

PRESS RELEASE

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ORGANISATIONS SOUGHT TO JOIN A NEW PROJECT TO DEVELOP THE COLLECTION OF STATISTICAL DATA ON ORGANIC FOOD AND FARMING

European markets for organic products are growing rapidly, with organic production now accounting for 4% of European Union agriculture, but the market information available in most European countries is seriously limited as a basis for investment and policy decisions.

The EU is therefore funding a three-year project to analyse the current situation in 32 countries and to develop proposals for a comprehensive statistical system to support the development of a sector which offers significant potential for further growth as well as environmental and economic benefits.

The project partners, drawn from the UK, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Poland and the Netherlands, and assisted by international agencies such as Eurostat, the European Commission, FAO, OECD and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), are now actively recruiting all interested organisations to join the initiative.

Dr Nic Lampkin of the Institute of Rural Studies, University of Wales Aberystwyth, and co-ordinator of the project said: 'At present, the levels and methods of data collection vary from country to country and much important information is missing entirely.'

'We will be working closely with regional, national and European statistical offices as well as stakeholders and private sector agencies to stimulate the development of the data collection and processing systems involved.'

'We are therefore actively seeking the involvement of all interested parties – data owners, collectors and data users – and hope to develop a large membership and active participation in the project.'

'Members will have access to unpublished reports and working documents, as well as the possibility of participating in European seminars and e-mail discussions to develop proposals for the new system.'

The European Information System for Organic Markets (EISfOM) website at <http://www.eisfom.org/> provides full details of the project and how to get involved.

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Editorial notes:

EISfOM is a Concerted Action funded by the European Union's 5th Framework Research Programme. For further information on EU funded research, see www.cordis.lu. Further details of EISFOM activities can be found at www.eisfom.org and on the attached sheet.

The project covers 32 countries (15 EU member states, 13 candidate countries and 4 EFTA states). There are nine core partners with regional co-ordination responsibilities:

- P1 University of Wales, Aberystwyth, United Kingdom (GB, IE, FR)
- P2 Research Institute for Organic Agriculture, Frick, Switzerland (CH, LI, TR)
- P3 University of Innsbruck, Austria (AT, SI, RO, BG)
- P4 University of Kassel, Witzenhausen, Germany (HU, CZ)
- P5 Zentrale Markt und Preisberichtsstelle, Bonn, Germany (DE, SK, ES)
- P6 University of Marche, Ancona, Italy (GR, IT, PT, MT, CY)
- P7 Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Foulum, Denmark (DK, SE, FI, NO, IS)
- P8 Warsaw Agricultural University, Poland (PL, EE, LV, LT)
- P9 Landbouw Ekonomisk Instituut, Den Haag, Netherlands (NL, BE, LU)

The project is managed by a group consisting of the core partners and representatives of key international organisations, including Eurostat, the European Commission, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

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EISFOM is an EU-funded Concerted Action whose aim is to develop a framework for reporting valid and reliable production and market data on the European organic sector, in order to meet the needs of policy makers, farmers, processors, wholesalers and other actors involved in organic markets. It has been formed by a network of researchers and agencies who have been researching and publishing organic farming statistics for several years. The project is co-ordinated by the University of Wales in Aberystwyth and will run from 2003 to 2005.

The EISFOM EU-funded concerted action aims to:

- review existing systems of data collection and processing for organic as well as conventional markets in order to understand their characteristics and identify opportunities for development and improvement;
- develop proposals for harmonizing existing data collection and processing methods, assess measures for improving data quality and provide tools for the development of new data collection systems at various levels within national frameworks/institutional circumstances;
- co-ordinate and evaluate pilot data collection and processing systems;
- stimulate further development of data collection and processing by integrating with national and international statistical affairs offices and preparing a framework for the development of a European wide database for organic markets;
- provide relevant recommendations to the EU in order to better coordinate and support data collection on organic production, processing and imports as well as prices.

The major outputs of EISfOM will be:

- An up-to-date, systematic review of existing data collection systems for organic markets, with particular attention to production, processing, trade (imports and exports), prices and links between them. A report on existing data collection systems for organic markets and their characteristics will be produced, which will include a description of existing data collection and processing systems for conventional markets in order to develop reference models or identify possibilities to merge systems. This report will cover all 15 EU countries, all candidate/applicant states and 4 EEA countries.
- Proposals to improve data quality and data collection systems for organic markets with particular attention to overcoming barriers which hinder the establishment of national data collection systems. Recommendations on the establishment and development of data collection systems for organic markets will be produced, taking into consideration the widely varying structures across Europe, and the need to establish systems from scratch in some countries.
- Recommendations for future development and co-ordination of data collection systems in 32 European countries (EU 15 + 13 accession + 4 non-EU countries). A framework for the long-term establishment of a European database on organic markets containing recommendations for Eurostat will be published. These recommendations will also include proposals on the integration of conventional and organic data collection and processing systems in Europe.
- Circulation of information to farmers, processors, wholesalers, policy makers, public institutions, market research institutes and other firms and institutions in order to stimulate willingness to participate in future data collection;
- A prototype database and web site containing:
 - results of partners' current research activities;
 - standards to ensure quality of data collection and processing;
 - recommendations for establishing data collection and processing systems for organic markets;
 - documents produced during the concerted action.