

Making good policies for organic food and farming - some key challenges and possible solutions

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Why support organic food and farming?

- Delivery of environmental, animal welfare and other **public benefits** from organic land and livestock management, not catered for by markets
- **Citizen demand** for organic food and its benefits reflected in the market place, regulated by EU law
- Premium market for organic products generates **economic** benefits to producers, food businesses and rural communities
- Still in early stages of development in many regions, requiring nurturing (**infant industry**)
- **Market failure** cases for support are still valid even in countries with well developed organic sectors

The 'duality' of organic farming

On the one hand:

- Public benefits, generated primarily from organic land management

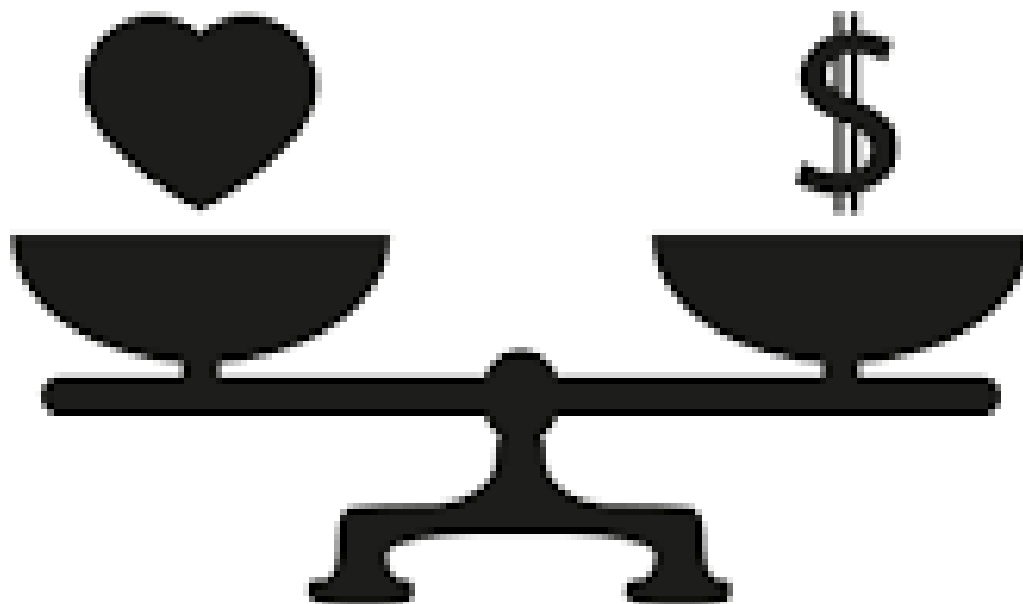
On the other hand:

- Economic benefits, generated by specialist organic markets for organic food

Needs an integrated approach, but in practice policy making tends to focus on one aspect only:

- Over-emphasis on land management and public benefits can lead to over-supply and market disruption
- Over-emphasis on markets can lead to disconnect with underlying principles and failure to deliver public benefits

