

POLICY BRIEF

Organic farming: the key to EU strategic autonomy and resilience

Input dependence is import dependence

Geopolitical volatility is a threat to food security, if an agricultural system relies heavily on external inputs. Each geopolitical crisis exposes the EU's vulnerability on imported energy, synthetic fertilisers, feed, and long supply chains. **To ease its exposure, the EU must reduce not only fertiliser imports but fertiliser use. And how to decrease synthetic fertiliser use in practice?**

In a fossil-based economy shaped by fossil-focused global geopolitical tensions, the EU food system must be prepared for recurring systemic shocks and move from ad hoc crisis management to structural, long-term resilience. **By avoiding synthetic inputs and focusing on short, diverse supply chains, organic farming exemplifies an EU food system with more strategic autonomy and resilience.**

As The Middle East Crisis Temporary State Aid Framework (METSAF)ⁱ attests, fertilisers are a critical input cost and food security risk, evidencing strong links between gas dependency, fertiliser prices, and farm vulnerability. As a result of 35% increases in the price of Brent crude and EU gas in April 2026, nitrogen fertiliser prices skyrocketed 60% above the 2024 average with an additional sharp price increase in agricultural fuel. Market shocks pose hard dilemmas to farmers with severe production consequences. However, temporary relief is not a solution to structural risks.

Synthetic fertilisers are mostly imported commodities. The EU's dependency on imports for nitrogenous, phosphorous, and potassic fertilisers was higher in 2024 than in 2014-2020 and has been unsteadily increasing. With the ratio of imports to domestic production reaching over 60%, EU agriculture is highly exposed to international markets through its fertiliser consumption.ⁱⁱ

Moreover, these imports are concentrated with a handful of trading partners. In 2024, more than 50% of nitrogenous fertilisers imports came from Egypt and Russia, more than 50% of phosphatic fertilisers from Morocco or Russia, and almost 60% of potassic fertilisers from Canada or Russia.ⁱⁱⁱ

Systemic costs

Non-organic farms rely on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides to control nutrients in the soil and pests in the field. This level of chemical control brings potentially higher yearly yields—at the cost of depleting soil organic matter, accelerating soil erosion, disrupting water cycles, shattering ecosystems above and below ground, and impairing pollination services. Such fields suffer more from extreme weather events and climatic pressures and must resort to more external inputs, closing a vicious circle.

Excess nutrients tend to vaporise, run off, or leach into waterways from the fields, leading to eutrophication (excessive concentration of nutrients, commonly phosphates and nitrates, in a body of water) and damaging local and coastal ecosystems. Nitrogen fertiliser production is also energy intensive, accounting for 50% of energy use in European agriculture as well as 37.5 Mt CO₂ emissions in the EU.^{iv}

On top of these externalities, it is farmers who internalise synthetic input costs. Fertiliser costs represent a significant share of farm expenditures in the EU, with an average of 7% of farmers' direct costs^v—€100-€200€ per ha, peaking at €1,200 per ha in horticulture^{vi}. Reducing fertiliser use could redirect funds towards more knowledge-intensive cultivation such as organic.

SUMMARY

- Food is not a commodity but a strategic asset.
- To improve food security, the EU should reduce dependence on imported products and inputs and thus on volatile international markets and transport routes.
- For that, the EU must cut not only synthetic fertiliser imports but synthetic fertiliser use.
- Organic farming avoids synthetic fertilisers and thus shows the way to a more autonomous and resilient food system.
- To minimise synthetic fertiliser use, input and import dependence, and thus agricultural and food-related market vulnerabilities, the EU must prioritise the structural growth and development of the organic sector and market.

Having 25% of agricultural land under organic conversion could decrease synthetic nitrogen fertiliser use by 2.7 Mt, or 26% of the total that might be used without any organic farming. This could mean potential reductions of up to 25 Mt CO₂e in agricultural emissions including 9.5 Mt CO₂e manufacturing sector emissions. Moreover, the organic targets would reduce pesticide use in the EU by 20-23%.

The future is organic

To minimise EU synthetic fertiliser use and thus agricultural vulnerabilities, structural measures are needed for the growth and development of the organic sector. Incentives for farmers to convert to and maintain organic farming and for consumers to buy organic products are essential.

