture.



#### Actions

- Based on the Organic Knowledge Agenda, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is focusing on steps to disseminate existing knowledge better and to strengthen the focus on education. GroenKennisnet has a central role to play in disseminating knowledge (see example on the next page).
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is committed to continuing to use the SABE scheme (Subsidy module for agricultural business advice and education) for those switching to organic agriculture. The SABE scheme enables farmers to request business advice. They can also get support for drawing up a business plan to make their operations more sustainable or to share knowledge and learn about organic farming concepts in a partnership with farmers, for example. If necessary, we will develop an in-depth course on organic food production or include more aspects of organic farming in the existing in-depth courses that can be followed with SABE vouchers.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is exploring the options for enhancing knowledge among agricultural business consultants, such as through the courses available as ongoing education for consultants registered in the BAS register.
- As it draws up its agenda for knowledge, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will explore how to provide a larger range of conversion courses, training and workshops aimed at all parties in the production chain, how these can be made more accessible and who can play a role in this.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will enter into discussions with Green Pact partners about how organic food production can be given a more prominent role in training and practical research to ensure that knowledge on organic production is more widely available in education. The options for organic research groups and practice-oriented groups are also being considered.



## 4.4 Innovation

Farmers, and especially organic farmers, are constantly implementing innovations in their business operations and cultivation methods. Other actors in the production chain do the same. The ambition is to share these innovations more widely, for example by also involving other actors in the production chain and farmers who are considering converting to organic.



*One example of an ongoing knowledge dissemination project that is relevant to organic and other forms of sustainable agriculture is the customised knowledge project entitled 'Organic - a source of inspiration for circular agriculture'. The aim is to make knowledge on organic production easier to access:*

- *For example by opening up, enriching and actively offering knowledge and research regarding organic agriculture from the bioKennisdata-bank and bioKennis.org.*
- *By continuing to collaborate with GroenKennisnet (GKN). The wiki for organic businesses and a dossier for organic agriculture on GKN will be linked to the bioKennis database and the knowledge offered by bioKennis.org, so that all knowledge on organic can be found together in one place.*
- *By being a source of inspiration and knowledge for regular businesses that wish to move towards circular agriculture methods.*

## Actions

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will promote innovation by utilising opportunities for field labs (demo companies, living labs, testing grounds). Businesses, other parties and researchers at various levels work together in field labs on innovation in the sector.

This includes exploring which specific field labs are needed for testing and preparing innovations in the field of organic agriculture for practical use.

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality welcomes initiatives that are aimed at

operational groups for the (ongoing) development of organic agriculture as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (European Partnership for Innovation (EIP)). The operational groups bring together farmers, researchers, advisors, businesses and civil society organisations to drive innovation for sustainable, climate-friendly agriculture.

## 5. Implementation of the action plan



The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality's goal for this action plan is to give organic food production a significant boost. In the first place, it will do this by taking responsibility for some of the steps outlined. But a substantial contribution will also be needed from other parties. This section looks at the implementation of the action plan.

## 5.1 Support and communication

It is very important that as many parties as possible fully embrace the expansion of organic food production. A commitment to the actions outlined among all parties is essential to supporting the growth of organic production and consumption. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality wishes to act as a facilitator and connector. Support for both the overall ambition and for the plans set out is vital for this, and extra commitment is required. This plan provides the starting point.

Support will be cultivated by communicating the ambitions of this action plan, acting on them and involving others in this process. It will take time to grow and build, and this process will depend partly on developments in the market and in society.

### Action

- In early 2023, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will organise a meeting with various parties, including those that participated in the stakeholder consultation, to hear their perspective on the action plan and what role they would like to play.

Communication will be an important way of raising the profile of organic and building enthusiasm over the years to come. It will help us to inspire farmers to switch to organic production, to increase the sale of organic products and to persuade consumers to choose more organic products. To do all this, every actor in the production chain will need to deploy marketing and communication. Not only to transmit, but also to receive and communicate interactively.

### Actions

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality holds an organic inspiration day for all those who are interested, every two years.
- Every year, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality organises activities relating to progress on the organic action plan at the Organic Knowledge Week / Biobeurs of Bionext.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality shares inspiring stories about companies that are switching to circular agriculture, including fully organic agriculture, on the campaign website [Groeienaar morgen.nl](https://www.groeiennaarmorgen.nl). [biologische landbouw](https://www.biologische.landbouw.nl).

*It is very important that as many parties as possible wholeheartedly embrace the growth of organic.*



## 5.2 Organising implementation

The implementation of the Action Plan will need to be organised as effectively and simply as possible. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will play a coordinating role.

## 5.3 Monitoring, evaluating and amending the action plan

Over the coming years, we will monitor specifically whether the steps set out in this plan are being carried out and are leading to the growth that we wish to see. Where necessary, we will adjust the policy and also formulate new actions to ensure continued growth. This will require accurate, up-to-date data, including figures on production, consumption and supply via sales channels, and figures on imports, exports and trade between EU member states.