A question of balance



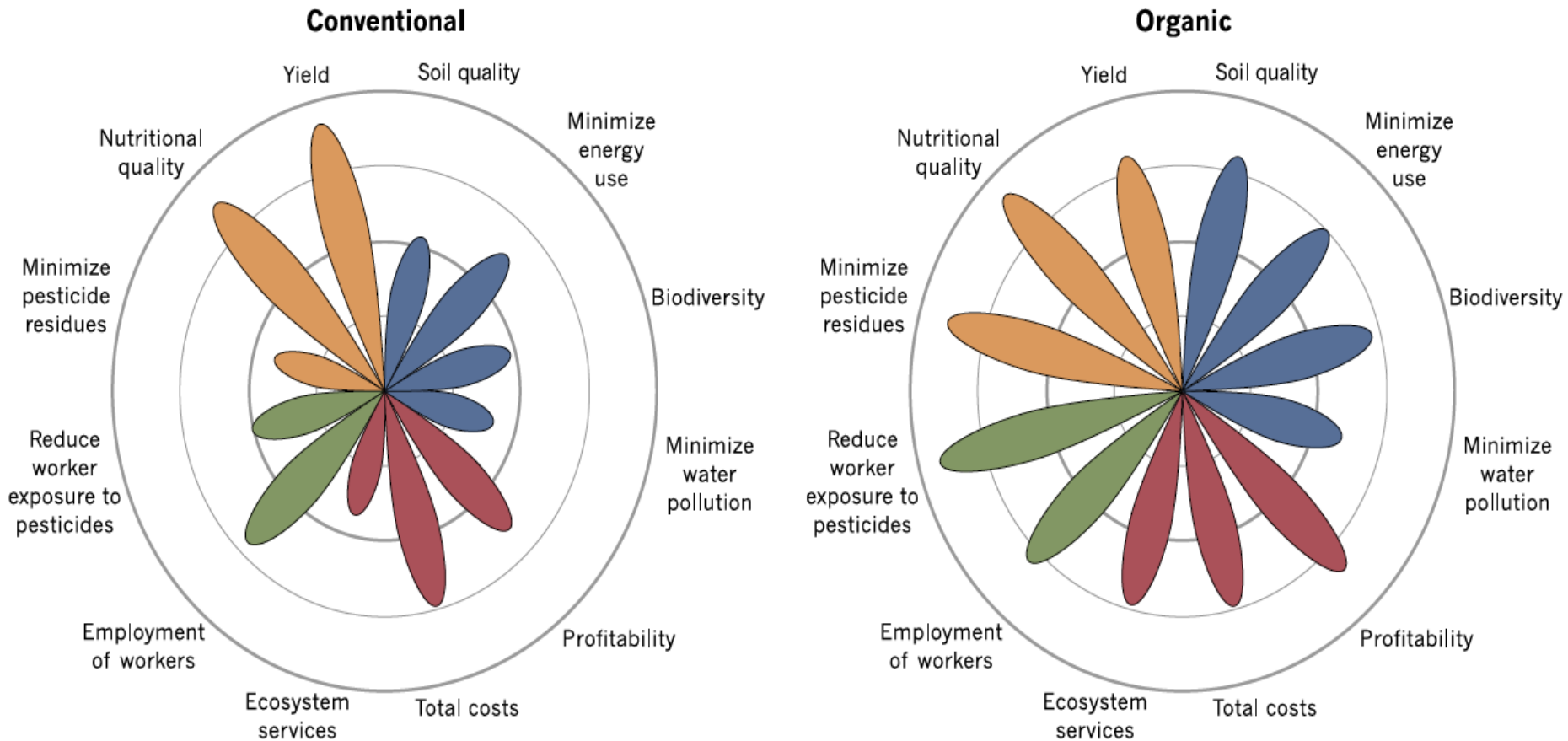
Examples of imbalance

- Dutch lack of policy to support conversion and continued management of organic farms
- French and other countries suspending maintenance support – market alone should sustain farms
- Welsh focus on biodiversity benefits prioritising organic hill farming at expense of lowland dairy and arable farms where demand greatest

Recognition of public benefits

- Organic farming represents a systems approach to delivering multiple benefits
- Policy-makers prefer targeted policies – single objective, single measure
- Targeted policies can help ensure more focused delivery
- But is a policy delivering 10 units of one outcome better than one delivering 3 units each of 10 outcomes?
- Swiss study (Schader) shows that combination multi-objective and targeted approaches can be more efficient

Multiple benefits are real but complicated...



Reganold JP, Wachter JM (2016) Organic agriculture in the twenty-first century. *Nature Plants*, 2 15221. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nplants.2015.221>

Measuring public benefits

- How can we be confident of the public benefit delivery of organic farming, given the wide range of farm types, geographical locations, skills and experience of farmers?
- Direct measurement of multiple benefits on individual farms likely to be too high an administrative burden
- Training farmers to self-assess at least some benefits is showing promise – allows farmers to experience directly impacts of management practices they implement
- Sustainability assessment tools might also have a role to play, for example by identifying weak points on individual farms as focus for improvement and recording change over time
- Control body data also potentially valuable data source
- Reliance on research studies to provide generic evidence

Balancing markets & policy support

- Historically, organic producers turned to the consumer.
- Market developed as a means to an end
- Environmental and other public benefits come from the production, not marketing, of organic products.
- Consumer interest not primarily focused on the environmental or other public benefits

Key questions

- Should the market determine the extent of organic production/land management?
- Should environmental support be limited by market potential?
- Should a minority of consumers be expected to pay for the benefits to society as a whole?

Can action plans help?

- Definition of relevant goals
- Integration of market and public support
- Integration of stakeholders and public institutions in partnership approach
- Balancing producer, food business and citizen interests
- Integration of policy measures (supply 'push' and demand 'pull')
- Focus on specific, often local, issues that need to be addressed with tailored measures



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Organic Futures:
An Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming in Scotland



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FOOD AND FARMING SECTOR

ORGANIC ACTION PLANS

DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION
AND EVALUATION

Second edition





The advent of certification and regulation

- Early recognition (already in the 1930s-1950s) that producers attempting to make fundamental changes needed support from citizens
- In the absence of direct government support, and reflecting citizen engagement, specialist markets started to develop (biodynamic pioneers)
 - ◆ *Markets developed as means to an end, supporting change - not the central focus/purpose*
- As markets grew, consumers and *bona fide* producers needed protection, and private certification schemes developed (Demeter, Bioland, Soil Association and many more from 1970s)
- Continued growth led to introduction of national and then EU regulations in late 1980s/early 1990s

What benefits does regulation bring?

