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## Organic Farming in the Netherlands 2001

**Francesco Melita**

Complete up-date by the author, August 2001

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## 1 General Information on Agriculture in the Netherlands

With a total surface area of about 4.15 million hectares the Netherlands ranks among the smaller countries in western Europe; it is slightly smaller than Denmark, but bigger than Belgium. As the population of the Netherlands is 16 million in the year 2001, it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

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The limited land area puts an almost permanent pressure on rural areas. They have to provide opportunities for economic production and transportation. At the same time valuable nature areas and unique landscapes must be safeguarded for future generations.

The agricultural area amounts to two million hectares, and in 1999 there were altogether 103000 farms. Four percent of the labour force works in agriculture. Farming concentrates on cattle (56 percent), horticulture (21 percent) and arable cropping (14 percent). Fruit-growing farms account for five percent of the farms and mixed farms for four percent.

## 2 History and Development of Organic Agriculture

In the Netherlands two types of organic agriculture can be distinguished: bio-dynamic and ecological farming. The history of organic agriculture starts in 1926 with the first bio-dynamic farm in Zeeland, Loverendale.

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In 1947 the Warmonderhof (<http://www.warmonderhof.nl/warmhof/index2.htm>) in Warmond establishes the first bio-dynamic agriculture school. In 1964 the first bio-dynamic advisor starts working.

In the course of the sixties the ecological movement comes into being. In contrast to bio-dynamic agriculture with its philosophical background ecological agriculture has social and environmental roots. Protection of the environment, being careful with natural resources, energy and a changing society are the most important objectives of ecological agriculture. The organic sector is slowly growing: in 1972 the Netherlands numbers 85 organic farms, at the end of the eighties 359.

In the nineties, organic agriculture receives more and more recognition and the organic sector becomes more and more professional. A new organisation for the entire sector is founded in 1992: Platform Biologica (<http://www.platformbiologica.nl/>).

Also in 1992 the conversion regulation comes into effect: farmers who wish to convert are subsidised by the state. Food surpluses, manure problems, the swine-fever, various food scandals (BSE, dioxin etc.) and falling prices in conventional agriculture result in more and more conventional farmers becoming interested in organic farming and in consumers demanding safe products. The organic sector slowly out-

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grows its "do-gooders" image. Research shows that organic farmers have a comparable - if not better - income than their conventional colleagues. Most farmers converting now opt for ecological farming. After some years of ecological management a number of farms choose for bio-dynamic agriculture.

In the Netherlands there is a growing consensus regarding the necessity for a more sustainable form of agriculture. In a country as densely populated and as intensively cultivated as the Netherlands an increase in organic agriculture is urgently needed to safeguard the environment for future generations and provide for healthy food-products. Platform Biologica, the umbrella organisation for the organic sector, advocates the realisation of ten percent organic agriculture by 2010.

In 1996 the [Ministry of Agriculture](http://www.minlnv.nl/) (<http://www.minlnv.nl/>) developed an action plan for organic agriculture. It is currently revising the action plan and now supports the ten percent goal. Yet it is still hesitant to invest sufficiently in conversion schemes.

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The current Minister of Agriculture has proposed to stop the conversion schemes in 2002. That would make the Netherlands the only country in Europe that does not support financially farmers in conversion.

### 3 Statistical Development of Organic Farming

The organic share in the total agricultural surface in the Netherlands is relatively small. As of July 2001 1.47 percent of the total agricultural area is organically managed (see [table](#)).

In the nineties, however, the growth increased considerably. Between 1993 and 1997 an average of 60 farms per year converted. In 1998 and 1999 more than 200 farms converted per year which is the equivalent in growth of more than 25 percent per year.

In the last two years the growth rate dropped to 14% in 2000 and 8% in 2001.

