

**IRISH ORGANIC
FARMERS & GROWERS ASSOCIATION**

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Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association

MANIFESTO

for

The Development of the Organic Sector 2007 - 2012

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Introduction

The Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association (IOFGA) is the largest organic certification organisation in Ireland representing approximately 1,000 farmers, growers, and processors and working actively to develop the organic sector.

We welcome the appointment of Mr Trevor Sargent TD as Minister of State for Food and Horticulture and look forward to working with him to achieve the 5% organic land target laid out in the New Programme for Government. We are confident that organic food and farming will finally receive the focus it deserves on the political agenda. Organic agriculture should be viewed as a priority in the context of issues such as global warming, protection of our natural resources, food security, food quality, nutrition, obesity, and the GM debate.

IOFGA believes that Ireland – with its green image, low population density, and buoyant economy – has the potential to capitalise on organic food and farming to boost its economy. IOFGA believes it is imperative that Government acts to ensure that Ireland is marketed as a green destination with quality organic food in order to capitalise on the opportunities available.

IOFGA sees organic farming as the future for agriculture in Ireland. We will work closely with the new Government to make this a reality and to help ensure that Ireland becomes an international example of best practice in the organic marketplace by 2012.

Why organic food and farming is critical to the new political agenda

Concerns about food safety, nutrition, and water quality have become major political problems that Government has to contend with. Deteriorating health and lack of consumer confidence in food are issues that need urgent attention. A declining agricultural sector is contributing to hardship for farming communities and rural dwellers.

Organic food production has the potential to resolve some of these difficulties if properly promoted and developed. Consumer demand for organic products continues to grow. The ambitious – and realistic – target the Government has set for the next five years is welcomed. However, IOFGA recognises that the current level of State

commitment to the organic sector will not significantly address these issues. Therefore, we look forward to a re-invigorated and strongly proactive approach from the new administration.

Genetically modified organisms

The use of genetically modified ingredients is prohibited in organic food and farming. GM technology is largely untested and there is mounting evidence that genetically engineered crops can produce harmful reactions in animals and people. There is also evidence – contradicting claims made by the biotech industry – that yields may be reduced while the use of and dependency on pesticides and herbicides may increase.¹ Current patent laws enable GM seed companies to take ownership of entire varieties of seed and to control prices. Consumer resistance to GM foods is strong and there is no proven benefit to their use.

IOFGA opposes GM contamination in organic products and is working with GM-Free Ireland to enable more Irish counties to declare themselves GM-free zones. GM technology threatens the livelihoods of organic farmers and food security at a global level. Consumers have given a very clear indication that they do not want GM food. We urgently need a combined proactive approach to ensure that Ireland is a GM-free country.

Nutrition

Organic food has high amounts of beneficial minerals, essential amino acids, and vitamins. Pesticides, artificial food additives, and artificial flavourings are increasingly linked to serious illness². As a result, more and more people are eating organic food because they know it is a better way to feed themselves and their families.

IOFGA wants to communicate to the public that organic food contains more of the goodness we need – like vitamins and minerals – and less of the unwholesome components that we don't need – like pesticides, additives, and antibiotics. Consumer information on the benefits of organic food should be made more accessible so that people can make more informed choices about the food they eat.

¹ *The Ecologist*, June 2007

² Findings reported by various UK daily newspapers including *Daily Telegraph* May 10 2007 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/05/08/nfood108.xml>)

Obesity and cardiovascular disease

One in eight Irish people is obese and every second person is overweight.³ The Cardiovascular Strategy of the Department of Health and Children highlights the need to access fresh fruit and vegetables. Eating organic food can help because hydrogenated fats and hundreds of commonly used food additives which contribute to today's widespread weight gain are prohibited in organic production.

IOFGA believes that eating organic food can help to radically reduce obesity statistics in Ireland. The organic focus is on eating unprocessed, locally produced foods in season. A switch to a predominantly organic diet with emphasis on fresh food will help to address the issue of obesity in Ireland. IOFGA wants to see organic food included as an integral part of food policy.

Food allergies and intolerances

Concern about allergies and food intolerances is increasing. Some preservatives, colourings, and flavourings affect individual well being. For example, the food colouring tartrazine has been linked with hyperactivity.² Only 32 of the 290 food additives approved for use across the EU are permitted in organic food. Aspartame, tartrazine, and hydrogenated fats are banned in organic food. Therefore, a wide range and large quantity of potentially allergenic or harmful additives are avoided on a diet high in organically grown foods.