- Fundamentally, it involves recognition by governments that the organic approach has value for society, which is now supported by extensive research evidence
- The EU legal definition has provided:
 - ◆ *a formal basis for trade, recognising the term organic*
 - ◆ *protection for consumers and bona fide producers*
 - ◆ *inclusion of organic in agri-environment and other policy measures from the 1990s*
 - ◆ *inclusion of organic in rural development actions, research and statistical data collection*
 - ◆ *specific requirements that deliver benefits for society (but many more benefits are indirect effects of specific requirements)*

Risks of regulation

- Fossilising current practice, making improvements difficult to implement
- Focus on input restrictions ('no chemicals'), thresholds and prohibited/prescribed practices
 - ◆ *understandable as easier to audit and to communicate*
 - ◆ *introduces black/white distinctions where shades of grey may be more appropriate*
 - ◆ *reduces focus on outputs and impacts*
– *but may still be relevant if clear linkages*
 - ◆ *distorts debate on potential contribution*
- Discouraging producer engagement by being too restrictive and limiting creativity
 - ◆ *unlike most regulations, participation is voluntary!*
 - ◆ *limited focus on what producers really (need to) do, for example:*

From the citizen perspective, regulation needs to:

- Safeguard the minimum requirements consistent with the global understanding of the organic idea
 - ◆ *Improve clarity of reasons why compromises are made*
 - ◆ *Public understanding of how systems work and generate benefits is limited – need for better communication of the evidence and debate*
- Address public concerns about food and farming through a combination positive incentives, not only restrictions

For producers and food businesses, regulation needs to

- Recognise that willingness to expose their operations to external scrutiny is voluntary and significant
- Provide a foundation to support creativity
 - ◆ *not a straight-jacket or a prison, stifling innovation*
- Support a teacher as well as a policeman role
 - ◆ *The system redesign associated with conversion to organic farming is a learning process taking many years and specific to the individual farm or business*
- Reward innovation and improved sustainability beyond the minimum pass/fail requirement
 - ◆ *shift focus to environmental, animal welfare and other outputs valued by citizens/society?*
 - ◆ *are there smarter ways to verify delivery without increasing regulatory burdens and transaction costs?*

Who owns organic anyway?

- Organic idea is the product of a century of development of ideas from thousands of people globally, representing a wide range of practical farming and theoretical backgrounds
 - ◆ *An 'open-source' concept not owned by corporations, institutions or governments*
- Closely linked with other movements
 - ◆ *soil conservation, animal welfare, environmental protection, social justice, agroecology*
 - ◆ *emphasis has changed over time reflecting this*

Is regulation and policy support a fundamental threat to the organic idea?

- Institutionalisation of the 'organic idea'
 - ◆ *no longer an open-source, citizen-owned concept?*
 - ◆ *new 'alternative' models avoid use of organic term*
 - ◆ *policy-makers struggle with organic policies because they don't 'own' the underlying concept*
- Loss of context as support for transformation of food agriculture
 - ◆ *an end in itself without bigger purpose?*

Taking back control

- Can the organic movement regain ownership of the concept?
- In UK, Organic Trade Board has secured promotional funding from EU by co-ordinating match funding from multiple businesses
- In the US, new movement of organic farmers seeking to reassert values over USDA moves to undermine standards
- Industry-led action plans under development, e.g. in England
- There is potential for the organic movement to reduce dependency on government by taking collective ownership of more development initiatives

Which brings me to Brexit...

- What does it mean? We still don't know
- If there is an agreement this autumn....
 - ◆ UK will integrate EU regulation into UK law
 - ◆ UK equivalency will be sought during implementation phase (ending 2020) – negotiations with other countries already initiated
 - ◆ Trade should not be disrupted, but risk of lower standards products being permitted in UK
 - ◆ Support for organic farmers will continue in England, but not yet clear in other parts of UK
 - ◆ New policies to be fully implemented by 2024
 - ◆ UK government will continue to support UK partners (including ORC) in EU research initiatives

If there is no agreement...

- Or Parliament votes against the deal
- Government may opt for no deal
 - ◆ No recognition of UK organic standards for export to EU
 - ◆ Recognition make take 9 months or more
 - ◆ Severe disruption to trade, and damage to businesses, likely
- Possible collapse of government followed by new (Labour?) government, extended negotiations?
 - ◆ Uncertainty will still be damaging to businesses
- Possible 2nd referendum if Parliament can't agree
 - ◆ attracting increasing support in last few months
 - ◆ Referendum could even result in a vote to remain in EU
- Who knows?



**We demand a vote on
the final Brexit deal**

**BREXITEERS
DID YOU VOTE
FOR A DOG'S
DINNER?**

**I WANT
A SAY
ON
BREXIT**

**IM16
BREXIT
STOLE
MY
FUTURE**

**THE EUROPEAN
COUNCIL
WANTS TO
CHANGE
THE EUROPEAN
TREATY**

**THE EUROPEAN
COUNCIL
DON'T
LIKE
BREXIT**

**exit is a
g deal, not
a done deal.**

**PERTH
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DEMAND A FINAL VOTE

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