FiBL
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Research Institute of Organic Agriculture
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Key factors influencing conversion to organic agriculture

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2 projects

- **Use and efficiency of public policy measures addressing organic farming**

  Jürn Sanders, Matthias Stolze, Susanne Padel (Pls)

- **The role of social factors for conversion to organic agriculture**

  Robert Home, Elke Ries, Nikola Patzl, Otto Schmid

First project

- **Use and efficiency of public policy measures addressing organic farming**

  Jürn Sanders, Matthias Stolze, Susanne Padel (Pls)

Background

- Organic farming has developed very differently in individual Member States.
- The large differences in the development of the organic sector are in part due to differences in the policy environment.
- For more than 20 years, European policies for organic farming have been developed on various levels.

Background

- **European Commission DG AGRI commissioned the project:**
  - to assess the effects of Rural Development Programmes on the development of organic farming in the EU
  - to compare policy support for organic farming across EU member states
  - to identify areas for improvement for organic farming policy support (“best practice”)
  - to help the Commission to develop the evidence base for future policy making and to better reply to political questions on organic farming
- **Scope: Organic sector development 2000 – 2011**
- **Focus here: 1 sub-project**

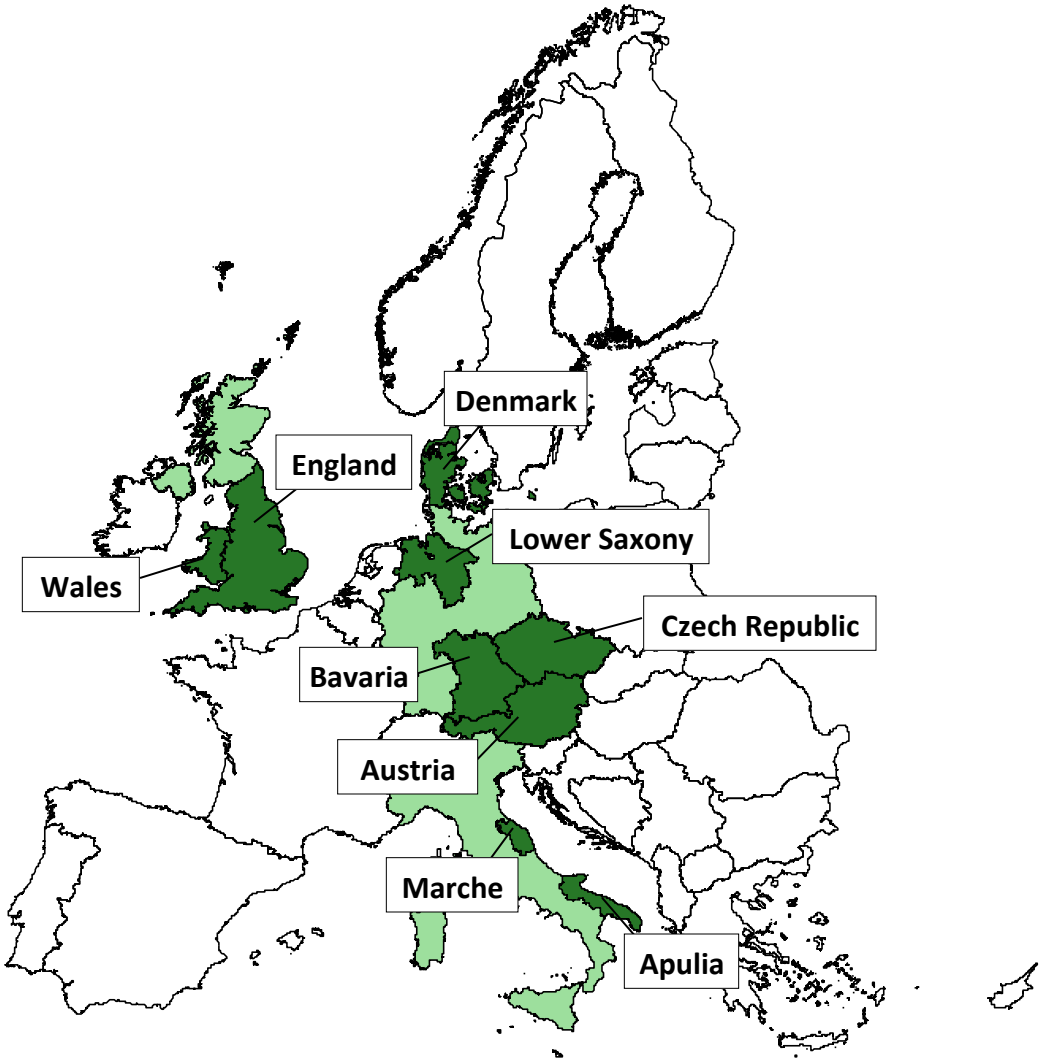
Methods

- **6 case study countries**
  - to assess the effects of Rural Development Programmes on the development of organic farming in the EU
  - to compare policy support for organic farming across EU member states

- **Quantitative impact analysis**
  - FADN data
  - compare profitability under different support payments

- **Qualitative impact analysis**
  - Two rounds of online stakeholder consultations
  - Six national workshops to put the results into context

Overview of case study countries/regions



Question

- **To what extent has the use of public support measures contributed to the development of the**
  - number of farms
  - area of land under organic management
  - growth of the market for organic products?

First online stakeholder consultation

- **111 stakeholders**
  - Government, advisors, producers, processors, certifiers, etc.

- **Identify the most relevant factors that influence the development of the number of organic farms, the area of organic land and organic markets**

