# GENERATIONAL RENEWAL - THE VISION OF THE YOUNG ORGANIC MOVEMENT FOR THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

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# Executive summary

The European Union is in urgent need of transformation to act against the ageing of its agricultural population. Young farmers, and especially young organic farmers, are currently facing multiple challenges such as difficulties in accessing land, funding, markets and profitability. The Organics Europe Youth Network calls for ambitious changes in European agricultural policies to ensure that food and farming becomes more attractive paths for young people. The Organics Europe Youth Network believes that the European Union must promote organic farming and agroecological practices to encourage generational renewal, as young people are more attracted to a career in this sustainable sector. Indeed, organic practices can reduce greenhouse gas emissions in synergy with providing benefits for biodiversity protection while contributing to the adaptation by making farming systems more resilient to the effects of climate change[1]. Our vision meets two objectives: ensuring generational renewal while helping young people in their ambition to adopt sustainable practices that preserve the natural resources necessary to feed the European population.

The Organics Europe Youth Network proposes a set of recommendations focusing on different aspects:

- There is low availability of – and access to affordable and high-quality agricultural land, even though it is a necessity for young farmers. So, we endorse the creation of a European Agricultural Land Observatory that would identify the challenges and be used as a tool for evidence-based land market regulation to prioritise access to land for sustainable food production, including organic farming systems, and potentially the creation of a European legislation on land considering it is such a strategic asset. Furthermore, the Commission should promote policies that are used in several European countries that have proven to be effective, such as pre-emption rights, land banks, and blueprints for succession models to support alternative and diverse farm models.
- We call on a fairer distribution of the CAP funds as a key policy and financial tool, as it is important to increase the possibilities for young organic farmers to start their activity. We call on the Commission to move away from granting aid based solely on the surface area of farms, towards the reward of provision of socio-ecological practices and services to local communities and for the common good, and generational renewal. Namely, Member States must allocate a sufficient and mandatory budget to young farmers and significantly increase the minimum level of funding, make changes in direct young farmers' payments in the pillar 2, consider the category of "new entrants". In addition, there

[1] IFOAM Organics Europe, 2022, "Organic agriculture and its benefits for climate and biodiversity", available here.

should also be an obligation to dedicate a certain share of the budget to supporting organic farming and we call for free and accessible advisory and support services qualified to accompany farmers who want to engage in sustainable farming.

- Young entrepreneurs experience systemic barriers to accessing finance, so we encourage the expansion of the range and creation of tailored financial instruments across the entire supply chain for young entrepreneurs, stronger collaboration between financial institutions, governments and young farmer organisations and we endorse the revision of the Common Market Organisation (CMO) to guarantee fair prices for agricultural products.
- The positioning of farmers in the supply chain must change to ensure a fair distribution of profits between farmers and other stakeholders in the value chain. We therefore advocate for the strengthening of direct sales and short supply chains, sustainable public procurement, and, importantly, the revision and improved enforcement of the Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) directive.
- Support for generational renewal must consider young entrepreneurs all along the value chain. To that end, we advocate for the creation of more mentorship programs, masterclasses and the facilitation of international collaboration between young entrepreneurs in the (organic) food chain to boost knowledge exchange, best practice learnings and network-building. We also advocate for an exchange of best practices and guidelines for successful succession models, a particular challenge for the (organic) retail and wholesale sector.
- Agricultural vocational training must also evolve to take more into account the growing interest in organic farming methods. We therefore advocate for a holistic view of the complex agricultural system with a new understanding of the basic pillars of agriculture in vocational training, instead of separating organic and conventional education programs. Besides this, we call for more investment in building and attracting expertise on the side of the teachers, as well as a review of the Commission's existing youth programs.
- Rural development is an important component to ensure the attractiveness of the agricultural sector to younger generations who need access to rural services. Some interesting initiatives, such as bio-districts, are a good way to revitalise rural areas.

# 1. Introduction

European agriculture is facing an ageing population, triggering concerns regarding European food security, resilience, and the long-term viability of the entire food and farming sector. Generally, the number of young farmers is decreasing, though there are differences in those trends across Europe. A long-term vision and clear policy pathway to address generational renewal are vital for

the thriving of the European food and farming sector. Young people entering and working in the agri-food sector need to be supported by the right political framework. At the same time, committed and knowledgeable young people, motivated to drive the sustainable transformation of the agriculture and food industry, are making their voices heard through many different means[2], and it is up to policymakers to listen.

### 1.1. European policymakers acknowledge organic is a cornerstone of the sustainable European farming system

The report of the Strategic dialogue[3], as well as the Commission's Vision on agriculture and food, published in February 2025[4], point out organic as a cornerstone of the sustainable European farming system. In the Vision document, the European Commission further acknowledges the link between addressing generational renewal and promoting organic farming, stating that "Young farmers want to be the drivers of innovation [...]. Concrete examples are the growing organic sector and agroecological farming practices, which prove to be attractive options for younger farmers, combining economic possibilities with environmental results and social responsibility."[5] Also, the European Parliament acknowledged in its 2023 report the important role of young farmers in the green transition, highlighting that "young farmers and new entrants are more likely to introduce innovative business ideas, promote shorter food chains, apply new technologies and production methods and implement sustainable farming practices, including agroecological practices and organic farming"[6].