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■ Table: Dutch Organic Agriculture 2001 in Figures (July 2001)

Number of organic farms	1436
Number of certified farms	1128
Number of farms in transition	308
% of total number of farms	1.53 (total number of farms = 93,820)
Hectares under organic management	29,393
% of total agricultural area	1.47 (total = 2 million ha)

(Source: [Skal/Blik](#))

■ Table: Growth of organic farms and land under organic management 1993-2001

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Year	1993	1994	1995	1996
Farms	455	512	561	656
Hectares	11,150	11,340	12,909	14,456

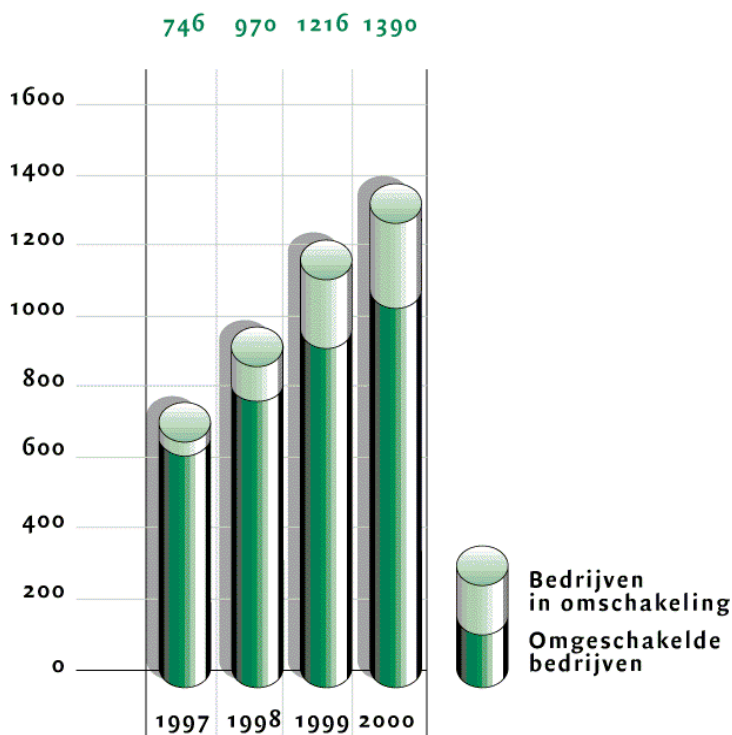
Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001 (July)
Farms	746	962	1,216	1,390	1436
Hectares	16,960	19,323	22,997	27,800	28,720

(Source: Skal /Blik)

■ Graph: Growth of the number of organic farms in the Netherlands 1997 to 2000 (light green: conversion farms, dark green, organic farms)

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Source/Copyright: Platform Biologica



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#### 4 Organic Agriculture Organisations and Logos

##### Federation of Organic Farmers



The organic farmers are organised in two organisations. One is the NVEL (Nederlandse Vereniging voor de Ekologische Landbouw) the organisation for ecological farmers, which was founded in 1983.

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The VB-DB (Vereniging van Biologisch-Dynamische Boeren) is the organisation for bio-dynamic farmers, which was founded in 1976.



**Federatie van Biologische Boeren** In 1995 these organisations joined forces in the Federation of Organic Farmers (Federatie van Biologische Boeren). The Federation safeguards the interests of the organic farmers in the Netherlands.

Their main aims are:

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- safeguard realistic prices for organic products
- improvement of national and EU-legislation on organic agriculture
- increase in the demand for organic products through improved consumer information
- safeguard the natural character of organic agriculture

The Federation of Organic Farmers is a member of Platform Biologica, the umbrella organisation for the whole organic sector.

### Skal



Since 1985 Skal (<http://www.skal.com/>) controls compliance to the [Council Regulation \(EEC\) 2092/901](#) ([http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/nl/lif/dat/1991/nl\\_391R2092.html](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/nl/lif/dat/1991/nl_391R2092.html)).

Its main aim is to guarantee a good and reliable certification of organic production.

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### Vereniging van biologische Productie en Handelsbedrijven VBP



VBP (Vereniging Biologische Productie- en Handelsbedrijven) is the organisation of processors and traders of organic products.

It was founded in 1995, uniting three smaller associations of processors. The main aim of the VBP is to defend the common interests of their members and to stimulate the trade and processing of organic products.

### Platform Biologica

Until 1992 there were two organisations: Biologica being mainly active in the fields of consumer information and marketing and Platform Biologische Landbouw & Voeding being mainly active in the field of agricultural policy.

