

Survey of EU organic market data collectors

The availability of good quality information is crucial in making market and policy decisions. Yet despite the growth of the organic market in Europe only very basic statistics about the sector exist in most countries.

Catherine Gerrard, Anja Vieweger and Susanne Padel present the results of a survey developed as part of the Organic Data Network project aimed at finding out who is collecting what information and how it's being used.

Member states collect data on the number of certified organic holdings, organic and in-conversion land areas and livestock numbers, which are published nationally and by EUROSTAT (the statistical office of the European Union), but other data are less commonly collected.

Important market statistics such as yield, consumption, retail sales, international trade and prices at farm or consumer level, which would be valuable to producers and others involved in the organic market, are lacking in most European countries.

To understand the availability of data on the organic market in Europe, an online survey was developed. 112 organisations in Europe and the Mediterranean (MOAN) completed the survey (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Map of Europe showing the number of responses in each country

Not Surveyed	No response	1-2 responses	3-4 responses	5 or more Responses

The largest category of respondents was government bodies (29%), followed by control/certification bodies (20%). 23% 'others' included private and state research institutes, not for profit organisations, NGOs and advisory services.

Production data, especially land area and production volume, are most commonly collected, whilst production value data are much less so. Price and retail sales data are the most generally collected market data. Export data are more common in non-EU countries than within the EU, perhaps reflecting a higher importance of export to their economies.

The product categories most often represented in EU+EFTA (Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein) market data collection are meat, milk and dairy products, fruit and vegetables. Data on non-food organic products are rarely collected.

The main uses of the data (Figure 2) are for statistics (32%) and market information (19%). However there is some variability with a higher proportion of 'EU15' countries (i.e. the older EU states including the UK) using the data for market information (26%) compared with 'newer EU states' (14%); and a lower proportion of them (4%) utilising data for subsidies/government support programmes relative to 14% in the 'newer EU states'.

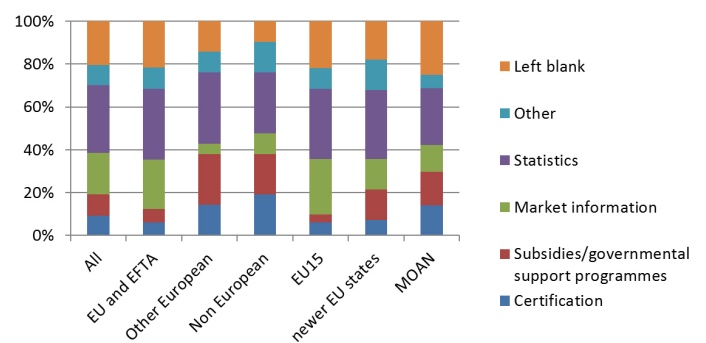


Figure 2: Ways in which the collected data are used.

There is generally a low rate of data publication in all countries (less than 50% of respondents gave a positive answer - see Figure 3). Production data are most likely to be freely available, but not all are published. Data are usually published annually; price, retail or export data are occasionally published more frequently, but sometimes at a cost.

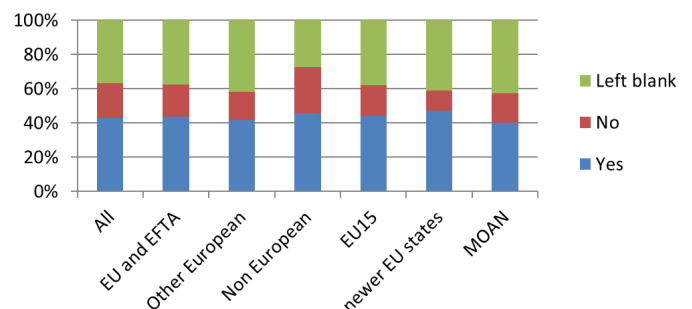


Figure 3: Responses on whether the collected data is published

It is clear that concerns about a lack of organic market data are justified. The data collection effort is very varied across Europe and not all collected data are published. There is a need to understand the reasons for this and the barriers to good quality data collection and dissemination.

Without good quality, accurate and timely information it is difficult for stakeholders to make investment decisions and for policy makers to frame effective policies.

The EU funded OrganicDataNetwork project (<http://www.organicdatanetwork.net/>) has been established to address this problem.