

PRESS RELEASE

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Release immediate

Government urged to commit to expanding organic food and farming to ensure a Green Brexit

The English Organic Forum has written to Environment Secretary of State Michael Gove highlighting that the UK is lagging behind its major European competitors in the development of organic food and farming. The letter sets out why stronger support for organic farming would be a significant opportunity to deliver both economic and environmental benefits, consistent with government policy aspirations.

Nic Lampkin, Chair of the English Organic Forum and Director of the Organic Research Centre, says: “The UK needs to up its game and focus more on organic food and farming if it is to reach its ambition for a new agricultural policy that delivers public goods as well as economic benefits. Organic food and farming is closely aligned to the Government’s key aspiration of a ‘Green Brexit’. We would like to have seen more focus on organic, with all its benefits, in the consultation proposals on future food and farming policy.”

Consumer demand for organic food and farming has seen record breaking growth in the UK and globally.

Adrian Blackshaw, Chair of the Organic Trade Board says, “Currently the European organic market is worth over £30 billion, while globally the organic market has reached £70 billion retail sales value. In the UK the organic market achieved £2.2 billion retail sales value, with nearly 7% growth in 2017. But many EU countries have seen 20% market growth rates in recent years, with market shares approaching 10% of food sales. Clearly we have some catching up to do just to satisfy growing consumer demand.”

Organic farming accounts for 6.7% of farmland under production in the EU (UK 3%). Italy, Sweden and Austria are between 15-20%. President Macron has declared a target of 22% of French farmland to be organic by 2022 and the German government coalition agreement includes a target of 20% of German agriculture to be organic by 2030.

Helen Browning, Chief Executive of the Soil Association, said: “A bold government commitment to the UK becoming a world-leader in organic farming would benefit nature, improve animal welfare, and help farm businesses to innovate and thrive – demonstrating that there doesn’t need to be a trade-off between food production and environmental protection. Stronger support for organic, as part of a transition to a sustainable food system, would also show that government is prepared to act on consumer concerns about food provenance, farm animal welfare, and pesticide use.”

The English Organic Forum believes that there is a significant opportunity for the UK to catch up and achieve a share of at least 10% of UK food and farming, given appropriate support. Indeed, meeting more of the current and potential future demand for organic food from domestic production, rather than imports, would deliver economic and environmental benefits.

Roger Kerr, CEO of Organic Farmers and Growers said, “We are surprised that organic wasn’t more widely identified in the consultation documents. Organic production is backed up by a legal regulation with annual inspections, certification and verification. With this robust approach Defra can have confidence in organic food and farming delivering both economic benefits and public goods for all.”

Ministers have recently confirmed that organic farming and food makes a significant contribution to environmental objectives and consumer choice. Building on this, a positive organic policy would provide space for new environmentally benign and innovative rural strategies that would build on the entrepreneurial vigour shown by many farmers and land managers. Organic can be a test-bed for a resilient food system that operates within a thriving countryside, enhancing biodiversity and using animal welfare friendly production methods with proven potential to benefit all farmers and consumers.

The letter has been sent as Michael Gove prepares to address the Prosperity UK Green Brexit Conference in London on Thursday 15th March, which will see many of the issues raised, and the potential contribution of organic food and farming debated.

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Nic Lampkin, Roger Kerr and Helen Browning will be attending the Prosperity UK London Conference: *Green Brexit, A new Era for Farming, Fishing and the Environment*, at County Hall, Westminster, on Thursday 15th March. They will be available to comment on Defra’s consultation proposals.

Notes to editors

The English Organic Forum represents organic organisations and businesses including: Abacus Agriculture Ltd.; Biodynamic Association; EcoS Consultancy; Future Sustainability; Garden Organic; Institute of Organic Training and Advice; Land Workers’ Alliance; Organic Arable; Organic Farmers and Growers CIC; Organic Food Federation; Organic Growers Alliance; Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative; Organic Research Centre; Organic Trade Board; Soil Association; Triodos Bank; SA Cert Ltd.; UK Organic Certifiers Group.