We will also need to know about the number of hectares under organic cultivation, farmers and businesses converting to organic, the range of products available, the share of consumer spending, consumer confidence levels and the percentage of land under cultivation.

### Action

- In consultation with various other parties, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will ensure a form of organisation that covers day-to-day implementation and the coordination of the action plan, as well as links and integration with other policy fields and coordination with stakeholders. An organic advice committee made up of experts and stakeholders will be established in order to identify developments in the

sector, encourage cooperation and provide advice to the ministry. A steering committee will be established to supervise the implementation of the action plan and, where necessary, suggest changes to the plan and the use of resources. At least once a year, there will be a wide administrative consultative meeting chaired by the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. Administrators from fellow governments and the most important sectoral organisations will be invited to this meeting.

### Actions

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality will draw up a monitoring plan regarding how the data required can be collated in a cost-efficient manner. For example, the data required by the EU on the CAP and Statistics on Agricultural Input and Output Regulation will be used to track developments in the organic sector, sales and the market.
- Every two years, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality surveys consumer confidence in the European quality mark for organic products in the Netherlands.
- Before doing this, a baseline measurement is carried out.
- The action plan will be evaluated in 2026. Proposed changes will be discussed by the organisation that supervises the implementation of the action plan, and adapted where necessary.

## 5.4 Including organic in policy development

The European Organic Directive is the starting point for organic production. Developments in other policy areas may also have consequences for organic farmers and actors in the production chain. We wish to look specifically at how obstacles can be prevented and removed. Where necessary, this will be done based on input from stakeholders, the SME test and consultations prior to the development of policy instruments. Businesses that are subject to regulatory pressure or obstacles that are impeding innovation can report this already to the [Agroloket](#) (Agriculture Help Desk).

### Action

- When developing new policy instruments or assessing new proposals from the Commission, the effects on organic agriculture should be evaluated. We will explore whether we can do this within the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality by means of a 'bio test'.

## 5.5 Certification for consumer confidence

The success of organic products, both in terms of market expansion and consumer preferences, depends largely on the confidence that producers and consumers have in the European Union's organic production label and the associated system of controls. Fraudulent activities and deliberate violations of organic regulations can undermine that confidence. Strict agreements have therefore been made in Europe regarding production regulations and control. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality has designated Skal Biocontrole as the sole public control authority permitted to carry out the regulatory checks and tasks that arise from the European regulations for organic production.

Where necessary, Skal does this in partnership with other implementing organisations such as RVO, NVWA and the Customs Authority (for the import of organic products). Skal informs, certifies and ensures that the production, processing and trading of organic products is compliant with (European) laws and regulations. In order to maintain confidence in the EU organic certification label, the system of controls will need to be scaled up in line with the expansion in organic production. And services to and information exchange with the organic sector need to be further optimised.

### Action

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality regularly consults both European and national authorities about the functioning of the system of controls. The Ministry monitors the national system of controls via Skal, the Customs Authority, NVWA and RVO, among others, and makes adjustments where necessary.





## 5.6 Funding

Funding from a range of different sources will be used to implement this action plan. This funding will be used in accordance with the relevant regulations, including state aid rules. An overview of the various funding is provided below, in addition to funding from the current policy field.–

- *NPLG Transition Fund*  
Organic agriculture can improve the prospects for future-proof agriculture. This will help us to achieve goals in the areas of nitrogen-based pollution, climate, water and nature conservation. In consultation with the provinces, organic agriculture will be promoted and included in the area plans in 2023. Over the next few years, funding from the acceleration package of measures for the future of agriculture will be used.<sup>14</sup>

- *Transition Programme for Sustainable Agriculture*  
The Sustainable Agriculture Investment Fund launched a pilot in July 2021, as part of the Transition Programme for Sustainable Agriculture. In addition to the Investment Fund, a guarantee scheme for working capital was also opened on 1 January 2022 with more favourable conditions than the regular guarantee scheme. This will help to mitigate the problem of liquidity shortages during the transition period. In addition, companies that want to switch to organic are given extra help to draw up a business plan in the form of grant vouchers.
- *Common agricultural policy / National Strategic Plan*  
The CAP-NSP (2023-2027) is an important financial instrument for farms converting to organic production and maintaining that production.

Using the CAP-NSP, the Netherlands wishes to focus on incremental growth to 6% of the agricultural area by 2027. The goal of the Organic Action Plan – 15% in 2030 – will therefore require some additional effort.

- *Knowledge and Innovation*  
For knowledge and innovation, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is working on multi-year mission and innovation programmes (MMIPs) which are referenced in the Knowledge and Innovation Agenda for Agriculture, Water and Food (KIA LWV). From these mission-driven programmes (Mission-driven Top Sectors and Innovation Policy), efforts will be made to strengthen knowledge and innovation for the organic sector.
- *Funding from the sector*  
In addition to a commitment from the government, we also expect a financial contribution from other parties. We appeal to financial institutions and investors, actors in the production chain and private individuals to invest in the organic sector.

14. <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/downloads/document?id=2022D50119>

## **Colophon**

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April 2023