



Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 23-Mar-1999

GAIN Report #FR9022

## France : Organic Farming Increased during 1998

Prepared by:

**Mattie R. Sharpless**  
**U.S. Embassy, Paris**

Drafted by:

Roselyne Gauthier

### Report Highlights:

**France ranks fourth in the European Union in organic farming after Italy, Germany and Austria. The Government of France's five year action plan to help French farmers to convert to organic agriculture has encouraged expansion of organic production.**

**This report was prepared by the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service for U.S. exporters of food and agricultural products. This information is in the public domain and may be reprinted without permission. Use of commercial or trade names does not imply approval nor constitute endorsement by USDA/FAS.**

## **Summary**

France is catching up with other important organic producers. The number of farmers and cultivated areas converted to organic agriculture strongly increased during 1998. However, France ranks fourth within the European Union countries in terms of organic agriculture cultivated area with 220,000 hectares, after Italy (640,000 hectares), Germany (390,000 hectares) and Austria (345,000 hectares). As a result, France needs to import large quantities of organic grains mainly from Central Europe. Organic milk production is also insufficient to satisfy French demand; up to half of the organic milk consumed in France is imported from Germany and Belgium.

## **Update on French Organic Farming**

According to the French Observatory for Organic Agriculture (see Note below), at the end of calendar year 1998, France had 6,130 organic farmers, an increase of 28 percent over 1997, for a total organic cultivated land area of 218,000 hectares (up 32 percent over 1997), representing 0.6 percent of total cultivated area. These increases are principally the result of an action plan put in place at the end of 1997 by the Government of France (GOF) to stimulate French production, distribution and sales of organic foods over a five-year period (1998-2002).

When he was appointed Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (MINAG) at the end of 1998, Minister Glavany increased financial support to farmers to help them convert to organic agriculture. According to the Observatory, this may result in an increase of 22 percent of organic farms in 1999, to 7,500, for a cultivated land area of 270,000 hectares, an increase of 23 percent in organic cultivated land area over 1998.

The West and South of France are the most dynamic regions; the Midi-Pyrénées region (southwest of France) is the leader with a cultivated area of 23,500 hectares, followed by the Loire region (23,100 hectares).

## **Organic Production in France and the Boom in Organic Animal Production**

Increasing consumer demand for organic meat and animal products resulted in increased production in 1998. Organic hog production more than doubled during 1998, compared to 1997, with over 20,000 head. Organic poultry production also increased over 50 percent and sheep production increased 45 percent. However, the increase in the vegetable organic production sector during 1998 is not as spectacular at 16 percent; the biggest increase being in protein seeds (up 42 percent), while grazing and fruit culture increased 22 percent (87,600 hectares) and 14 percent (3,700 hectares) respectively. Organic oilseed land area decreased 7 percent to 5,400 hectares in 1998.

Note: An entity managed by the French Permanent Assembly of Chambers of Agriculture (APCA), with the support of the French Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MINAG), and the sponsorship of the French Association for Organic Farming (FNAB), and the Professional Association of Organic Processors and Distributors (BIOCONVERGENCE).

*Changes in the Evolution of the Organic Farming in France*

	1997	1998	% Change 98/97
Number of Organic Farming	4,780	6,130	+28
<b>ORGANIC PRODUCTION AREAS (in hectares)</b>			
Grains	22,900	24,600	+9
Oilseeds	5,900	5,400	-7
Protein seeds	1,200	1,700	+42
Vegetables	4,000	4,200	+5
Fruits	3,300	3,700	+14
Vineyard	4,700	4,800	+2
Grazing and fodder	71,800	87,600	+22
TOTAL	122,300	142,300	+16
<b>ORGANIC ANIMAL PRODUCTION (in heads)</b>			
Dairy cows	15,100	19,600	+30
Suckling cows	12,800	15,900	+24
Suckling sheep	21,900	30,900	+41
Laying hens	691,000	1,044,000	+51
Poultry meat	2,336,000	3,594,000	+54
Hogs for pork meat	8,400	20,900	+149

Source: French Observatory for Organic Farming

The Observatory pointed out that the French deficit in organic proteins for animal feed doubled in 1998, to reach 20,000 tons equivalent of soybean meal, most of which had to be imported. Currently, France imports 40 percent of organic foods from third countries. However, most third country regulations on organics are not equivalent to EU regulation, making this a problem for both French producers and consumers.

## **Consumption and Trade**

By the year 2000, organic food product consumption in France should reach three percent of total household food consumption. Sales of organic products in supermarkets are booming, with total 1998 sales estimated at FF 1.5 billion (\$257 million), representing 38 percent of total sales of organic food products in France. Sales in specialized stores are estimated at FF 1.1 billion (\$187 million). Direct sales at open air markets and bakery shop sales of organic foods totaled FF 1.3 billion (\$223 million) in 1998. In terms of value, the organic food products which sell the best in France are cereals, dairy products, fruits and vegetables, and meat and poultry.

The French market for organic foods is facing five major obstacles:

— Prices are high;

— Visual and gustatory qualities: Consumers accept bruised fruits since they understand that natural fruits need to grow without pesticides, but they do not fully understand that an organic toast without additives contains irregular holes. Consumers also require tasty products, and the quality labels on organic food assure this tasty requirement.

— A lack of conformity and recognition of organic logos: To fight against this confusion, MINAG created the “AB” (organic agriculture) logo. The “AB” logo is now fairly well known by French consumers and is applied only to organic food products for human consumption. Manufacturers of organic animal has also require that this logo be applied on their products.

— Multiple specifications: In other European countries, the logo for organic foods is different from the French “AB” logo, thereby making the sale and/or recognition of an organic food product difficult in other EU countries. EU harmonized specifications for vegetable products exist, while for meat and animal products no such harmonized specifications exist at this time.

— French farmers’ hesitation: France’s delay in developing organic farming resulted in the country importing 30,000 tons of organic foods in 1997, compared to 1,370 tons four years earlier. Currently 30 percent of organic milk sold by Carrefour, one of the largest French supermarkets, is imported from a certified milk cooperative in Germany. Despite these opportunities, French animal breeders hesitate to invest in organic production since they are not certain of future demand, given that there are still questions about future EU regulations for meat and animal products.