IOFGA believes there is a correlation between rising rates of food allergies and intolerances and the increasing range of additives and pesticide residues sometimes found in non-organic foods. Many of these additive combinations are still untested for their combined effects on the human body.

³ Health Promotion Unit. (www.healthpromotion.ie/topics/obesity/)

Climate crisis – CO₂ emissions

The overall environmental ‘footprint’ of organic farming is less than that for conventional farming. This issue is very relevant in the current debate about climate change.

A 2002 study by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs in the UK has shown that organic farming produces significantly less CO₂ per hectare than conventional agriculture because of its greater energy efficiency.⁴

Food scares

Intensive food production and manufacturing practices have led to food scares such as BSE and bird flu.

IOFGA advocates food production methods which put food quality and safety before economies of scale. Organic standards prohibited the feeding of animal protein to farm animals well before the BSE crisis hit British agriculture. Organic food producers are subject to strict standards of production and scale which are routinely assessed by organic certification bodies such as IOFGA. This ensures that organic food production is less intensive and that organic foods are traceable and produced to the highest standard thereby reducing the possibility of food scares.

Standard of hospital meals

Governments across Europe are recognising the importance of providing healthy meals to hospital patients who are ill or recovering from surgery. In France, the Comité de Liaison Alimentation Nutrition – comprising doctors, nurses, catering staff, dieticians, and patients – has declared that food should be considered a medical treatment. A widely quoted 2003 Council of Europe report highlighted an unacceptable number of undernourished hospital patients in Europe.⁵ A significant percentage of patients admitted to UK hospitals are malnourished and their condition can worsen while in hospital.⁶ In the UK less than £2 is spent on hospital meals per

⁴ DEFRA “Organic Farming and the Environment”, 2002
(<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/policy/actionplan/annex3.htm>)

⁵ Council of Europe. “Food and nutritional care in hospitals: how to prevent under nutrition”. France: Council of Europe Publishing, 2003.

⁶ Helen Andrews, Chief Dietician, St Luke’s Hospital, Bradford, UK quoted in “Food for thought”, *Student BMJ*, Vol. 14, January 2006.

patient per day.⁷ In the Netherlands €6 - €7 is spent on food per patient per day, compared with €4 - €5 in German hospitals, and €3 - €5 in French public hospitals.⁸

IOFGA would like to see transparent figures for spending on hospital meals in Ireland. We advocate the introduction of organic food to hospital menus to aid patients' recovery. Organic food should be an integral part of the national health strategy.

⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4521681.stm>

⁸ Andrew Isaac, Marketing Director, Sodexo Healthcare Services; quoted in "Food for thought", *Student BMJ*, Vol. 14, January 2006.

IOFGA's Twelve Point Plan for 2012

1. Establish an organic development agency

The organic sector has been stagnant in Ireland for several years while progress has been rapid in many other countries. Existing structures, supports, and resources have been inadequate and ineffective. A new agency is needed to help drive the sector forward and realise the full potential of organic farming in Ireland.

This agency would promote and co-ordinate the development of all aspects of organic production and marketing in Ireland including advice, research, and training. It would draw together and augment the current functions of State agencies and would advise Government on organic policy.

The Organic Development Agency would have executive responsibility for its own budget and would initiate and drive forward projects to deliver its goals. Its Board should include producers, processors, certifying bodies, and trainers. The agency could explore the development of Public/Private Initiatives. It may be necessary to establish a steering committee to assist the Minister with the establishment of this agency and its resources.

2. Commit an additional budget of €20m for the organic sector over 5 years to 2012

Ireland needs a substantial budget – exclusive of REPS payments – to develop the sector. Organic development is more rapid in countries where generous state support is provided. For example, since 2004 the Andalusian Council of Agriculture has invested €25 million to further develop organic farming.⁹

⁹ Director General for Organic Farming, Regional Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Andalusia quoted in *Organic & Wellness News*, Spring 2007.

