Parliamentarians for Agroecology

Parliamentary Briefing: An organic action plan for England
November 2026

The first organic action plan for England (OAPE) in two decades has just been published and has been widely welcomed by farming and environmental groups. It is backed by the UK government and it was jointly developed by Defra working with the English Organic Forum, which includes the key bodies involved in the organic sector.

The plan recognises the particular benefits that arise from the avoidance of synthetic pesticides and nitrogen in organic farming, and from taking a whole system approach rather than ad hoc environmental management options around the farm. The OAPE is also clear about the financial benefits organic growth can bring for farmers when they are supported to switch to organic production as well as to regional economies. It will form a central part of the wider transformation in the food and farming system signalled in the Defra Farming Roadmap, with a focus on much more sustainable and regenerative approaches of which organic is a prime and regulated example.

However, converting to organic production incurs initial financial and operational challenges, for example reintegrating livestock and arable farming to improve soil fertility and establishing longer rotations to control disease rather than use chemical means. At present the main conduit for government support for that conversion process is through the Sustainable Farming Incentive, which is currently suspended.

Key Ask

Parliamentarians for Agroecology (P4A) would encourage you to

- **Submit a written question to Defra** to confirm that when it reopens the SFI will include sufficient ring-fenced resource to meet the interest from farmers in converting to and staying organic, as part of a phased pathway to ensure 10% of farmland becomes organic. This will provide immediate and long lasting environmental benefits in contrast to the more transient benefits afforded by some SFI options.

How the OAPE is structured

The OAPE learns from earlier experience, and specifies that the expansion of the organic sector must be driven by increased demand in parallel with increased supply. It is therefore structured into three pillars:

A. Increasing and managing organic supply through targeted support for existing and new organic producers and processors

B. Realigning existing and emerging domestic supply and demand, and increasing the proportion of sales met by domestic production

C. Increasing consumer awareness and stimulating demand from the public through using public procurement

The measurable outcomes

The OAPE highlights the immediate potential that could come from substituting imports of organic foods with domestic production and also cites examples of initiatives such as Growing Communities based in Hackney which, by bringing healthy organic food to local communities, demonstrates that organic can be made available to all citizens and thus a bedrock of work to promote healthy and sustainable diets. Organic also has significant potential to contribute to national nature recovery and animal welfare objectives.

Delivery of the action plan will be assessed against five outcomes:

1. A year-on-year closing of the gap between imports and exports of organic goods, including an increase in domestic organic production
2. Ambition to grow the organically managed land area in England year on year to 10% across the range of organic sectors (horticulture, arable crops, poultry, red meat and dairy).
3. An assessment of the contribution of organic production and consumption to government's Environment Improvement Plan's ten goals, and the associated reductions in fertiliser and pesticide use that organic conversion delivers.
4. A sustained increase in the share of organic food within public sector purchasing.
5. Growth in the knowledge and understanding of organic production among farmers, growers, and consumers.

Other support needed

The English Organic Forum and the Organic Research Centre have been helping build the evidence base for organic production and the OAPE identifies the need for a central database for organic in the form of a data observatory – this will need modest funding.

The OAPE sets out how government and the organic sector will work together to grow domestic organic production, broaden citizen's access to organic food, and unlock the environmental and economic benefits that organic farming can deliver. A degree of coordination will be needed across the UK with the recent launch of an Organic Action Plan for Scotland. Securing a government ambition to grow the sector and recognition of the benefits this will bring is a major milestone for food, farming and environmental policy. It is the culmination of years of patient and effective work by many partners. Politicians at both national and local level can be key allies in realising the potential benefits of the new Organic Action Plan for England for local communities, farmers and the wider economy.

Written by Gareth Morgan, Head of Farming and Land Use Policy, Soil Association