

The organic sector in Ireland

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In Ireland, almost 50,000 hectares of land are certified organic, representing about 1,25 % of the total agricultural land in the country. More than 1600 farms are working according to organic guidelines, of which 1150 are certified by the Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association. Ireland's National Organic Awards are handed out each year on the occasion of the National Organic Week in September. (Picture: Bord Bia presents the best overall product 2009 - milk from the Moon Shine Farmhouse Milk Company)



Ireland's National Organic Awards will take place for the 4th year in 2010, and are recognised as an important feature in the organic food and drink industry calendar. The awards aim to recognise the achievements, according to Maeve Desmond, International Communications Manager at **Bord Bia**, the **Irish Food Board**, and raise the profile of Irish organic food and drink manufacturers. They are organised by Bord Bia in conjunction with Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and attracted over 140 entries from Irish organic companies in the past year.

Ireland's National Organic Awards 2010 are due to take place during **National Organic Week** in September again and are open to all Irish organic producers. This year it is intended that awards will be announced in July and judging will take place early September.

2008 was a special, positive year for the profile of organic food in Ireland and this is reflected by strong sales performance to the end of the year. **Bord Bia** / TNS research in August 2008 valued the organic market in Ireland at over **104 million euros**, a jump of **82 % from 2006**. The report also showed that an increasing number of people had started buying organic products on a more regular basis. September 2008 was a busy month for organic activity on the Irish market, starting with Bord Bia and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food hosting an **organic conference** in Waterford themed "Maximising Ireland's Potential". The conference was attended by over 150 delegates and was addressed by Mr. Trevor Sargent (Green Party), Minister for Food and Horticulture at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food until February 2010. Organic week in mid-September saw the launch of a new consumer message "Organic – Good for Nature, Good for You". Bord Bia supported the week with a national campaign using outdoor media, press and radio. Additionally, there were 42 local events supporting organic week across 18 counties.

In August 2009, Trevor Sargent (picture) named the members of **Forás Orgánach**, a new body which he has established to drive forward the **development of the organic sector** in Ireland. Forás is the Irish word for growth, development and progress. Forás Orgánach replaces the National Steering Group for the Organic Sector. However, the new group has a different emphasis. Whereas the National Steering Group brought nominees from various stakeholder groups together to agree a programme of action, Forás Orgánach is made up of individuals with expertise in particular areas who can bring their talents and specialist knowledge to efforts to develop the organic sector further.



"The National Steering Group was an excellent forum for the various stakeholders to share their perspectives on the organic sector, and their biggest achievement was to produce the **Organic Farming Action Plan 2008-12** which I described when I launched it as the single most important initiative in driving the organic sector forward in Ireland. It is vital that we do not lose momentum as we work towards the target that was set for the organic sector in the Programme for Government. The

members of Forás Orgánach have been selected for what they, as individuals, can bring to this task," Mr Sargent stated. He resigned as minister in February 2010.



In reporting on BioFach 2010, at his last official function, Mr Sargent explained that the department would maintain the momentum in developing the organic sector. Ireland had great potential - organic salmon producers, for example, had a vibrant and growing export business to Germany worth 20 million euros. He also saw potential for development in the area of beef. **Irish retail demand** for organic produce had been on the rise as well. If Irish farming and food production was to maximise its potential, more producers were needed to become certified as

organic.

The minister stated that one of his last "wins" in the job had been to have the **Organic Farming Scheme and Grant Aid Schemes** re-launched in spite of budgetary cutbacks. The scheme will end on May 15, 2010. The area of land in organic production in Ireland is still very small, but growing. There is currently **49,550 ha** of land certified as organic in Ireland (IOFGA). The Government targets to have 5 % of the UAA under organic production by 2012.

| Year | Operators | Hectares |
|------|-----------|----------|
| 2003 | 983 | 28,514 |
| 2004 | 1004 | 30,670 |
| 2005 | 1090 | 35,266 |
| 2006 | 1270 | 37,466 |
| 2007 | 1334 | 41,122 |
| 2008 | 1,450 | 44,751 |

(Graphic: Growth in the sector in recent years is shown in the table/Source: Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (July 2009)

The most important organic products for the **export market** are meat (mainly beef), dairy products such as yogurt and cheese, and fish such as smoked salmon, according to Grace Maher (*picture*), Development Officer at **IOFGA** (Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association). Imported organic products into Ireland are fruit and vegetables (a large percentage), dairy products and dried and ambient products. IOFGA is Ireland's leading organic certification body dedicated to certifying organic produce and products throughout Ireland. IOFGA has been at the **forefront of the organic movement** in Ireland since it was established in 1982. Almost 30 years of experience in inspecting, certifying and networking with organic farmers has placed the association in a unique position to serve a dynamic and growing organic market. IOFGA is a voluntary organisation and a company limited by guarantee with a membership open to all.