Key areas requiring investment include:

- Training - at every level from introductory courses for farmers and growers to third level degree courses.
- Development of processing facilities for organic producers so that the range of value added organic products can be increased.
- Marketing strategies – to encourage new entrants to the sector while simultaneously increasing consumer awareness about the importance of Irish organic food production.
- Provision of additional funding and grant aid for certain sections of the organic sector which currently have relatively low levels of production such as horticulture and tillage.
- Long term market development – including export – to ensure that producers have a varied and growing market base.

3. Prepare a new organic development plan up to 2012

Significant targets and aspirations in the current organic development plan have not been met. A new plan will revitalise the organic sector provided it is realistic, targeted, results oriented, and enables the sector to develop in a sustainable manner. It must be under-pinned by adequate resources.

4. Achieve a target of 5% organic land by 2012

Conventional agriculture is declining in Ireland with serious consequences for rural economies and population. Morale among the farming community is at an all time low. Organic agriculture is the largest growth area in farming internationally but Ireland has one of the lowest percentages in Europe of land under organic production. (Appendix 1.)

IOFGA is confident that if this 12 Point Plan is fully implemented without delay, Ireland can achieve a target of 5% organic land by 2012. A new, proactive organic agricultural strategy has the potential to reverse declining farm fortunes and restore confidence in the farming sector.

The target of 5% by 2012 requires a high level of Government commitment. Key action areas for achieving this target include:

- The conversion period to organic. Farmers need to know they have long term support if they convert to organic farming and to know it is a combined investment in the sustainability of agriculture in Ireland. After the conversion period they need the assurance that they are well positioned to produce and market a product that consumers want.
- Horticultural production. Organic vegetables and fruit account for the largest value of organic products sold in Ireland.¹⁰ However, there is a significant shortfall in the number of organic horticultural producers and a considerable volume of produce is imported. More horticultural producers need to be encouraged into the sector to meet demand at a national level.
- Organic tillage. The current area of organic tillage is far from sufficient to meet the growing demand for the product. Support for the organic tillage sector needs to be increased in order to ensure the sector expands.
- National commonage. Examine the feasibility of certifying land such as National Parks and Wildlife Service commonage.

5. Set up a dedicated conversion information service

This service would provide training and advice to farmers converting to organic production and would have a specialist advisor based in each county. The conversion period is vitally important because it strongly influences the future viability of the organic unit. A dedicated advisory service would instil confidence and provide the skills and knowledge to ensure that producers achieve success in the organic sector.

Key areas to be addressed include:

- Training throughout the conversion period on a variety of topics specific to individual needs.
- On-going training in the form of mentoring.
- Technical publications by producers in the industry to illustrate best practice and highlight potential pitfalls for producers.
- Training to develop marketing and sales skills for producers who are interested in direct selling.
- Networking service to encourage the transfer of information through regional groups.

¹⁰ "Estimating the size of the organic food market". A study carried out for Bord Bia by Research Solutions, 2006

6. Establish a comprehensive and integrated organic research and training programme

Research: Organic agricultural research in Ireland is relatively under resourced. Investment in research should be a priority – in order to provide relevant data specific to Ireland. This is essential in relation to crop varieties, pests, diseases, and livestock husbandry. Research is also required in other areas such as markets, economics, demographics, business models, and skills.

Research into the nutritional and environmental benefits of organic food and farming is also required. Results and findings should be made available to producers and consumers.

Training: A comprehensive education strategy is essential for organic farming to advance in Ireland. It would assist new entrants and established producers by allowing them to up skill and diversify. In the adult education sector there are several different methods and levels of learning from participatory to distance learning. We need to ensure that organic farming courses are offered at every level to provide skills learning for those involved in the sector. It is worrying to realise that in Ireland one may undertake a masters degree in computer gaming but not even a primary degree in organic agriculture!

An organic training programme must include educational resources for Primary and Secondary schools.

7. Assist with the marketing and distribution of organic produce

A marketing plan to assist both direct and third party sales needs to be devised. Direct selling is a relatively new practice in Ireland and can be daunting to many producers in terms of expertise and time management. A training programme needs to be developed to assist producers to market products to a high standard. This is particularly relevant to the development of direct marketing channels such as box schemes and market stalls.

Government should carry out a review of the Casual Trading Act in order to facilitate direct sales of produce.

In some areas the development of local producers groups has been successful in driving the organic sector at a regional level. A framework should be installed to assist the development of these groups throughout the country.