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Platform Biologica (<http://www.platformbiologica.nl/>) was founded in 1992. It is the umbrella organisation for organic farming and nutrition. Organic farmers, traders, manufacturers and retail-traders are co-operating to build up the reputation and the market of organic products.

The following organisations are affiliated with Platform Biologica:

- The Federation of organic farmers
- the VBP, the organisation of processors and traders of organic products,
- the VVNR, the association of retail traders in natural food,

- the CBL, the umbrella organisation of supermarkets.

Platfom Biologica also publishes magazines, newsletters, reports and trade and address guides on organic agriculture, such as the consumer quarterly magazine [Smaakmakend](#), the Green Trade Directory in four languages and with the addresses of all producers and traders of organic products, the Eko-guides with all the addresses of selling-points of organic products as well as the the [Ekomonitor](#) which reports regularly on developments in Dutch organic agriculture.



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### Good Food Foundation



The [Good Food Foundation](#) was established in 1986 with the aim to encourage, initiate, subsidise, manage and supervise projects in the field of organic agriculture. Members of the foundation are mainly European firms. Certified organic products originating from the projects are: Sultana raisins and paste, dried figs and fig paste, dried unsulphured apricots and other fruits as well as herbs, pulses, grain and seeds.

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### Avalon Foundation

Avalon is an international, non-profit foundation based in the Netherlands.

Since its establishment in July 1991, Avalon has been committed to the support of sustainable rural development in the transitional economies of Central and Eastern Europe.

Much of its work focuses on harnessing market development and agro-environmental policy to create a favourable economic climate for organic agriculture to become established and to prosper to the benefit of local communities throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

## 5 Regional Distribution of Organic Farms

The Netherlands has twelve provinces. The province of Gelderland has the highest number of organic farms ([table](#)). They are also the largest provinces of the Netherlands. In Flevoland, however, the area under organic management is highest.

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■ Table: [Organic farming in the provinces in the Netherlands in 2001](#)

## 6 Land Use, Animal Husbandry

Many of the organic farms in the Netherlands are mixed farms. The table below shows the main activity of the farms.

■ Table: Share of organic farms per sector 2001

Sector	Percentage at the total number of organic farms

Horticulture	24.2
Fruit production	4.7
Arable crops	22.8
Animal husbandry	44.8
Others (includes: mushrooms, planting material and herbs)	3.5

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(Source: [Skal](#))

The largest sector in the Netherlands is the animal husbandry sector. In the past few years the number of dairy farmers in particular has risen sharply because compared to other sectors the conversion is relatively easier. Increasing consumer demand and the introduction of dairy products in the supermarkets has also stimulated the growth of the dairy products.

Greenhouse production is still limited: 40 organic farms have greenhouses. But for half of them it is not their only source of income. Only 20 farms are mainly greenhouse farms, the rest are horticultural farms with small greenhouses.

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### 7 Standards, Certification, State Regulations and Implementation of the Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91

As in all European countries, in the Netherlands [Council Regulation \(EEC\) No. 2092/91](#) is in force for organic plant production and processing and from 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2000 also for animal production ([Council Regulation \(EC\) No. 1804/99](#)).

The Dutch government has appointed [Skal](#) as the only inspection body in the Netherlands to check compliance with the EU-Regulation.



Certified organic products can be identified by the EKO trademark.

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For bio-dynamic products there is also the Demeter-trademark.



### 8 State Support and Policy Initiatives

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The Ministry of Agriculture is an advocate of expansion of the area under organic management. The Minister of Agriculture presented September 2000 a renewed Plan of Action for Organic Farming, committing itself to the aim of 10% of agricultural land under organic management by 2010.

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Dienst Landelijke Service (LASER), implements the subsidy regulations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries.

