

getting together  
on organics

*“ I am looking forward to this great challenge. There is an increasing interest in high-quality research into organic food and farming. Our task is to help develop the national support for this high-quality research. ”*

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The organic farming sector is growing fast, something the European Commission is keen to encourage, but the national research programmes are often poorly coordinated. CORE Organic is an ERA-NET project linking 11 authorities and organisations funding national organic research programmes. The partners share information about their research, and are working to organise organic food science at a European level, where more complex and long-term issues can be addressed. They aim to channel €3 million a year from national funding programmes into transnational organic research that will pool European expertise and capitalise on their EU perspective on research needs.

Organic farming is ‘chemical free’. It prohibits the use of synthetic pesticides, fertilisers or prophylactic medicines. Small, mixed farms with high labour inputs, crop rotations, support for beneficial wildlife and natural soil improvement are all vital aspects of organic farms. Such an approach satisfies a growing societal demand for food that is free of synthetic additives and whose production supports a healthy environment and countryside. Since 1993, there has been annual growth of 25-30% in European organic agriculture and trade in organic food products. By 2001, organic agriculture had expanded to cover 4.6 million hectares, 3.7% of farmland in the European Union. As well as this strong economic potential for Europe, organic farming helps fulfil fundamental policy objectives of CAP, the common agricultural policy, such as maintaining biodiversity, supporting vibrant rural communities, and improving food safety and animal welfare. The European Commission is keen to continue developing the organic sector.

### Ancient and modern

While reliance on traditional methods is useful in organic farming, it is not necessarily the best or only way. New foods and techniques can vastly improve efficiency. Biological pest control methods – for example, novel disease-resistant varieties or feed processing methods – offer substantial progress. But to fit the basic principles of organic farming, such novelties must be backed by thorough research proving they are effective and safe for the environment. The organic sector relies on scientific research as much as conventional agriculture does to keep up with consumer demands for a greater variety of fresher, better quality food. Yet, because organic farming has reduced inputs, there is less investment interest from private industry. On top of this, organic food and farming is a fairly new research field, with a history of individual pioneers in conflict with accepted science. As a result, it is characterised by small, often isolated research communities. Improving funding for research into organic farming has recently been identified as a very important issue in the newly published European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming. Specifically, there is a strong need to gather the dispersed expertise and provide a European perspective on research directions. To this end, the Danish Research



## Coordination Action CORE Organic



“ *It is very gratifying to see the interest that national bodies are taking in organic farming research. I am certain that this interest, combined with the wish to cooperate internationally, will be beneficial for the development of an organic sector.* ”

### Full title:

Coordination of European Transnational Research in Organic food and farming

### Research field:

Organic Food and Farming

### Coordinator:

Denmark: Danish Institute of Agricultural sciences / Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming (DARCOF)

### Partners:

- Austria: Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
- Finland: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- France: Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and Rural Affairs
- Germany: Federal Ministry for Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture
- Italy: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- The Netherlands: Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries
- Norway: The Research Council of Norway
- Sweden: Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Science and Spatial Planning
- Switzerland: Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture
- UK: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

### Further information:

Dr Erik Steen Kristensen, Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming, Research Centre Foulum DK-8830 Tjele  
Fax: +45 89 99 16 73  
e-mail: ErikSteen.Kristensen@agrsci.dk  
website: <http://www.darcof.dk/>  
Project website: <http://www.core-organic.org>

### Duration:

36 months

### EC funding:

€1.2 million

### Project reference:

CA-011716-CORE-ORGANIC

Centre for Organic Farming is coordinating agricultural research authorities from ten other European countries to work together in a project called CORE Organic. The three-year project aims to bring national organic food and farming research programmes into contact and to establish a joint pool of funding, channelled from national programmes and allocated to integrated, international organics research.

### Organic science on-line

The CORE Organic partnership is setting up an internet portal providing information on European organic research programmes. It will include an archive of existing programmes, activities and facilities in each country. At present, 11 countries are involved but the project hopes to include all those Member and Associated States with national research programmes in organic food and farming. The website will enable researchers, research sponsors and users of the information, such as farmers and consumers, to find out what research is in progress and what funding opportunities exist. It will also enable CORE Organic partners to see whether current research genuinely and completely reflects the research needs of the sector, or whether there are gaps that could be addressed by transnational research. Organic farming research does not fit well into the science infrastructure built up

around conventional agriculture, because the approach to farming is holistic. There is a need for research, which is focused on entire farm systems and their impact on the wider environment, or over the long term. A second goal for the project is to develop between national programmes criteria for evaluating and assuring quality in organic research, including drawing up a list of approved experts able to assess research proposals. National research programmes can then be sure their organic research is meeting standards that are common across Europe.

### Joint funding

The partners in CORE Organic spend around €60 million a year on organic research – over the course of the project at least €180 million will be invested. The project will allocate some of this funding – a minimum of €3 million a year, beginning in the last year of the project – into a European Research Programme for Organic Farming. It is creating a list of priority research topics for this international collaboration, based on an analysis of current organic research programmes.

By working together, national funding bodies hope to enhance the quality, relevance and usefulness of organic research in Europe, providing better support for the new and buoyant European organic food industry.