IOFGA strongly recommends that the Government promotes Ireland as a location for international organic food companies. This would encourage linkages to Ireland's organic sector and provide valuable local outlets for Irish organic produce.

The development of added value organic products has a key role to play in the success of Ireland's artisan food sector.

The lack of abattoirs for processing organic meat and poultry needs special focus so that this constriction on market development is removed. (Similar constrictions relating to abattoirs affect conventional farmers and artisan food producers.)

8. Develop export markets for Irish organic produce

Ireland is perceived to be a green country and has marketing advantages associated with a relatively unspoilt environment. As the organic sector enlarges it is important that new markets abroad are secured – particularly for the meat and dairy sectors. Government should provide financial assistance for organic producers and producer groups in the context of agreed market development plans which explore the export market for organic products.

9. Prepare a consumer information campaign

Government should provide information for consumers on the benefits of organic food. It should also address the cost issue and explain why organic food appears to cost more. Food production is a complex industry subject to national and international rules and regulations. A national consumer information campaign is required. Part of this campaign should be designed specifically for Primary and Secondary school children.

The following issues should be addressed:

- Food security internationally and nationally and threats to that security.
- Health benefits of eating organic food.
- Taste associated with good quality organic food.
- Dangers linked to diets high in processed foods.
- Environmental benefits of eating organic food.
- Consumers support for the indigenous food industry and rural economy – to ensure that organic farming is a sustainable option for farmers who wish to remain on the land.
- The reasons for the high production costs of organic food compared to cheaper, mass produced, imported foods.
- High animal welfare standards.
- Stringent production standards.
- Case studies of ‘Local Heroes’ who derive sustainable incomes from the production and sale of organic food (Appendix 2.)

10. Commit to a public procurement programme

Public bodies should agree a target of 15% for procurement of organic food for canteens/restaurants by 2012. The Fair Trade campaign has been very successful at getting public procurement and organic farming should follow suit.

There has been an increase in the demand for organic food in the private sector. Restaurants serving predominantly organic food have opened to cater for this. The public sector should copy this model starting with the introduction of organic food in hospitals, schools, and colleges. Government should run pilot projects to examine this. Experience in the organic sector has shown that if people become more exposed to organic products via the workplace or friends then they will be more likely to buy organic products. Public procurement of organic food in places such as hospital, canteens, and restaurants would demonstrate the Government’s commitment to organic farming.

11. Encourage the conventional farming sector to support organic agriculture

IOFGA understands the difficulties of increasing costs and reduced profits faced by the conventional farming sector. This is particularly true of conventional horticulture where growers leave the industry in favour of other employment. We believe that organic farming offers a real future for many conventional farmers. IOFGA wants to work more closely with representatives of the conventional sector to explore ways of generating greater understanding of and interest in organic farming methods. Increasing attendance by conventional farmers at the series of organic farm walks – organised by Teagasc and supported by IOFGA – is a positive development.

A campaign should be devised to inform organisations involved in conventional agriculture about the benefits of the organic system. There is potential to focus positively on common aspirations and to work together to sustain and develop Irish agriculture as a whole. If misconceptions about organic farming can be dispelled then more conventional producers could be attracted into the sector.

12. Protect Ireland's GM free status

There is no consumer demand for genetically modified food in Ireland. The introduction of GM crops would have a devastating effect on both organic and conventional farming. The key issue for Government is to acknowledge that we can produce good quality organic food in Ireland without the need for GM technology.

Key steps to take include:

- Introduction of legislation to protect Ireland as a GM free zone.
- Establishment of a GM-Free regulatory authority to ensure that rigorous testing is put in place to verify that animal feed is free of GM inputs. Establishment of penalties and enforcements.
- Vetoing any EU calls for a threshold for GM contamination in conventional seeds below which such seeds would not be labelled as GM contaminated.
- Opposition to the patenting of seeds.

Appendix 1: How does Ireland's organic marketplace compare with others?

Ireland: ¹¹

- Just over 37,000 hectares of land is farmed under organic production methods.
- Less than 1% of Irish agricultural land is farmed organically.
- The Irish organic retail market is currently estimated to be worth €66 million.

