



ISPRA

Istituto Superiore per la Protezione
e la Ricerca Ambientale

PRESS RELEASE

ORGANIC FARMING IS EXPANDING WORLDWIDE

IN ITALY ABOUT 1.3 MILLION HECTARES OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS ARE ORGANICALLY FARMED , 12.,8 PERCENT MORE THAN THE PREVIOUS YEAR. THIS HAS A POSITIVE EFFECTS ON BIODIVERSITY, SOIL AND WATER QUALITY, FOOD SAFETY, AND—IN THE LONG-TERM—TO FOOD SECURITY TOO

On a global scale—according to data provided by the Institute for Research on Organic Farming (FIBL) and the International Federation for Organic Farming (IFOAM)—organic farming is still growing: the area currently under organic farming in the world is about 43.1 million hectares, an increase of 12% compared to 2012; the regions with the largest organically farmed area is Australia (about 17.3 million hectares, equivalent to 35% of the organic area worldwide) and Europe (11.5 million hectares, equivalent to 27% of the overall organic area). From 2012 to 2013 there was an increase of 0.3 million hectares (+ 3%) of the organic area, which now occupies 2,4% of total agricultural land. In the EU, the total organic area amounts to 10.2 million hectares, the number of producers totaled 330,000 units. In the world are 82 countries that have regulations in production trade and organic.

Even in Italy, as confirmed by the statistics provided by SINAB (the National Information System on Organic Agriculture at the MIPAAF) there is a positive trend of biological, both in terms of area (now at 1.3 million hectares (+12 , 8% compared to 2012), about a tenth of the agricultural area Italian), both in number of companies (46 000 producers and more than 52,000 operators), both in turnover (3.5 billion euro, more than 2% of sales total food of the country). Italy is ranked second in Europe and fifth in the world for organic area.

A survey conducted by ISPRA confirms that organic farming is more economically profitable, despite of frequent yield decrease, and effectual in terms of biodiversity protection and enhancement, water and soil quality conservation, green-house gas mitigation, use and consumption of resources such as land, water and energy.

Organic farming helps to maintain the uniqueness and the 'territoriality' of genetic diversity and species of cultivated plants and animals. In organic soils, where it is forbidden the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, it is possible to detect a double number of wild plant species compared with conventionally farmed soils, up to 50% more spiders, 60% more birds and 75% more bats.

Over the last quarter of century the production of organic food has grown steadily in Italy, demonstrating as a philosophy and lifestyle oriented to social and environmental principles, fairness, fair trade, rural development and environmental sustainability.

Italy has a leading role in the EU's organic agricultural production and it is in second place (after Spain, 1.6 million hectares) for extension of organically farmed areas. Italy it one of the world's first producers of citrus, olives, grapes, cherries, pears, plums, apples, quinces and apricots, as well as cereals and vegetables.

Currently, 60% of Italian consumers are buying organic. In 2014 there was a sharp increase both compared to 2012 (+5.8) and to 2013 (+ 4.5%). In the first five months of 2014 the consumption of packaged organic products by Italian families increased by 17% in value over the first five months of 2013, while spending on agri-food overall has witnessed a significant decrease (-1.4%).

The issue of global food security is addressed by the 2015 Universal Exposition in Milan, whose title “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life” it is an eloquent invitation to governments, institutions, international organisations, corporations, civil society institutions, science, to find quick solutions to the issue of world’s food security and sustainability.

Demographers estimate that by 2050 the population will reach 9 billion people and the global demand for food and fiber will grow by 70% compared to current demand. Referring to food security, other elements of concern arise from the competition of agricultural land for food or non-food products (such as biofuels and bio-plastics), and the competition for other land uses, such as urban settlements and infrastructures, and the antagonism between agriculture and other productive sectors for land and water resources a. Furthermore, the global food security is threatened by global changes, including climate change. In addition, it is necessary to ensure the integrity of natural habitats and, more generally, biodiversity, the prerequisite of ecosystem services, which underpin the communities’ well-being.

A key issue in the debate on the contribution of organic agriculture to the future of world agriculture is whether organic agriculture can produce sufficient food to feed the world.

Comparisons of organic and conventional yields play a central role in this debate. ISPRA’s analysis shows that organic yields of individual crops are on average 80% of conventional yields, but variation is substantial. The organic yield gap significantly differs between crop groups (3% for fruit crop and 35% for vegetable) and regions. On the other hand, the study shows that the land occupied by intensive forms of agriculture are subject to a decline in fertility and production capacity. Some studies estimate that nearly 40% of the intensively-farmed land will be lost by 2050. In contrast, organic soils maintain the essential physical, chemical and biological properties over time, helping to keep up productivity and ensure the long-term food security.

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