### 1.2. The organic movement is an attractive pathway for young farmers and entrepreneurs

For many young farmers, entrepreneurs and new entrants, the organic movement is an attractive pathway in food and agriculture. According to the Fédération Nationale d'Agriculture Biologique (FNAB) in France, between a third and half of the future farmers wish to practice organic agriculture[7]. Also, the demand for agricultural land, especially to establish organic farms, is continuously growing. The number of organic farms in the EU more than doubled between 2010

[2] For example, see the vision document of the Organic Future Camp 2025 which is available here.
[3] European Commission, 2024, "Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture", available here
[4] European Commission, 2025, "Vision for Agriculture and food", available here
[5] European Commission, 2025, "COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS A Vision for Agriculture and Food Shaping together an attractive farming and agri-food sector for future generations", available here
[6] European Parliament, 2023, "REPORT on generational renewal in the EU farms of the future", available here
[7] FNAB, 2024, "Loi d'Orientation Agricole: il faut enseigner la bio pour susciter les vocations", available here

and 2020[8]. It is also well-recorded that the share of young people involved in organic agriculture is significantly higher than in conventional agriculture.

*Only 13% of organic farm managers are over 65 years old, in contrast to their non-organic counterparts, who have 33% of farm managers over the age of 65. The percentage of organic farm managers under 40 years of age is 21 %, which is double that of non-organic farms at 10%[9].*

Thus, strengthening the organic sector and empowering youth in food and farming go hand in hand. There are interesting correlations: Austria, for instance, has the youngest farming population (23,4%) and the highest share of organic farming in the EU (27,3%)[10]. Through organic farming, young farmers share a commitment to making long-term investments and adopting environmentally friendly practices that offer significant benefits for both the environment and rural communities. For instance, organic farming practices can reduce greenhouse gas emissions in synergy with providing benefits for biodiversity protection, increasing soil carbon sequestration, and at the same time contribute to adaptation by making farming systems more resilient to the effects of climate change[11]. Young people involved or wanting to be involved in organic food and farming activities share a vision of the food system based on diversity in ecological and socio-economic dimensions as the foundation of decision-making and action, applying it throughout the entire value chain. This also includes embracing circularity and resource responsibility—promoting closed-loop thinking, intergenerational resource use, and actively preventing waste at all stages of the system[12].

## 1.3. Nuances in definition: young producers and new entrants

At the outset, it is important to establish who is meant by young farmer/producer. According to the European Commission, the age limit of 40 years applies[13]. However, young people are not a homogenous group, namely, so-called "new entrants" (from a non-agri-food context) face specific challenges and these new entrepreneurs may be both under and above this age limit.

[8] Eurostat, 2024, "Fully organic farms in the EU", available here
[9] AgroNews Comunitat Valenciana, 2022, "La superficie de cultivo ecológico representó el 9,1 % del total de las tierras agrícolas de la UE en 2020", available here
[10] FIBL, Helga Willer, Jan Trávníček, Bernhard Schlatter, 2025, "The World of Organic Agriculture 2025 Latest Statistics About Organic Agriculture Worldwide", available here
[11] IFOAM Organics Europe, 2022, "Organic agriculture and its benefits for climate and biodiversity", available here
[12] Organic Future Camp, 2025, "16-POINT PLAN OF THE ORGANIC FUTURE CAMP (OFC) 2025", available.here
[13] European Commission, "Young farmers", available here

While new entrants bring personal interest from environmental sustainability, organic agriculture, and a rural life and new skills to the table, such as marketing[14], they might not have the same starting conditions as other young operators that come from a family business background (e.g. inheriting machinery or land). According to studies, these new entrants are more likely to be female[15]. Although there is a lot of overlap between the categories of 'youth' and 'new entrants', there are significant differences in the barriers to a viable profession in food and farming. Hence, these new entrants must be supported and their needs carefully considered within the discussion on generational renewal.

### 1.4. A renewed and clear strategic pathway is needed

A clear strategic pathway to address generational renewal is needed to offer the right regulatory framework that can support young people and new entrants in contributing to European food and farming. Socio-economic and complex behavioural changes lead to additional challenges that need to be considered as well. For instance, a strategy on generational renewal also needs to consider the evolution of lifestyles in general and those of young people in particular. Indeed, some young people would like to work on a farm for only ten years, for example, but not to make it their entire career. Policy pathways and regulatory tools need to be imaginative and flexible in proposing legal solutions that accommodate these behavioural changes. Moreover, the regulatory framework needs to adopt a systemic and cross-sectional approach, due to its complex root causes and cross-sectoral nature, to encourage young people to start or continue working in the sector. There should be cooperation between many Directorates General of the Commission to tackle this multidimensional topic holistically, in line with the recommendations of the 2024 report from the Strategic Dialogue[16].