Worldwide: ¹²

- The world market for organic food was worth £16.7 billion in 2005.
- In 2004, 4% of European farmland was managed organically.
- In 2004, the average organic farm size in Europe was 40 ha – larger than the average non-organic farm (15 ha).

Some examples from Europe... ¹²

- **United Kingdom:** Retail sales of organic produce increased by 30% to £1.6 billion between 2005 and 2006.
- **Germany:** Organic sales have an estimated value of €3.9 billion.
- **Norway:** The Norwegian Government has set a target of 15% of Norwegian food production and consumption to be organic by 2015.
- **Denmark:** The organic market in Denmark accounts for approximately 5.5% of the total food market. In 2005, organic turnover increased by 10% to €300 million. Based on population, the equivalent figure for Ireland would be €220 million. Denmark exports 10% of its organic production.
- **Switzerland:** (Outside the EU) In 2005, the organic market maintained its value of approximately €790 million. Based on population, the equivalent figure for Ireland would be €420 million.

Not just developed countries... ¹²

- **Romania:** In 2005, the organically managed land area increased by 25% to 100,000 ha.
- **Croatia:** The Government has set a target to increase the organic land area to 10% of the total agricultural land area by 2010.
- **Poland:** Organic land area doubled between 2004 and 2005, reaching 168,000 ha on 7200 farms.

¹¹ Brendan Smith TD, Minister of State, Department of Agriculture and Food: address to All-Ireland Organic Conference, Carrick-on-Shannon, November 2006.

¹² "Organic market report", Soil Association, 2006 (<http://www.soilassociation.org/marketreport>)

Appendix 2: 'Local Heroes' Case Studies

Detailed Profiles from the examples below can be prepared by IOFGA on request.

<u>Contact</u>	<u>Business Name</u>	<u>Product(s)</u>	<u>Location</u>
Ralph Haslam	Mossfield Organic Farm	Cheese	Midlands
Jo Condon	Omega Beef Direct	Beef	Midlands
Declan Droney	Kinvara Smoked Salmon	Fish	West
Pat Mulrooney		Tillage, Cereals, Dairy	South West
Desmond & Olive Thorpe		Horticulture	South East
Vincent Cleary	Glenisk	Milk, Yoghurt	Midlands
Leitrim Organic Co op			North West

Appendix 3: What does “Organic” mean?

When you see food marked as organic it has been produced in a sustainable, transparent, environmentally friendly way that maintains high animal welfare standards.

Taste: From top chefs and food writers to the general public the consensus is that organic food is tastier than intensively produced conventional food.

Health: Increasing evidence demonstrates that organic food has greater health benefits than conventionally produced food. Buying organic encourages people to source their food locally and in season.

Environment: Organic products have fewer negative ecological impacts than conventional methods using fertilisers and pesticides. Levels of emissions and pollution which are an intrinsic cost of manufactured fertilisers and pesticides are non-existent in organic farming methods.

Animal Welfare: Animals reared organically have freedom to move around in low density conditions with access to outdoors. Livestock are given a nutritious diet free of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, and herbicides and are allowed to develop in a natural way without growth promoting hormones or routine antibiotics.

Biodiversity: Organic farming encourages and protects wildlife by creating suitable habitats and minimising disruption to the natural environment.

Rural Development: Supporting small organic enterprises helps to develop rural businesses and contributes to sustaining levels of employment in the countryside.

Transparent Pricing: Organic food products reflect the true cost of food production by including all major costs in production and giving the producer a fair deal.

Consumer Trust: Organic food is produced to stringent standards. The rigorous enforcement of these standards at every stage of the food chain ensures traceability and offers the consumer accurate and informative food labelling they can trust.

References:

- 1 *The Ecologist*, June 2007.
- 2 Findings reported by various UK daily newspapers including *Daily Telegraph* May 10 2007
(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/05/08/nfood108.xml>).
- 3 Health Promotion Unit. (www.healthpromotion.ie/topics/obesity/).
- 4 DEFRA "Organic Farming and the Environment", 2002
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- 5 Council of Europe. "Food and nutritional care in hospitals: how to prevent under nutrition". France: Council of Europe Publishing, 2003.
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- 9 Director General for Organic Farming, Regional Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Andalusia quoted in *Organic & Wellness News*, Spring 2007.
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- 12 "Organic market report", Soil Association, 2006
(<http://www.soilassociation.org/marketreport>).