The following regulations are relevant to organic farming:

- Regulation supporting the conversion to organic production (Regeling stimulerend biologische productiemethode, RSBP, <http://www.minInv.nl/international/deutsch/presse/02.htm>)
- Innovation, market and competitive power (Innovatie Markt en Concurrentiekracht, INN)
- Stimulation regulation Modernisation Rural Areas (Stimuleringsregeling Vernieuwing Landelijk Gebied, VLG) - Investment regulation market and Competitive power, - Division processing and sales of farming products (Investeringsregeling Markt en Concurrentiekracht, onderdeel verwerking en afzet van landbouwproducten, VAL)
- Subsidy regulation Demonstration projects Market and Competitive power (Subsidieregeling Demonstratieprojecten Markt en Concurrentiekracht, DEMO)

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Within this stimulation framework a little over 11.5 million Guilders (5.2 million Euros) were paid out in 1997 as well as in 1998 to projects in organic farming (including the conversion regulation).

### 8.1 RSBP - Conversion Scheme

Farmers who want to convert to the organic production method have to wait for two years before they may call their products organic. During this period they do have to work according to the organic method. That means lower yields without higher prices. In order to compensate this loss in income the regulation supporting the conversion to organic production (RSBP) was created.

This regulation provides financial support during the transition period. The conversion subsidies were substantially improved in 1999 for the horticulture, for greenhouse production and fruit production. There is, however, the condition that one must grow organically for at least five years. Subsidy is given per five years per hectare.

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- For arable crops it amounts to Guilders (Dfl) 2,500.- / 1,136 Euros ,
- for vegetables (field and greenhouse production) the subsidy is Dfl 12,500.- / 5,682 Euros (until 1999 it amounted to Dfl 6,000.- / 2,727 Euros respectively Dfl 9,250.- / 4.205 Euros) and
- for fruit production it is Dfl 25,000.- / 11,364 Euros (was Dfl 9,250.- / 4,205 Euros).

The budget for 1999 amounted to 15 million Guilders (Dfl) / 6.82 million Euros. (In 1998 conversion subsidies were granted for almost 3.5 million Dfl / 1.6 million Euros, in 1997 for 4.1 million Dfl / 1.86 million Euros.)

The interest in 1999 was so high that the regulation was over-subscribed within one day. Within the application period 175 applications were submitted. No more than 55 applications could be granted (see [table](#)).

For the year 2000 an adapted regulation was announced. In order to prevent unintended use the subsidy amounts for fruit farming and open field vegetable farming were based on the real loss of yields. For the year 2000 30 million Dfl (9.1 million Euros) were budgetted, however only 20 million guilders were used, even though a record number of 431 applications were granted.

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The fact that 10 million guilders were not allocated is partly due to the fact that the Ministry reduced the amounts by 35% and introduced a maximum of 400.000 guilders per farm. In 2001, 132 farmers applied for a subsidy.



Again only a quarter of 20 million guilders budget was used. Platform Biologica has requested the government to reopen the scheme later this year, so that the budget is not lost.

■ Table: Number of honored applications for conversion

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Number of granted applications	95	40	14	110	83	55

Year	2000	2001
Number of granted applications	431	132

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(Source: LASER Noord, 2001)

## 8.2 Green Financing

Since 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1995, the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment (VROM, <http://www.minvrom.nl>) has enabled green investments. Interests and dividends for private investors will no longer be taxed. Organic farming, marketing and processing are one of the "green" fields on which investments can be made.

For organic farmers and other organic industries it is possible to borrow at a lower interest rate (one to even 1.5 percent lower) on the condition that a project has been recognised as a "green" project.

In spite of an initially slow start in 1995 and 1996 (only three and 44 projects respectively), full use of this regulation was subsequently made in 1997 and 1998. In total 403 organic green projects, with a project capital of more than 350 million guilders, were able to make use of this lower interest rate (see table).

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■ Table: Number of green projects in the organic sector

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998
Number of applications	3	44	232	124
Project capital in million Guilders / million Euros	1.84 / 0.84	47.3 / 21.5	204.8 / 93.1	99.1 / 45.0

Source: LASER Zuidwest, 1999

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## 8.3 Tax Breaks

Since the year 2000 organic farms are eligible for a tax free allowance for sustainable producers. For this 20 million Guilders (9.1 million Euros) have been made available for the year 2000.

Organic farmers and producers of organic products who obtain at least 70 percent of their turnover selling organic products can deduct up to 22,500 Guilders (10,227 Euros) from their income taxes.