Organic farming avoids synthetic nitrogen fertiliser and most pesticides, resulting in less emissions, less nitrate leaching and eutrophication, and more biodiversity. Organic relies on local, natural resources to produce food. It works with soil microorganisms, natural predators, pollinators, biological nitrogen fixation through legumes, nutrient cycling, and holistic management practices that strengthen production stability, ecological and economic robustness, farm autonomy, and land worker wellbeing. Organic farmers have a vested interest in protecting and restoring agroecosystems that provide invaluable services and enable resilience in times of crisis.^{vii}

The organic sector has built practical knowledge and experience over decades on strengthening resilience on the ground through:

- stronger territorial organisation of food systems,
- closer links between production, processing, and local markets, shorter and more diversified supply chains,
- greater attention to protein autonomy,
- decentralised energy solutions, e.g., renewable energy communities,
- nutrient cycling and soil fertility management without synthetic fertiliser use,
- prioritising soil health to better cope with extreme weather events.

Achieving the EU's organic target, 25% of agricultural land under organic, would decrease synthetic nitrogen fertiliser use by 2.7 Mt, or 26% of the total that might be used without any organic farming. This reduction is important for water quality, biodiversity, and greenhouse gas emissions. Besides reducing structural dependencies, this would mean potential reductions of up to 25 Mt CO₂e in agricultural emissions, including 9.5 Mt CO₂e manufacturing sector emissions. Moreover, 25% EU agricultural land under organic would reduce overall EU pesticide use by 20-23%.^{viii}

Developing the organic sector requires **consistent policy commitment and funding support for organic at EU and national levels alike** to boost strategic autonomy and resilience by reducing input and import dependence and strengthening ecosystem services. Agriculture policy must prioritise reducing fertiliser dependency, incentivising nutrient cycling, legumes, and soil health, and supporting inputs compatible with organic production.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Commission's Temporary Iran Crisis Framework should recognise organic as a concrete pathway to minimise vulnerability in the EU agri-food sector and a competitive agricultural model less dependent on input prices.

The **MFF** and **CAP** post 2027 should:

- Ringfence 30% of the CAP budget for agri-environmental and climate actions, including support for organic
- Guarantee no backsliding in financial support for organic farmers in the new CAP
- Prioritise whole-farm approaches regulated at EU level
- Capitalise on synergies between organic and generational renewal, as young farmers are more interested in organic farming
- Support investments in low input systems, on-farm renewables, protein autonomy, and short supply chains.
- Prioritise decentralised food systems by directing investments into shared processing and storage facilities, mobile slaughterhouses, short value chains, territorial networks, and renewable energy communities at local, regional levels.

Read the organic movement's [position paper](#) on the post-2027 CAP and [reaction](#) to the Fertiliser Action Plan!

IFOAM Organics Europe is the European umbrella organisation for organic food and farming. With almost 200 members in 34 European countries, our work spans the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors organisations, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders, and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies.

ⁱ https://competition-policy.ec.europa.eu/state-aid/legislation/metsaf_en

ⁱⁱ Eurostat data, "Fertiliser production overview" (Fertiliser production > Detailed production (yearly)) and "All trade data (bulk)" (Fertiliser trade > Data Explorer).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-18773-w.pdf>;

Lampkin and Padel, 2022, Environmental impacts of achieving the EU's 25% organic land by 2030 target: a preliminary assessment, Report for IFOAM Organics Europe, <https://www.organicseurope.bio/library/environmental-impacts-of-achieving-the-eus-25-organic-land-by-2030-target-a-preliminary-assessment>.

^v Eurostat data, "Share of fertilisers costs in direct costs, 2022, all types of farms".

^{vi} Eurostat data, "Cost of fertilizers per hectare (Euro/ha) by type of farming, EU27".

^{vii} Carlotta Garancini, "The Strait of Hormuz and the Fertilizer Crisis: Why Food Independence Requires Organic Farming," 11 May 2026, [Lifegate.it](https://lifegate.it).

^{viii} Lampkin and Padel, 2022.