## 2. Context: Spotlight on some challenges faced by young (organic) operators

Despite broad agreement on the need for generational renewal, encouraging more young people to pursue a career in food and farming is a complex exercise due to numerous wide-ranging and

[14] European Commission, Lee-Ann Sutherland, May 2015, "EIP-AGRI Focus Group New entrants into farming: lessons to foster innovation and entrepreneurship", available here

[15] European Commission, Lee-Ann Sutherland, Neus Monllor, Teresa Pinto Correia, December 2015, "EIP-AGRI Focus Group New entrants into farming: lessons to foster innovation and entrepreneurship", available here

[16] European Commission, 2024, "Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture delivers its final report to President von der Leyen", available here

interconnected challenges. In the section below, we spotlight issues around access to land, finance, and markets.

## 2.1. Access to land

Land and soil are a strategic asset for the EU, yet, problematically, there is a low availability of affordable and high-quality agricultural land. The 157 million hectares of land used in the EU for agricultural production, which represent 38% of the total land area of the EU in 2020[17], are becoming less and less available. In many regions, land prices and rental costs are rising rapidly, causing stronger competition for agricultural land. Young farmers, especially, suffer from this development. Several factors explain this, notably (1) high competition between different land uses (agricultural food production and non-agricultural interests such as renewable energy production, protected nature area, urban sprawl) and land speculation, (2) climate change that is impacting not only the quantity but also the quality of the land, through droughts, floods and soil erosion, and (3) land degradation and water pollution.

Another important factor that simultaneously drives low availability of land as well as transmissibility issues is the trend that agricultural land is increasingly concentrated in ever fewer hands, among other things due to pressures of the market to produce at increasingly lower prices: just 3% of farms (over 100 hectares) control over half of EU farmland[18]. Simultaneously, corporate agricultural holdings, often with backing from financial investors with little connection to farming, are expanding rapidly. Terre de Liens explains that in 50 years, the average farm surface has risen by 50 hectares[19]. This means that farms are bigger, more specialised, more industrial and too expensive for young people who want to become farmers. Problematically, farm enlargement is correlated with the **decrease in the adoption of agroecological practices**, meaning that the more land a farmer owns, the more likely they will step away from sustainable practices[20]. Namely, growing the size of the farm leads to the adoption of standardised practices such as monoculture or removing hedgerows to enlarge fields in order to streamline production.

Another challenge linked to access to land arises out of impeded intergenerational land mobility, and connectedly, intergenerational farm transmissions, both for family farms and new entrants. Mobility is hampered by land retention by the older generation of farmers. Often, pension schemes are inadequate, and the level of pensions is particularly low (around 700 Euros per

[17] CEJA, 2023, "Policy Paper Access to land: Are we losing the European plot?", available here
[18] ACCESSTOLAND, “Securing land for agroecology”, available here
[19] Terre de Lien, 2024, “Renouvellement des générations : l’indépassable plafond de terre de l’installation", available here
[20] Journal of Rural Studies, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg et. al., “The economic potential of agroecology: Empirical evidence from Europe”, available here

month for retired farmers in France and Germany[21]), so, CAP subsidies may be the only means to maintain an income. A good pension scheme can encourage generational renewal. For instance, Polish farmers are overall satisfied with their pension scheme that operates separately from other workers[22] which leads to a high ratio of young to old farmers. Furthermore, the older farmers may have a strong attachment to their land and life's work, making it painful to pass the farm, including the decision-making power over the future of the farm, especially with transmissions outside of the family. Policy and legal incoherence and intransparency of land planning policies and land ownership at the national level are also inhibiting factors for young farmers, as this results in a lack of long-term certainty for land investments, especially when land is rented.

Despite the difficulties of dysfunctional land markets, the EU currently has no agricultural land policy framework. There is an urgent need to address and reverse these damaging trends on the regional, national, and European level by prioritizing access to land for those models of farming that create more jobs, generate more wealth, preserve the environment, and strengthen rural vitality, such as organic farming systems. There is a correlation between the level of regulation of land markets and the rate of generational renewal. For example, France established a system of public-private land development and rural establishment companies, also known as SAFER. Poland and Austria are best practice examples. While Poland restricts the ownership of agricultural land to 300 ha of land and prohibits companies from owning agricultural land, Austria implemented the monitoring of land markets, and every transaction on the rental or sales market must be approved by a land commission. Austria has the youngest farming population (23,4%)[23]. Poland is not far behind with 21% of its farming population being under 40 years old[24].

Access to land is one of the most important and urgent challenges for young farmers. An increasingly competitive land market is particularly affecting young organic farmers because they enter a system with structural disadvantages that is increasingly dominated by those with strong capital. Especially those who we need to attract most, i.e. young, talented and well-trained professionals, experience these structural barriers. On a market with high demand and scarce resources, it is particularly difficult to find entry to land if there is no parental farm to take over. The problem continues in the ongoing competition for the limited land available and affordable for purchase or lease with bigger market players.