In the new Action Plan for Organic Farming the Ministry of Agriculture has reserved in total 70 million guilders (31.8 million Euros) until 2004 for this tax-free allowance. However this allowance has until now (July 2001) still not been ratified by the European Commission so it has not been put into practice.

#### 8.4 Provinces

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Most provinces in the Netherlands have made their own Action Plans for Organic Farming and are striving for an increase in the number of organic farms.

Information on the subsidy- and financing regulations of the provinces and the contact persons concerned can be requested at Platform Biologica (<http://www.platformbiologica.nl>).

### 9 Implementation of Agenda 2000

In July 1997 the European Union presented Agenda 2000 in order to convert the Common Agricultural Policy followed by detailed regulations in March 1999. On 15th of December 1999, the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture (<http://www.minInv.nl>) presented a new rural development plan to the European Union.

In the plan the Dutch government requests 124 million Guilders (56.4 million Euros) support from the European Union. 38 million Guilders (17.2 million Euros) are targetted to sustainable agriculture of which organic farming is a part. It is the European Union that finally approves the plan in consultation with the Member State. For the period 2000 to 2006 an annual total of 4.3 billion Euros is available for the member states. The quality of the plan will determine how much money the European Union will make available. Normally the European Union refunds a percentage of the expenditures. What that percentage will be is not yet clear.

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It is expected that this will be approximately an average of 25 percent for the Netherlands. The ministry publishes a related newsletter: "Newsletter Project Rural Development plans". Interested parties can receive the newsletter (Tel: + 31 (0)70-3785314 ).

### 10 The Market

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#### 10.1 Market Volume

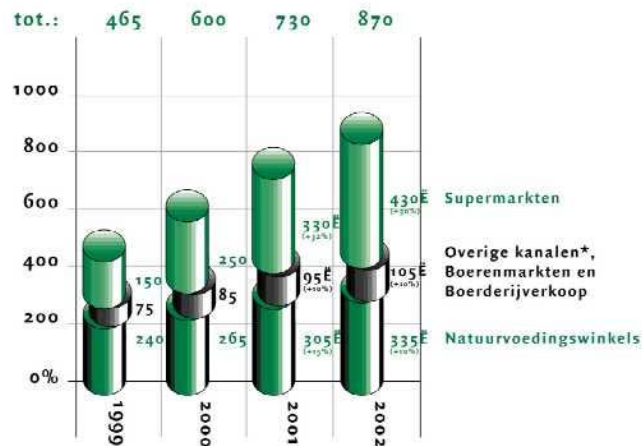
In 1999 the market for organic products in the Netherlands was 465 million Guilders (211 million Euros). In the year 2000 it was 600 million Guilders (272 million Euros), and in 2001, according to an estimate by the research bureau Aurelia, Dutch shops, farmers and exporters will have a turnover of Dfl.800 million (363.6 million Euros).

■ Graph: Development of the turnover with organic products (sum in Euros)

Source: Platform Biologica 2001

For enlarged version click on graph.

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Supermarkten = supermarkets; Overige kanalen = other marketing channels, Natuurvoedingswinkels = natural food stores.

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## 10.2 Organic Food Stores

42% of the organic products in the Netherlands are sold through food shops. (Dfl 305 million / 138.6 million Euros). In the last six years the increasing interest of the consumer has led to a yearly growth in turnover of the organic food shops of five to eight percent.

## 10.3 Supermarkets

The interest of supermarkets in organic products has sharply increased over the last years. Since Albert Heijn (AH) - the market leader in the Netherlands - introduced its own organic house brand at the beginning of 1998, sales through the supermarkets have risen sharply.

The market share of the supermarkets has grown in four years time from 19 to 45 percent (Dfl 330 million / 150 million Euros).

The other sales take place directly from the farm, at farmers' markets or via vegetable subscriptions (box schemes).