Second online stakeholder consultation

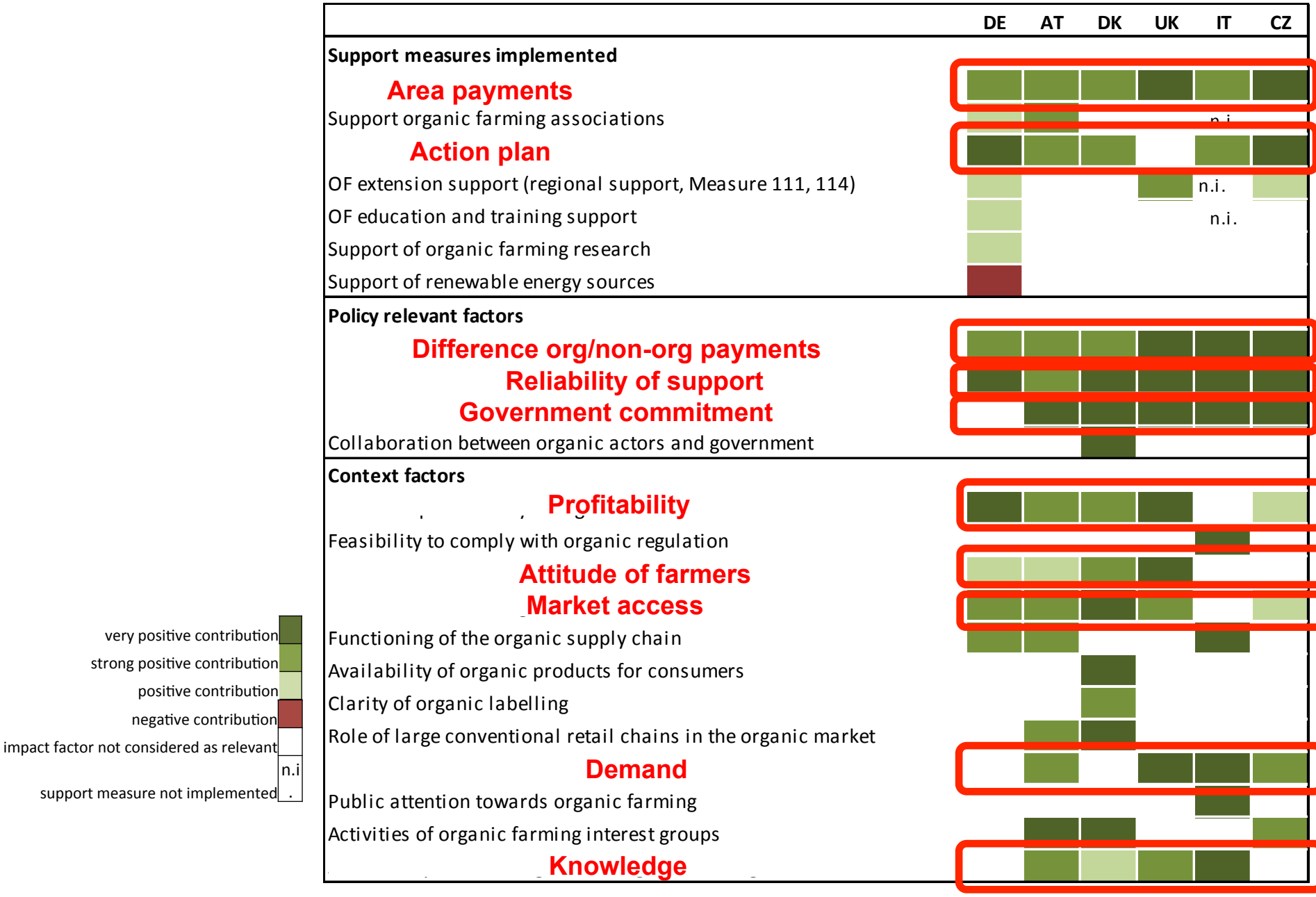
- **79 stakeholders**

- **Considered the most relevant factors identified in the first online stakeholder consultation**
  - Most relevant factors are those with more than medium impact (in a scale of “strong – medium – weak - no impact”)

- **Aimed at estimating the mutual impacts between these most relevant factors**

Factors influencing the development of organic areas

Stolze and Jahrl 2011



Results

- **Public support for organic sector is a major driver for the organic sector development**
  - In the absence of favorable non-policy factors public support may have limited impact

Results (cont.)

- **Organic action plans are a second important support instrument**
  - to make the strategic role of organic farming within the general organic farming policy transparent
  - provides reliability and ling-term perspective
  - to design the best possible policy combination, policy mixes and policy links to further develop organic farming
  - Collaboration government / organic sector can greatly enhance effectiveness of policies

Results (cont.)

- **Adverse impacts from competing labels**
- **Adverse impacts from bioenergy subsidies in Germany**
  - Conventional farms profit much more as bioenergy crops do not fit into the organic crop rotations
  - Difficulties to rent land due to high prices
  - Reconversion due to higher revenues

Second project

- **The role of social factors for conversion to organic agriculture**

  Robert Home, Elke Ries, Nikola Patzl, Otto Schmid

Background

- **The overall goal has been to identify barriers to conversion to organic agriculture**
  - How did organic farmers manage to overcome barriers to conversion?
  - What is the attitude of non-organic farmers towards conversion?
  - How can the knowledge on support measures may be used to make conversion to organic agriculture more attractive?

Data

- **Sample of 24 farmers**
  - 13 organic
  - 11 IP-Suisse
- **German speaking part of Switzerland**
  - Aargau, Basel, Basel-Land, Luzern, Bern, Graubünden and Thurgau
- **Selection with “maximum variety”**

Methods

- **Guided interviews**
  - Starting with some first proposals:
    - What is your view on your task/role as a farmer?
    - Which have been your experiences during conversion?
    - Do you think about changing the production system in the future?
  - Further questions

Results I

- **Conditions for conversion are met**
- **External factors are assessed realistically**
  - Agricultural policy
  - Markets
- **High confidence in extension services**
- **Conversion “in attitude” is key**
- **Early and continuous support is important**