[21] Sozialversicherung für Landwirtschaft, Forsten und Gartenbau, ”Bemessungswerte in der SVLFG”, available here

[22] Journal of Rural Studies, Hlochova, McNally, T. HAYDEN, Kinsella, “Pension provision in the farming sector – Lessons from Europe", available here

[23] Eurostat, 2022, ” Farmers and the agricultural labour force - statistics", available here

[24] Eurostat, 2022, “Farmers and the agricultural labour force - statistics", available here

## 2.2. Access to finance

A thriving, future-looking, and financially profitable sector that provides good working conditions is an attractive sector for youth to get involved in. Young farmers should have the perspective to reach financial self-sufficiency independent of direct payments. It is very complicated for young farmers to obtain the necessary financial support to set up their operations, as they often lack collaterals, patrimony and a strong credit profile as compared to older and established farmers. Banks assess young organic farmers as higher risk categories, so rejection rates for loan applications for young farmers are two to three times more likely in comparison to farmers over 40 years old[25].

Organic farmers have an additional disadvantage, since most banks look for low-risk investments that are usually focused on high yields, which creates pressure for farmers to adapt to conventional and intensive farming methods. Organic farmers might be more exposed to short-term risks, but they are more resilient in the long term. Banks do not tend to take that into consideration.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds, while intended to support generational renewal in farming, do not always achieve this objective. In many cases, funding encourages expansion and capital-intensive investments, which can make it more difficult to transfer farms. These funds also offer limited targeted support for new entrants and young farmers, which may further hinder generational renewal. According to an analysis by the European Court of Auditors (2023), "The aid was often paid to beneficiaries who had been established for several years and, in some cases [...] had already achieved a sufficient and stable income."[26]. There is no good analysis of what young farmers' real needs are and thus subsidies are not well targeted[27]. Under the CAP 2023-2027 framework, the EU mandates Member States to dedicate at least 3% of the direct payments to address generational renewal (as income support investment or start-up aid) but, there is no harmonisation between them. Only 7 Member States allocate significantly more budget to generational renewal. Greece, for example, allocates 11,7% of the funds to support young farmers and Austria 7,1% but Romania gives 1,1% and Portugal 1%[28].

[25] CEJA, 2025, "Generational renewal in agriculture CEJA's preliminary inputs for an EU Action Plan", available here: CEJA-position-paper-A-CAP-post-2027-for-generational-renewal.pdf
[26] European Court of Auditors, 2023, "EU support to young farmers should be better targeted to foster effective generational renewal", available here
[27] European Court of Auditors, 2017 , "EU support to young farmers should be better targeted to foster effective generational renewal", available here
[28] Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bauerlich Landwirtschaft, 2024, "Design of CAP mechanisms for fairer distribution : Analysis of the 28 strategic plans", available here

## 2.3. Access to markets and profitability

Farmers face many challenges, linked to profitability, uncertainty (market, price, yield, climate, etc.), and regulatory requirements. In addition, farmers generally and young farmers particularly, face issues linked to holding a weaker position within the supply chain compared to other actors. This is a major cause of why youth is reluctant to enter the sector. Conditions to enter the market (for example, setting up contracts with traders or vendors) and selling their products are a complex and difficult step for young (organic) farmers. There are also large discrepancies per product, so for example, sales contracts in the meat and milk sector are easier to establish than in the sector of vegetables and other food crops, where market access is generally poor and direct sales are often the only option.

Direct sales structures for organic farmers may strengthen the local economy and promote sustainable production and consumption models. Direct sales not only guarantee greater margins for producers, but also allow citizens to access healthy, traceable and short-chain food, contributing to the spread of organic culture in the area. However, it is important to emphasize that direct sales should not be the only option available to young organic farmers. Running a direct sales operation requires farmers to manage marketing and sales in addition to their agricultural work. While some may thrive in this setup, others might prefer to focus more on production. Furthermore, direct sales can work in areas where there is already an established infrastructure and community around direct sales, but in other regions, the entry barrier is simply too high. Improving market access would make it both more efficient and much safer for new organic farmers to establish.

It is also important to touch upon the true cost of food production. Farming practices are embedded in complex ecosystems with positive and negative externalities, that are currently not reflected in the pricing of the products[29]. True cost accounting levels the economic playing field and reveals the genuine value of sustainable agriculture. Currently, organic food production can seem costly due to higher production costs, which include labor-intensive practices, certification fees, and limited access to subsidies that conventional farmers often receive, despite providing socio-environmental benefits that are not accounted for from a purely economic standpoint. With true cost accounting, the real costs and benefits are revealed, making organic farming not only more competitive but also more attractive as a profession for the next generation[30].