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## 10.4 The "Vegetable Bag"

A subscriber to a vegetable box scheme receives a bag with freshly harvested vegetables and fruit every week. The bag contains mainly regionally grown seasonal vegetables and fruit. A vegetable box scheme can be arranged directly via organic farms or with organic food shops. These "vegetable bags" are very popular. While ten years ago it was an unknown phenomenon in the Netherlands, in 2001 45'000 households got their vegetables at a shop or a farm every week ([figure](#)).

■ Figure: [Subscribers to Vegetable Boxes](#)

[Odin](#) is the name of a bag and also of the retailer. Vita and Blijer are names of bags that are retailed by [Udea](http://www.ekoland.com/) (<http://www.ekoland.com/>).

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### 10.5 Farmers' Markets

The number of farmers' markets - markets where only organic products are sold - has increased sharply during the last five years. In six years' time their number has more than doubled: from 15 to 34 farmers' markets in 2001 (see table). That is also due to the Organic Farmers' Markets Association that endeavour to create farmers' markets in as many towns as possible in the Netherlands based on accurate market research.

■ Table: Growth of Organic Farmers' Markets

Year	Number of markets
1995	15
1996	13
1997	18
1998	22
1999	27
2000	30
2001	34

Source: Platform Biologica

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### 10.6 Processors

The growing demand has also resulted in a remarkable growth in the number of organic processors (see table).

Since 1996, 300 new processors have acquired a place in the organic market. Skal (<http://www.skal.com>) considers processors to be industrial and artisan processors, importers and the service providing .

■ Table: Number of organic processors

Year	1993	1997	1998	1999
Processors	432	514	575	733

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Year	2001	2001 (July)
Processors	841	877

(Source: Skal 2001)

### 10.7 Consumers

Several research organisations have published or are publishing regularly reports on consumer behaviour on organic products:

- Motivaction/ITM Research, a private marketing research organisation executes a continuing research on consumer attitudes and preferences, also through their website. They have published a research on profiles of consumers of organic products (contact: Mariska de Wit; +31-20-5898383 ; e-mail: [moti@motivaction.nl](mailto:moti@motivaction.nl); website: [www.motivaction.nl](http://www.motivaction.nl)).

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- The Centraal Bureau Levensmiddelenhandel (CBL) publishes every two years a research on selling of organic products in supermarkets (contact: [Winy de Jong](#), Tel. 0031... ).
- They LEI Landbouw Economisch Instituut, the National Economic research institution, has published several researches on consumer behaviour: "De consument gevangen in cijfers; zoektocht naar het bestaan van consumentenbeelden" (contact: [Mr. Harry Hansman](#); Tel. +31-70-3358330 ).
- GfK, a private research organisation that pays a consumer panel of 4700 households to screen their buyings. They provide up to date figures on the consumption of organic dairy and meat-products in all the selling points (supermarkets and organic food stores) (contact: Ruud van Tilborg, 0162-384000; e-mail: [Ruud.van.Tilborg@gfk.nl](mailto:Ruud.van.Tilborg@gfk.nl)).
- Aurelia: Private research organisation with research on the organic market (contact: [Mr. Wim Engels](#) Bisschopsweg 202, NL-3816 BA Amersfoort 0+31-33-4699913; Fax +31-33-4699963)

## 11 Training and Education

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The only school for bio-dynamic farming in the Netherlands is the [Warmonderhof](http://www.warmonderhof.nl/warmhof/index2.htm) (<http://www.warmonderhof.nl/warmhof/index2.htm>) in Dronten. The Warmonderhof is a part of Groenhorst College. Students between 15 and 27 years of age can take a four-year course to become a bio-dynamic farm manager. An organic diploma for organic farmership is being developed at the moment.

The [Warmonderhof](http://www.warmonderhof.nl/warmhof/index2.htm) (<http://www.warmonderhof.nl/warmhof/index2.htm>) also provides a course via the apprenticeship system. This exists not only in the Netherlands but also in Belgium and the South of Germany. These countries themselves do not provide any possibility to acquire a diploma for bio-dynamic farm manager.

In the secondary and higher agricultural education in the Netherlands more and more attention is being paid to organic farming. This also thanks to the BIOLA (biologische landbouw)-project, a sizeable project in which schools and teachers are being informed of the possibilities to include organic farming in the agricultural education. Over 100 teachers take part in the project that will end in the middle of 2000.

