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## ORC investigates how organic ideas can help make UK farming a world leader

The Organic Research Centre (ORC) – the UK’s leading research charity in this field, has been awarded two new research projects by Defra to gather robust evidence on organic farming. Both projects aim to identify how organic food production techniques can help the UK build on its position as a world-leading food and farming nation.



*The Organic Research Centre has been a pioneer of many techniques such as agroforestry, the use of diverse ley mixtures, cover crops and intercropping, which are being adopted by conventional farmers*

The first project will look at how a selection of organic farming practices can deliver wider sustainability benefits for conventional farming systems. The second project will help provide an evidence base for future policy direction of organic agriculture in the UK following EU exit as well as exploring the issues surrounding the potential implications of introducing an independent organic labelling system.

Dr Susanne Padel from the Organic Research Centre said, “This a fantastic opportunity to see how some of the well-proven farming techniques developed by the organic sector can provide the impetus for mainstream farmers to become more sustainable. Although organic farming accounts for a relatively small proportion of UK food production the sector has emerged as hugely innovative, employing novel solutions to reduce reliance on inputs while maintaining production but with limited resources.”

As well as considering what can be learnt from organic systems, the **first project** will also assess opportunities, practicalities and barriers for translating best practice management techniques from organic to conventional farms including examining potential impacts on farm incomes, productivity and risks.

The research will also review what is already adopted within conventional systems, or is actively promoted through bespoke initiatives such as Agricollogy, Integrated Farm Management and LEAF Marque.

The ORC will collaborate with the GWCT's Allerton Project, the Soil Association, Organic Farmers and Growers, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming).

During the course of the research the project will identify and actively involve the farming community and relevant industry stakeholders. A key element is to develop future actions to promote sustainable farming practices across all agricultural systems. Results from this research will be widely shared with all interested farmers via a project 'hub' on the Agricollogy website and promoted using social media and events ([www.agricollogy.co.uk](http://www.agricollogy.co.uk)).

With our imminent exit from the EU, the **second project** provides information from which to review our national organic regulations for England and Wales following EU exit.

The project will review regulatory approaches controlling organic production and provisions for trade in other countries and summarise their strengths and opportunities.

In addition, the project is tasked with exploring the organic labelling used by other countries such as those in USA and Norway.

To undertake this project ORC leads an international consortium of organisations including Organic Services (based in Germany), EcoS Consultancy (UK) and the Swiss Research Institute for Organic Agriculture (FiBL). All the members of the consortium have longstanding and complementary experience with organic regulations and the organic sector in the UK, Europe and globally.

Dr Padel said, "We are delighted to be leading these two significant research projects, which will help to create an evidence base for future policy development. Many conventional farmers in the UK are doing a fantastic job by providing high quality food and contribute to the environment, but there is always something new to learn or improve to create a robust and profitable agricultural industry in the UK. It is also framed by the Defra strategy to provide a cleaner and healthier environment benefiting the economy."

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**Notes to editors:** The Organic Research Centre (ORC): established in 1980, is the UK's leading independent organic research charity. It works both nationally and internationally, to:

- Research and develop practical, sustainable land management and food production systems based on organic and agro-ecological principles
- Foster knowledge exchange with and between current and future producers, food businesses and related professionals
- Influence policy and public debates on the future of food and farming based on sound evidence.

[www.organicresearchcentre.com](http://www.organicresearchcentre.com)



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