[29] ScienceDirect, Amelie Michalke, and al., 2023, “True cost accounting of organic and conventional food production”, available here

[30] Food and agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Olivia Riemer, Tavseef Mairaj Shah, alexander Müller, 2023, “The role of true cost accounting in guiding agrifood businesses and investments towards sustainability”, available here

# 3. Recommendations to strengthen the position of organic youth

## 3.1. Secure access to land

- We endorse the creation of a European Agricultural Land Observatory, hosted by the Commission, in order to compile data on agricultural land purchase and rental markets, record prices, study the behaviour of owners and tenants on the markets, identify land use changes and the loss of agricultural land, study the extent of the societal phenomenon in land takeovers and assess its impact on the breakdown of social cohesion in rural areas. It is important that this tool is also used to guide and improve systems and tools for land market regulation to prioritise access to land for sustainable food production, including organic farming systems.
- The conduct of further studies within the framework of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) on the links between land concentration, farm expansion and their impact on both generational renewal and environmental degradation.
- European Directive on agricultural land. We believe it could encourage public-private partnerships to promote systems of public private land development that can prioritize new farm installations and land uses connected to organic and other agroecological practices, while regulating sale of land size and pricings and including citizens and civil society.
- It is necessary to guarantee public intervention in land transfers, either by regulating sales or by ensuring long-term leases for farmers. The Commission must ensure that land prices are not set by the market alone. We call for the establishment of a set of criteria as guidance for Member States to prioritise farming systems that are sustainable, such as organic and other agroecological practices, as well as support for generational renewal. The Commission should have the possibility to intervene if a sale is deemed in opposition to certain main objectives, notably preventing land concentration, ensuring land mobility, prioritising land use, and increasing transparency on land markets.
- Regulation of land as a market good: The taxation of land speculation and non-agricultural land purchases can reduce investors' interest from outside agriculture.
- The Commission must ensure that land is transferred to young people via public regulation, promoting tools that are used in several European countries and that have proven to be efficient, such as:
  (1) Pre-emption rights: also known as rights of first refusal, give specific individuals or entities the preferential right to purchase agricultural land before it is offered to other potential buyers. They may help to set a concrete framework to favor young farmers

who are promoting sustainable farming practices, maintaining the viability of rural communities by keeping land accessible and in active production. The 2025 Briefing by the European Parliamentary Research Service also suggests pre-emption rights as a possible pathway[31].

(2) Promotion of land banks that would aggregate abandoned and available land, involve public, associative and educational entities, and would have the capacity to provide it to young people, prioritising organic and other agroecological farming practices and leasing at favourable conditions. The report from Access to Land outlines various best practice examples and legal frameworks across Europe, providing useful lessons learned[32]. Main objectives of such a land bank should be to:
   - limit and control sale prices,
   - control farm size,
   - prioritise projects that wish to install,
   - prioritise organic and other agroecological production methods.

- Support diverse and alternative farm succession models and legal frameworks that support collective ownership and cooperative business structures. This would facilitate non-family farm succession which is increasingly common. To that end, the creation of an EU-wide promotion program for the financial and legal support of non-family farm handovers.

## 3.2. Create a fairer distribution of CAP funds towards youth and organic

It is necessary to change the way subsidies are distributed in the CAP, not according to the amount of land owned, capital or investment capacity, but according to the provision of socio-ecological practices and services to local communities and for the common good.

- Member States must allocate a sufficient and mandatory budget to young farmers and significantly increase the minimum level of funding beyond 3% of the overall CAP budget. In addition, there should also be an obligation to dedicate a certain share of the budget to supporting organic farming. There would be an incentive for Member States to allocate a special budget for young organic farmers to achieve both goals.

Both budgets should be used to achieve several mechanisms:

A fairer distribution of CAP funds, since currently 20% of CAP beneficiaries receive 80% of the funds (when it comes to direct payments), proving an unfair allocation of CAP money. Capping,

[31] European Parliament, 2025, “Generational renewal in EU agriculture”, available here
[32] AccessToLand, 2016, “Supporting access to land for farmers in Europe Experiences and potential of local authorities", available here

degressivity and redistribution can be tools that support a fairer distribution of CAP funds if well designed and thought in a general framework of CAP reform to target farmers that need it most.