It has an elected board of directors and a membership of 1100 people. IOFGA is approved by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) in the Republic of Ireland and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in the United Kingdom to provide an inspection and certification scheme pursuant to EC Regulation 2092/91 as amended.

IOFGA is also a **strong lobbying group for organic farmers** and is influential in developing organic policy in Ireland. It promotes organic food and farming in the national and regional media, and is the publisher of the award winning magazine

Organic Matters. (Picture: Pat Mulrooney and John Liston, two of IOFGA's Organic Dairy Farmers analyse lab equipment with Tracey Larkin who is doing some research on organic milk).

IOFGA also certifies **organic school and community gardens**. In March 2010, IOFGA launched its new scheme "**Grow Organic**" in the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin. The scheme offers support and help to people who want to learn how to successfully grow organic vegetables. The director of the Botanic Gardens Dr. Peter Wyse Jackson stated how important it was to educate people to grow their own food. The Vegetable, Fruit and Herb garden in the Botanic Gardens is a demonstration garden and it is currently undergoing organic certification.

The primary business at IOFGA is still to certify organic farmers and growers, and organic processors and retailers. However, since there is a huge interest in organic gardening among the general public and they have been contacted by many schools and organisations who want to learn about **organic gardening**, the Grow Organic Scheme has been designed - for schools, allotment holders, community gardens and also hobby gardeners who want to learn the techniques of organic gardening. IOFGA is proud to offer the Grow Organic scheme as they passionately believe that everyone should have access to healthy fresh food. (Picture: Angela Clarke and Patricia Notley, IOFGA staff members)



Further certification of organics is carried out by The Organic Trust. The certification body grants organic certification for professional organic producers, processors and distributors. It came to life in 1991. Additionally, IMC, located in Switzerland, certifies some organic products in Ireland. BDAAI (The Biodynamic Agricultural Association Ireland) was launched to promote and foster the biodynamic agricultural impulse founded by Rudolf Steiner. Activity ceased in 2008, however.

The winners of the 2009 National Organic Awards were the following:

Best Overall Product

The 2009 winner was Moon Shine Farmhouse Milk Company, **Kelly's Organics**, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

Best Organic Retail Product

The 2009 winner was Organic Greek Style Natural Yoghurt, **Glenisk**, Killeigh, Co. Offaly (picture). Glenisk is also the overall winner of the SFA National Business Award 2010, as well as the Environmental Enrichment Award at the 2009 Food and Drink Industry Awards.

2009 Highly Commended went to Irish Smoked Organic Salmon, **Ummera Smoked Products Ltd**, Timoleague, Co. Cork



Best Organic Local Product

The 2009 winner was Moon Shine Farmhouse Milk, Kelly's Organics, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

2009 Highly Commended went to Dark Choc Almond Cake, **Organic Choice**, Stillorgan, Co. Dublin

Best Organic Export Product

2009 winner was **St Tola Goats Log Company**, Inagh Farmhouse Cheese, Co. Clare. Over the years, St Tola has won a number of awards in Ireland and Britain including the 2009 Shop International Cheese Awards, 2009 Great Taste Award, 2009 British Cheese Award and 2009 Premio Roma Awards.

The Highly Commended went to **Flahavans** Organic Jumbo Oats 1 kg, Flahavans, Co. Waterford

Best Organic New Product

2009 winner was Organic Gluten Free Real Wholegrain Bread Mix , **Sowan's Organic** Bread mix, Stradbally, Co. Laois

The Highly Commended for 2009 went to Original Steakhouse Company, **Goodherdsmen**, Cahir, Co. Tipperary

Best Organic Sustainable Product

The 2009 winner was Happy Heart Oil Rapeseed Oil, **Drumeen Farm**, Urlingford, Co. Kilkenny

The Highly Commended for this category in 2009 went to Organic Galloway Steakburger, **Omega Beef Direct**, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.

14.05.2010

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