Results II - Key messages

- Conversion is less difficult than commonly assumed
- Perception of organic farmers as producers is key
- Support mutual learning opportunities
- Organic farmers are well-embedded in a community
- Family can play an important role
- The picture of organic production adopted in farming schools prevails for long

Results: role of the family

- Sometimes, the family has a negative attitude towards organic agriculture
- Tensions/disagreement with the predecessor
- Support by the spouse is important

Recommendations

1) Courses in organic agriculture targeted at the spouses/female farmers

Goal: strengthen the role of female farmers in conversion

- **Few courses on organic agriculture targeted at female farmers**
  - Could increase interest for organic agriculture and provide necessary information
  - Focus on specific demand: organic gardening, small animal husbandry
  - Regional organisational structure for such courses

Results: acceptance I

- Acceptance and recognition by other farmers and in the social context is important
- Mutual respect among farmers – irrespective of the production system
- Non-organic farmers who do not feel being respected by organic farmers will turn away from organic production

Recommendations

2) Organise meetings between organic and non-organic farmers

Goal: strengthen the reputation of organic farmers as producers

- **Show respect towards non-organic farmers and avoid disputes organic vs. non-organic**
- **Happenings with both organic and non-organic farmers together and having the same role can foster mutual acceptance**

Recommendations

3) Make solutions from organic production known to non-organic producers

Goal: support small steps towards organic production

- It is wrong to assume that non-organic farmers produce with maximal synthetic input use
- Non-organic farmers are open towards measures that allow for reducing inputs
- If non-organic farmers adopt certain organic practices, the barriers toward conversion will become lower

Results: acceptance II

- Organic farmers are measured along the same indicators as non-organic farmers: quality and yields
- Conversion often seems to be easier than expected

Recommendations

4) Support on-farm visits on organic farms

Goal: support direct personal impressions and dialogue and opportunities to show success

- Farmers should get more information on what it means to be an organic farmer
- Organic farms can be presented as show-cases for productive farms
- Illustrate that problems of organic production are less drastic than commonly thought and that a range of solutions is available

Results: the first impression counts

- Generation change is an opportunity for conversion
- Conversion can also happen later in life
  - E.g. after 40, when farmers have plenty of experience, expertise and knowledge
- The view that farmer students gained on organic agriculture in their study time (e.g. on organic farmers as producers) remains relevant for long

Recommendations

5) Organise happenings, workshops etc. for farm school students of organic and non-organic agriculture

Goal: provide a correct picture of organic agriculture for young farmers

- **Organic farmers are seen as “representatives” of organic agriculture as a whole**
- **They thus influence the image of organic agriculture**
- **Common happenings bring organic and non-organic students together**

Results: increasing self-determination

- Perception of loosing freedom in decisions is a barrier to conversion
- After conversion, farmers generally report an increase in freedom
- There are barriers to seek advice from official extension services – it is seen as a type of “outing”

Recommendations

6) Compile a list of farmers that are willing to give peer-to-peer advice

Goal: provide informal or also “anonymous” support services, where farmers can find advice without “outing” to think about conversion

- **Other farmers have high credibility**
- **In a second step, a mentoring system may be established**

Results: farmers as producers

- The low willingness of consumers to buy non-norm products is a challenge
- As long as retailers do not offer non-norm products, consumers may not even have the choice to buy them
- Some farmers mentioned a drop in quality as a reason for not converting

Recommendations

7) Start collaboration with retailers to have an outlet for non-norm products

Goal: reduce the influence of non-norm products on the farmers self-esteem as producers

- **Difficult to estimate demand for non-norm products**
- **Selling non-norm products would make them visible and support the view that they are also a legitimate output of farms and not a failure**

Summary - Key messages

- Conversion is less difficult than commonly assumed
- Perception of organic farmers as producers is key
- Support mutual learning opportunities
- Organic farmers are well-embedded in a community