- Hence, we should move away from the logic of granting aid based solely on the surface area of farms. The surface should be taken into account for some measures (e.g. agri-environmental payments), but it should not be the only factor to consider, especially regarding young farmers' start-up aids. Indeed, new entrants mostly start up their farms on smaller surfaces given the struggles to access land and investments. This change would make it possible to give priority to the employment of farmers on many farms rather than favouring salaried employment as part of the enlargement of farms and company structures. Shifting from a CAP mainly composed of subsidies based on area-surface payments to a CAP supporting farmers who need it the most, thanks to a budget looking at socio-economic criteria, would allow a radical shift in the logic of the CAP. It would support a fairer agricultural model that encourages young farmers to set up, preserves small and medium-sized farms, combats enlargement and stimulates employment in rural areas.
- Direct young farmers' payments in pillar 2 must include bonuses for organic young farmers, as a way to recognise the contribution of young farmers to develop organic agrifood practices and support projects in rural areas more broadly.
- The age limit "of young farmers" prevents a significant number of new farmers from accessing start-up aids: whereas farmers in family businesses often take over the farm under 40 years old, new entrants tend to set up their farms after a professional retraining, which may happen after 40 years old. This concerns especially women who have more discontinued careers – in France, they come into farming 6 years older on average than men[33]. In order to lift constraints on installation, gender equality, and agroecological transition, financial mechanisms by Member States to support older new entrants should be improved and aligned throughout Europe alongside young farmers' payments.
- Free and accessible advisory services should be independent (i.e. not linked to companies from the chemicals industry) and equipped to accompany farmers who want to engage in sustainable farming, such as organic and other agroecological practices. They would exist in addition to public services available for all people living in rural areas. While education and training are national competences and agricultural education systems vary widely throughout the EU, the CAP has some tools which put a strong emphasis on knowledge sharing and innovation. It provides specific measures

[33] Agence Bio, 2023, "1er Baromètre du moral des agricultrices et agriculteurs bio 2023", available here

to help farmers access advice and training throughout their working lives through CAP direct support for AKIS, for example.

## 3.3. Ensure access to finance for young organic farmers and entrepreneurs

Young organic farmers and new entrants face systemic barriers to accessing finance, which undermines generational renewal and the broader transition toward sustainable agriculture. We need tailored financial instruments for young farmers and new entrants that reflect the realities of organic farming and ensure equitable access to capital. We have several recommendations:

- Fostering stronger collaboration between financial institutions, governments and farmer organisations to improve understanding of the specific needs of young organic entrepreneurs. Banks and mutual funds must offer financial products that reflect the long-term nature of organic farming, including its conversion periods, ecological benefits, and potentially delayed returns on investment.
- Improving access to finance across the entire supply chain for young entrepreneurs, not just at the farm level. Young entrepreneurs need support to build and participate in resilient, sustainable food systems – this includes funding for local mills, bakeries, cooperatives, processing units, and community distribution models.
- Integrating financial education and literacy into vocational agricultural training, apprenticeships, and secondary education curricula. Young farmers must be equipped not only with technical skills but also with the knowledge to manage finances, assess investment opportunities, and negotiate fair contracts.
- Expanding the range of financial tools available, such as rent-to-own models for land and equipment, convertible loans, zero-interest rate or subsidised loans for investment, and other financing mechanisms tailored to sustainable production practices and seasonal cash flows.
- Revising the Common Market Organisation (CMO) to guarantee fair prices for agricultural products. Farmers must be able to earn a decent livelihood from the market, not rely on subsidies to survive. This will support the economic viability of sustainable farming and encourage new entrants into the sector.
- Increase the premium and investment funds for instalments for young farmers, tied to specific project(s).

## 3.4. Strengthen the position of farmers in the supply chain

Improving (young) farmers' position in the supply chain is crucial to ensure fair and predictable incomes and a sustainable agricultural sector. Mechanisms must be implemented to ensure a fair distribution of profits between farmers and retailers in the organic value chain.

- A combination of supporting direct sales, transparent market conditions and regulated contract conditions, and short supply chains might be a viable pathway. At the local level, farmers' markets are a key tool for supporting young agricultural producers, particularly those engaged in organic and sustainable practices. More and more municipal governments and territorial networks are promoting direct sales spaces, which allow young farmers to shorten the supply chain, obtain a fair price for their products and build direct relationships with local communities. Best practices such as the Italian farmers' markets in Rome, Bologna and Turin show how logistical and regulatory support from local authorities can facilitate market access for those who are at the beginning of their entrepreneurial journey, enhancing biodiversity, seasonality and the environmental quality of production. These spaces also become places for food education, social innovation and territorial praesidium.
- Furthermore, public procurement is a powerful tool to stimulate the demand for organic products and support (young) organic farmers by offering them a stable market for their products. Engaging in market dialogues with producers and public institutions and introducing targets for organic food in public food procurement would benefit organic farmers by creating a positive shock in the demand for organic products. Among the positive examples is the city of Copenhagen which reached almost 90% organic public procurement in its public canteens, all by reducing food waste and with no effect on expenditure[34]. Another example is the French city of Mouans-Sartoux, which has been co-leading the BioCanteens project, distributing fully organic and local food daily for the last 20 years[35].
- There is a need for mechanisms that regulate contract conditions, particularly regarding minimum delivery volumes, so that they are more accessible to smaller or newer producers. Lowering these thresholds could allow more young farmers to enter into contracts, thereby improving their access to the market.
- Furthermore, the Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) directive is certainly a step in the right direction to regulate contract conditions, but it does not seem to have significantly changed the fear of retaliation faced by farmers. As such, revision and improved enforcement of the UTP Directive are key to addressing market distortions and power imbalances between (young) farmers and large buyers, preventing exploitative practices such as late payments, unfair contract changes, and excessive price pressure. The UTP needs to explicitly prohibit the purchase of agricultural goods below

[34] IFOAM Organics Europe, Paul Holmbeck , 2020, "Best practice in Organic Public Procurement: The case of Denmark", available here
[35] Maison d'Education à l'Alimentation Durable, available here

production costs and the practice of selling food at a loss and increase market certainty for farmers.