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At academic level students can take subjects concerning organic farming at the Faculty of [organic farming systems of the Wageningen University](#) and Research Centre ([WUR](#)) in Wageningen. It is also possible to obtain a Master's degree in organic farming or to do a PhD in organic farming .

Finally, the [Study Centre Kraaybeekerhof](http://www.kraaybeekerhof.nl/) (<http://www.kraaybeekerhof.nl/>) in Driebergen provides retraining courses for organic farmers. And the Centre for Organic Farming (<http://www.centrumbiologischelandbouw.nl> ) in Lelystad provides an orientation course in organic farming for conventional farmers in co-operation with the [Warmonderhof](#) Education.

## 12 Advisory Service

In the Netherlands a farmer who wants to convert to organic farming may receive technical advice and training from several private consultancies. DLV used to be a government institute (Dienst Landbouwvoorlichting) but has now been privatised.

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It is the largest consultancy and employs specialist advisers for all sectors in organic farming. Since privatisation it is called DLV Adviesgroep NV.

On top of that a smaller private consultancy firm specialised in organic farming is available: Agro-Eco ([www.agroeco.nl](http://www.agroeco.nl)) and DLV also provide

training courses for conventional farmers wishing to convert or training courses for organic farmers.

### 13 Research

In order to solve bottlenecks in organic farming a powerful research policy is needed. In 1999, 176 research projects existed specifically for organic farming, totalling approximately twelve million Guilders (5.5 million Euros).

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The exact share of the Ministry of Agriculture is estimated at eight million Guilders (3.6 million Euros). This is approximately 0.5 percent of the total budget of the Ministry of Agriculture for research, education and extension (approximately 1,700 million Guilders / 773 million Euros).

Of course, the total budget includes research for conventional farming that can contribute to organic farming.

By far most of the money (approximately 5.5 million Guilders / 2.5 million Euros) concerns horticultural projects . Dairy farming is next with approximately two million Guilders (0.9 million Euros), and fruit with approximately one million Guilders (0.45 million Euros). The other sectors have budgets of less than 1 million Guilders, but practically all research stations now undertake research for their organic sector.

Most research is aimed at the development of farming systems in general, such as housing, crop rotation, soil fertility and farm economics. Also much attention is paid to pests and diseases affecting production.

In order to better structure and co-ordinate research in organic farming, Platform Biologica undertook the project "Research agenda organic farming and food 2000-2004" in co-operation with Wageningen University and Research centre (WUR – the only agricultural university and research centre in the Netherlands). The aim of the project was to determine a research agenda for the entire organic sector. The research agenda produced was presented to the Ministry of Agriculture on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2000 and was used for the new Action Plan for organic farming of the Ministry of Agriculture.

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One of the institutes in the Netherlands doing research on biological agriculture is the Louis Bolk Institute

(<http://www.louisbolk.nl/>) in Driebergen.

Since 1976, the Louis Bolk Institute has been a pioneer in scientific research and innovation in organic farming, food and medicine.

### 14 Challenges and Outlook

Within the last ten years much has happened in the organic sector. The dairy sector has developed rapidly. Sectors such as poultry, greenhousehorticulture, fruit and pigs are still in the pioneering stage in the Netherlands but have much potential. Yet the Netherlands still lags behind its European neighbours. Many obstacles that hinder growth must be removed; there is hardly any research money available and the budget for the conversion regulation and other measures promoting organic farming is too limited.

In the new Action Plan the Ministry of Agriculture has expressed the intention of devoting 10% of all research efforts on organic agriculture.

Yet the staff needed to reach such aim are too limited. Only two persons are responsible at the Ministry for the implementation of the whole Plan and they are unable to cope with the workload.

Nonetheless, when the organic production and sales channels continue to develop at the same rate and the negative environmental effects of conventional food production are increasingly taxed leading to higher food prices, then organic farming will continue to grow.

However, defining and monitoring clear standards that guarantee the sustainability of organic products in this growing market is an absolute pre-condition. Therefore the image of the organic sector must be developed on the basis of a single, integrated vision.

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