LIAISON
Optimising interactive innovation

Organic PLUS

Food safety

Agricultural Paradigm Change

ORGANIC PLUS

Research and Innovation Action
Horizon 2020 fund

CH, DE, DK, ES, FR, GR, IT, NO, PL, SE, TR, UK

25 partners
led by the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience - Coventry University (UK)

2018-2022

€4.1 million
public funding (EU)

A little bit more about Organic PLUS

Despite high production standards, organic farming often still relies on contentious inputs, such as copper and mineral oils for plant protection, peat as a growing medium or bedding material for livestock, manure from non-organic farms as fertiliser or fossil fuel-based plastic as mulch. Organic PLUS aims to identify and optimise existing alternatives to these inputs and to assess their effects in order to make informed recommendations for policy (and practice) on how to phase out contentious inputs.

The Organic PLUS teams are testing alternatives to these contentious inputs in their laboratories and field labs. They are assessing their suitability, including environmental and economic effects. They are exchanging with farmers all over Europe to learn from their experiences and to understand their concerns. A survey is studying consumer attitudes towards organic farming. All these insights will feed into science-based advice for practitioners and policy makers.

"'Organic-PLUS' means minimising, and eventually phasing out, contentious inputs from certified organic agriculture."
Organic PLUS website

Highlights!

Optimisation and adaption of pioneer farmers' novel solutions

Large share of research organisations in the consortium; farming SMEs involved as stakeholders

Local synergies with other research projects

Interesting links/videos/reports

https://organic-plus.net/

Organic PLUS has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 774340

Report: Available Alternatives or Copper and Mineral Oil Reduction Strategies (updated version 2019)

Organic PLUS factsheets on alternatives to contentious inputs (multiple languages)https://organic-plus.net/factsheets/

BBC report on Organic PLUS and plastic mulching https://videopress.com/v/RzhLcqUu

Innovation and co-creation in Organic PLUS

Innovation in Organic PLUS

Alternatives to contentious inputs in organic farming are usually novel approaches and only used by pioneer farmers. They may be alternative inputs (e.g. biodegradable instead of plastic mulches), or system changes, involving avoidance of some inputs through a redesign of farming practices (e.g. improved ventilation to better prevent diseases and reduce the need for antibiotics). Organic PLUS contributes to the development, realisation and dissemination of these innovative solutions. The consortium tests their effects, e.g. on plant and animal health or on the soil, identifies their optimal usage and adapts them to specific context conditions or new research developments (development and realisation stage). It then disseminates these results to farmers to induce a change in farming practices, and to policy makers to effect change in existing EU, national and regional regulations (dissemination stage).

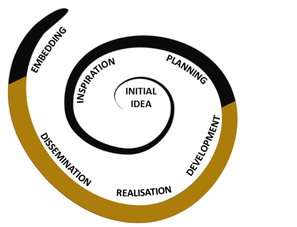
Co-creation in Organic PLUS

To achieve their targets, Organic PLUS members cooperate closely amongst themselves as well as with farmers and other important actors in the organic farming sector.

Internally, work is divided into six work packages (WP) in which partners from different countries collaborate on specific tasks. All WPs operate autonomously within the boundaries of the consortium agreement. Each is led by an experienced European scientist. The coordinator acts as a research manager and ensures that all targets are met.

Organic farmers are a central target group as well as a source of information. At the beginning of the project, partners asked organic farmers and advisors in different countries to provide information on the current use of contentious inputs. Apart from this, cooperation with farmers mostly takes place on the local level. For example, partners in Germany and France are seeking out pioneer organic farmers who already avoid contentious inputs in order to learn from them and disseminate their good examples. At regular on-farm events in all participating countries, farmers may share their concerns about contentious inputs, but also about the identified alternatives. Some partners also perform trials on actual commercial farms and community gardens and engage with farmers there.

The consortium also wants to learn about the attitudes of **consumers** towards organic farming, since these are an important success factor for any changes in organic farming. For this purpose, Organic PLUS partners have conducted a large consumer online survey as well as focus groups and joint meetings of farmers and consumers.



Innovation Spiral. The stages the project has moved through are highlighted in yellow

Source: Wielinga, E., Zaalmink, W., Bergevoet, R., Geerling-Eiff, F., Holster, H., Hoogerwerf, L. and Vroljk, H. (2008). Networks with Free Actors. Wageningen UR, Wageningen. https://edepot.wur.nl/22956

"We are working together not only with all the countries, but also with certain people who are really interested in this subject, in Turkey and Poland, and is that not a great advantage?"
Interview with an Organic PLUS member

The Organic PLUS consortium (Kick-off meeting in Padova, Italy, June 2018)
Source: https://organic-plus.net/

Good Practices & Lessons Learned

Interaction with the funding mechanism	Under the lead of the coordinator, the consortium developed a common framework and distributed roles at an early stage during the proposal writing. This helped to identify and address gaps.	It is difficult for some actors, such as small organisations or SMEs, to engage as full partners in H2020 projects due to the high administrative burden associated with this status.
Interaction between the case study partners	Within the limits of the consortium agreement, work package leaders manage their WPs autonomously. This demonstrates the partners' trust in each other's disciplinary expertise, but requires particular effort to ensure integration.	The lead partner brings multiple assets to the project: scientific expertise, administrative and project management skills, international reputation, a large stakeholder network and access to research infrastructure and support.
Interaction with external stakeholders	Organic farmers in Europe are amongst the Organic PLUS project's key stakeholders. However, engagement with them works better in some countries than others, depending on the local project partner's pre-existing network.	Partners differ in their assessment of how to engage with farming businesses and have different degrees of related experience. In particular, some research partners face difficulties in connecting with farmers.
Interaction with the case study context	The different disciplinary backgrounds of partners ('applied' agricultural research vs. modelling) correlate with different opinions about how much theoretical abstraction is required and possible in modelling phase-out scenarios.	International cooperation also means cooperation of partners having unequal access to staff, expertise or alternative funding sources. Costs for activities such as experiments may also differ greatly between countries.
Contribution to societal challenges	By testing not only alternatives to contentious inputs, but system changes that would make those inputs unnecessary, Organic PLUS seeks to broaden the scope of choices available to farmers.	The project must find a delicate balance between the intention to improve existing agricultural policies and farmers' interest in not making certain practices public and to prohibit them prematurely.

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