## 3.5. Consider young entrepreneurs throughout the value chains

Systemic challenges require systemic solutions: the entire food production chain must be taken into consideration in the discussion on generational renewal. Support for young farmers only works if upstream and downstream actors are supported, too. To that end, we call for:

- More research for the sustainable transformation of the food chain and innovative practices across the supply chain.
- Mentorship programs, masterclasses, and the facilitation of international collaboration between young entrepreneurs in the (organic) food chain. Currently, many of these initiatives remain organised privately with a lack of funding and are scattered (such as the Organic Business Leadership Academy). A systemised facilitation of the exchange by the Commission would be helpful to boost knowledge exchange, best practice learnings and network-building. Innovation in the supply chain is increasingly broad, including AI and technology inventions. This leads to new interests, opportunities, business concepts, and alliances in the agri-food chain, and the Commission should take a central role in connecting these newly arising stakeholders and alliances.

Moreover, in the retail and wholesale sector, there is often a lack of viable succession plans, meaning that many companies are sold to private equity firms or conventional industry actors. Especially for the organic sector, a lot of the retail and wholesale market is still carried forward by first-generation pioneers who started their business in the 1970s. Generational renewal in management structures is vital to their continued success.

- Options for succession include cooperative buy-in models and branching out of the store, which can be managed by a young person who will gain experience and eventually may take over the initial store.

In parallel, there is a trend towards market concentration in the retail sector, also posing challenges for generational renewal for young organic entrepreneurs. For example, in Germany, specialised organic shops are decreasing: While the number of organic stores was 2.042 in 2023, the year after there were only 1.974[36] despite the growing organic market.

[36] BioHandel, 2024, “Der Bio-Fachhandel schrumpft weiter", available here

- Hence, an exchange of best practices and guidelines for successful succession models would be very useful.

## 3.6. Enhance opportunities in vocational training and education

As a foundation for sustainable agriculture, young farmers and entrepreneurs need to learn the necessary skills to be able to act in an ever-changing field of work, marked by increasingly noticeable environmental changes and new social demands. The 16-point vision plan developed by the Organic Future Camp lines out: "Young perspectives on a sustainable agriculture and food system of the future need inclusive, attractive training conditions, meaning holistic agroecological education that is regularly updated in a participatory way, is practice-based, includes teacher training, and allows for accessible (re)entry pathways."[37]

Problematically, today's agricultural vocational training is strongly influenced by conventional methods in its in-company, inter-company, and vocational school components. For example, in Germany, even though the framework curriculum recommends that 80 out of a total of 880 teaching units in agriculture training should be devoted to teaching organic farming, this is not implemented in any federal state. Another example is France, where only 5% of public agricultural education is organic-oriented training courses. Across Europe, there are only fourteen master's degrees that offer a training in organic agriculture. Some of them are solely focused on this very topic (e.g. BOKU University in Austria or South East Technological University, Ireland) while others either combine it with other related topics like Animal Sciences (Aarhus University) or offer it as a module within a master's degree.

At the same time**,** the evolution of the agricultural employment market poses new, additional demands on adequate vocational training: in France, for instance, the organic sector represents 16% of agricultural employment, and organic farms employ 30% more workers than conventional farms[38]. There is an increasing pool of people to train in order to meet economic demands. The lack of and insufficiencies of educational possibilities pose additional hurdles to young farmers and new entrants.

Since the in-company part of the training is subject to the respective trainer and their individual operational requirements, the vocational school and inter-company training are essential to provide a theoretical foundation and practical skills development.

- While we advocate for a stronger integration of components of organic farming and a revision of the understanding of 'organic' within the agricultural vocational training,

[37] Organic Future Camp, 2025, "16-POINT PLAN OF THE ORGANIC FUTURE CAMP (OFC) 2025", available here
[38] Agence Bio (2023), & Ministère de l'agriculture et de la souveraineté alimentaire, 2024, " Infographie - L'agriculture biologique (chiffres 2023)", available here

importantly, separating conventional and organic farming methods in schools, as is often the case, counterproductively produces prejudices or camp thinking.

