

Purpose of the project

Organic farming is generally considered to be synonymous with sustainable farming and it has led the field in the development of farming systems and practices based on broad principles of financial, social and environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, the organic sector faces multiple sustainability challenges in the future; consumers are becoming more aware of the issues and food companies are accordingly more demanding. Government is requiring evidence to justify policy and grant support for organic farming and there is an urgent need for organic farming to deliver multiple objectives more effectively than it has done in the past. To merely fulfil the requirements of the organic regulation is not sufficient anymore. Organic producers are asked to deliver in-depth evidence of the sustainability of their farms.

This evolution challenges not only the farmers, but also their advisers and certification bodies. In the past, advisory services focused in the first place on optimizing production and profitability while improving the ecological and social status of the farms received much less attention. New societal demands now urge organic advisers to develop

new tools to assess and improve the sustainability of organic farms across all fronts. Funded by the EU's Leonardo da Vinci's programme, the STOAS project aims to make organic advisers, organic organisation managers and inspectors familiar with some of the recently developed tools and to provide practical training on sustainability to those working with farmers.

Every day, the organic sector has to prove that it merits the trust that consumers confer on it. This means the sector has to continuously improve its sustainability performance. The project sets out to contribute to that.

Aims and Objectives

The project provides two courses each of two x two-day workshops, spread over 6 months. These courses will help participants to:

1. develop their understanding of sustainability and the multiple objectives that organic farming needs to deliver
2. learn about the principles and use of different tools and techniques that are available to assess farm sustainability

3. understand the farming systems and practises that can be used to improve sustainability
4. consider how to advise commercial farmers on the delivery of sustainability objectives as well as being profitable
5. communicate the issues to the wider public, consumers, food companies and politicians.

Course 1. For executive staff and experienced advisers responsible for organisation management and overall development and implementation of the organisation's sustainability policy and strategy

The aim of Course 1 is to enable organisation managers to be better informed generally about sustainable farming principles and practices and the assessment tools available and to be able to develop policy and/or advisory or other services based on practicable and measurable outputs from farming.

Course 2. For practising advisers or inspectors working with farmers.

The aim of Course 2 is to support advisers and inspectors in their work, making sustainability the guiding principle of their services. Participants will learn how to use the sustainability assessment tools and discuss practical measures which they can use to advise farmers in becoming more effective in delivery of multiple sustainability objectives.

Sustainability Assessment Tools

Eight European organic associations are involved in the development of these courses which will be based on the use of three advisory tools: RISE, the Public Good Assessment Tool and the Bioland Assessment Tool.

RISE (Response-Inducing Sustainability Evaluation) has been developed at the Swiss College of Agriculture (SHL). It was originally commissioned by the World Bank to assess the sustainability of farms in the tropics. FiBL is now experimenting with a version for organic farms under temperate climate. RISE provides farmers with scientifically sound yet practically relevant information that motivates and helps them

improve the sustainability of their farm. Based on an extensive interview with the farmer, the RISE model calculates 68 sustainability parameters and summarizes them in 10 indicators. The results are presented in an easy-to-read cobweb.

The **Public Good Assessment Tool** was developed on behalf of Natural England by the Organic Research Centre and the Institute of Organic Training and Advice in order to inform policy makers on the effectiveness of policy actions such as agricultural grant schemes and to support farmers in their management decisions toward more sustainable farming. The Public Good Tool is designed to provide a simple, measurable and accessible way to show 11 Public Goods indicators that accrue through organic and conventional farming systems and management. As with the RISE-tool, the results of the assessment are presented in a cobweb diagram that can quickly be understood by the land manager.

The **Bioland Tool** aims to raise awareness about the Bioland principles of organic farming among the members of the Bioland Association. The assessment consists of a 3-hour farm visit and interview with the land manager. From the 7 Bioland principles, two or three are chosen that are of particular relevance to the farm. The compliance to the chosen principles is assessed in detail and based on this a set of goals and recommendations are formulated.

Whilst also being understandable by the general public, all three tools are designed to achieve active engagement of the land manager. Rather than providing ready solutions, they stimulate farmers to find solutions themselves. Notwithstanding the merits of all three tools, they have been developed for specific national contexts. Therefore, STOAS wants to broaden their scope to a European context.

About the Leonardo da Vinci Programme

The Leonardo da Vinci Programme is part of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. It funds practical projects in the field of vocational education and training.

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