- Interdisciplinary and integrative vocational training that is more strongly oriented towards the basic principles of agricultural production allows a neutral examination of the teaching content at the beginning of an agricultural training path. While it might be a good first step, merely adding additional topics to the general agriculture curriculum, such as a mandatory course on organic farming, instead of integrating the content, is insufficient.
- We therefore advocate for a holistic view of the complex agricultural system with a new understanding of the basic pillars of agriculture in vocational training. Promoting soil fertility, preserving biodiversity, using adapted organic varieties, and operating in closed material cycles are decisive criteria that determine the sustainability of an agricultural system. The basic principles of organic farming in its core components (soil, plant, animal, and human) are therefore the starting point for all agricultural production.
- Furthermore, there needs to be investment in building and attracting expertise on the side of the teachers: Teachers may lack the knowledge to convey the principles and techniques of organic farming practices. In a survey conducted in France, 72% of teachers in agricultural education programs say that they need more technical content to feel able to teach organic farming[39].
- To that end, we fully support recommendations featured in the Strategic Dialogue Report[40] for the European Commission to adopt a cross directorate-general approach to develop, by mid-2026, a common educational strategy for better information on agricultural occupations to be implemented across different educational institutions and programs. As the report points out, "it should include information on socio-ecologically and economically attractive transition farming systems, namely organic farming practices".
- Also reflected in the recommendations of the report, we further advocate for the review of the Commission's existing youth programs, such as Erasmus+, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, and other initiatives, to ensure better inclusion and representation of farming and food systems in those programs.

[39] "Enquête auprès des établissements de l'enseignement agricole pour mieux intégrer l'AB dans leur activité", [Inquiry on the agricultural schools to better integrate organic in their educational work] FNAB study for the French Ministry of Agriculture (non-published), 2020

[40] European Commission, 2024, "Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture delivers its final report to President von der Leyen", available here

Lastly, we would like to stress two points: access to vocational training is also essential for young entrepreneurs beyond the farming perspective.

- Courses and learning content about organic agriculture and other agroecological practices should be more integrated in an interdisciplinary vision, for instance, in education around marketing, food technology and processing, culinary schools, etc.
- The role of youth associations is very important in terms of knowledge exchange and networking opportunities. These organizations act as important bridges between youth passionate and engaged in food and farming and help to build expertise.

### 3.7. Adress structural rural vitality through improved services and development

Access to rural services is necessary to enable rural development, which is a fundamental aspect of generational renewal, as it is a very important incentive for young people to become farmers and move to rural areas, and lack thereof might be a major deterrent. The rural population in the EU faces significant structural barriers regarding access to health, social, and economic services. About 51-67% of the rural population lacks access to essential health services. In some regions, there are ten times fewer health workers than in urban areas[41].

This is also a central tenant of the vision of youth, co-created at the Organic Future Camp 2025, namely: "the revitalisation of rural areas, especially through investment in care, mobility, education, health, and cultural infrastructure to enhance their attractiveness and social equity".

- It is essential to have support services for populations, schools, health, internet, transport, etc. It is a way of establishing a population and combating depopulation. It is very important for intergenerational dialogue, as there is no rural territory with only young people.

Importantly, bio-districts play an important role in revitalising rural areas, making this area more attractive for young farmers and new entrants. A bio-district is a geographical area where farmers, citizens, schools, tourist operators, associations, and public authorities enter into an agreement for the sustainable management of local resources, based on organic production and consumption (short food chain, purchasing groups, organic canteens in public offices and schools). There are currently 50 bio-districts in Europe.

[41] EURIPA, 2024, "ACEM 2024 Abstract Boook, Tackling Health Inequalities in Rural and Remote Communities", here

*Interestingly, the creation of the bio-district Idanha-A-Nova reduced the exodus from rural areas to big cities, so much so that in the 1950, the population was 35.000 inhabitants, 70% less compared to now.*

Bio-districts can include as many as 400 organic companies and 40 municipalities, thus bringing life back into the rural area. The Cilento bio-district is another interesting example as it gets young people involved in revitalising rural areas. It partners with the Erasmus + EduEcoRegion Project and the beeB project to support the ecological transition of territories and communities and changes in beekeeping through training possibilities[42].

## 4. Conclusion

The Organics Europe Youth Network welcomes the ongoing initiatives of the European Commission to address the issue of generational renewal and urge policymakers to take into consideration the extensive recommendations outlined in this position paper. Young voices of the organic movement are keen to make themselves heard towards policymakers and take an active role in shaping the sustainable transformation of European food and farming.

To that end, the role of associations as a bridge between individuals and policymakers is essential: existing young (organic) farming and food associations need to be strengthened and the creation of new organic youth organisations, particularly on national level, need to be promoted, among other things in terms of financial support.

With the right political and legal framework in place, policymakers can empower a new generation of farmers and food producers. The organic sector already offers a viable pathway for young entrepreneurs, and, with supportive policies, it can become a cornerstone of generational renewal in European agriculture. Because generational renewal and organic farming go hand in hand, we carry a strong vision for the future of farming towards organic and agroecological practices, and we advocate policies that reflect the values and needs of the next generation.

[42] Distretti Biologici o Bio-Distretti o Evo-Regioni, "Associazione Bio-distretto Cilento APS", available here