

# Growth of European organic acreage slowly continues

For now, the growth of the European organic fresh produce sector is nowhere in sight. FreshPlaza delved into the latest of Eurostat's data, and compiled a list of the largest acreage and yield developments. The data of the statistical office were last updated on 4 December, and provide insight into the current state of affairs in the field of root crops, fresh vegetables (including melons), strawberries, grapes and other fruit from temperate climate zones.

## Arable land

The acreage of organic arable land increased by 37 per cent in total in the 2012-2016 period. The Dutch acreage is fairly limited (21,899 hectares), but has seen a relatively considerable growth (+6.8%) between 2015 and 2016. Mainstays Italy and France were at the top of the list in 2016 with 841,176 and 830,536 hectares, respectively. In that same year, Sweden was the big surprise, with 430,361 hectares. However, the figures don't distinguish between use in fresh produce production, stock breeding and arable farming. Considering the Scandinavian country has never been a fresh produce producer of interest, it's plausible the organic agricultural land is used for other purposes. On an annual basis, the acreage of arable land in transition is also experiencing a significant increase. Of the total organic acreage in 2016 (5,685,730 hectares), about a quarter (1,531,225 hectares) was in transition.

## Root crops

Regarding yields, the organic root crops are gaining ground, albeit to a moderate extent. In 2016, the counter was at 222,505 tonnes (+13,276 compared to 2015, +20,173 compared to 2014). The Dutch production proudly came first with 54,119 tonnes in 2016, although this number decreased compared to 2015 (61,104 tonnes). Both the UK and Sweden saw their yields increasing by about one quarter, up to 35,520 and 34,700 tonnes respectively, followed by Poland (31,563 tonnes) and Latvia (17,248 tonnes). In 2015 and previous years, Italy was a major player (they were the biggest in 2014), however, over 2016, no data was reported.

After a considerable growth in 2013 (+2,554 up to 32,312 hectares), the European acreage dropped slightly in the two following years, before peaking at 35,058 hectares in 2016. Germany (10,820 hectares) is the frontrunner in 2016, and has almost a third of the European acreage. Austria comes second (4,022 hectares), followed by France (2,758 hectares).

### Fresh vegetables (including melons)

Eurostat's data set doesn't distinguish between various product groups for the figures regarding fresh vegetables. For convenience's sake, the organisation has chosen to also include melons in this analysis. In European context, the reported total production indicates a significant decrease (1,161,052 tonnes in 2016; 1,353,720 in 2015), but these figures misrepresent the reality, knowing that no figures are available of Italy over 2016, even though that country was good for 252,255 tonnes in 2016. The Netherlands can once again call itself the leader of the list with 351,368 tonnes based on available figures. Germany (299,493 tonnes) and Spain (286,075 tonnes) complete the top three. The other countries follow at quite a distance, such as Poland (45,798 tonnes) and the UK (42,319 tonnes).

Regarding the organic acreage, Poland is also unstoppable for the third year in a row, with 51,866 hectares. Together with Italy (43,646 hectares), the bulk producer takes up just over half of the total European organic acreage. The organic acreage in the UK is declining (10,024 in 2013 compared to 6,318 hectares in 2016), but its crop yields in tonnes increased considerably in that same period, from 25,387 to 43,907, which makes it seem as if investments have been made in crops that yield a profit per hectare.

### Fresh strawberries

The strawberry production has peaks in Turkey (9,371 tonnes), Poland (6,007 tonnes), Spain (5,078 tonnes) and Germany (3,352 tonnes). Compared to these volumes, the remaining countries only play a marginal role. Bulgaria is experiencing a remarkable growth spurt, and rose from just 15 tonnes in 2013 to 680 tonnes in 2016. Measured over the 2012-16 period, the strawberry yields show the most structural growth of all product groups mapped by Eurostat (26,428 tonnes in 2016 compared to 15,059 tonnes in 2012).

This upwards trend shows a proportional image in acreage developments. Between 2015 and 2016, the European organic strawberry acreage increased considerably: from 3,650 to 4,249 hectares. Except for Germany (+225 hectares), Turkey (+188 hectares) and Italy (+115 hectares), no appreciable shifts are taking place in other countries.

### Fruit from temperate climate zones

During the 2012-16 period, this product group experienced significant fluctuations, and in a European context it fluctuated between 200,000 and 400,000 tonnes. In 2016, Turkey is at the top of the list because they practically doubled their yields in one year (168,919 tonnes compared to 89,997 tonnes in 2015). Once again, 'mastodon' Italy is missing from these figures – in previous years it was single-handedly good for approximately half the European yield. Over 2016, Spain is still a player to reckon

with, although the Iberian peninsula does record a loss (40,960 tonnes in 2016 compared to 50,814 tonnes). It's noticeable that Slovakia was in a free fall in 2016 (from 4,097 to 67 tonnes), but southern neighbour Serbia saw its yields nearly tripling (from 7,038 to 18,013 tonnes).

The European organic acreage for fruit from temperate climate zones has remained practically unchanged in the 2014-16 period. Individual differences among the countries, however, are considerable. In 2016, Poland experienced a significant decline: from 30,401 hectares in 2015 to 18,616 hectares, and the country had to give up its leading position to Italy (22,378 hectares). Turkey – which has experienced an uninterrupted acreage increase since 2013 – closely follows after Poland with 16,260 hectares, although the majority of the production is still in transition. Number four, France (13,544 hectares), shows a linear growth during the entire period, and is therefore also a factor to reckon with.

## Grapes

In the analysis of organic grapes, Eurostat doesn't distinguish between table and wine grapes. Over 2016, the yields were a factor three lower than in 2015 (305,409 compared to 906,221 tonnes). Although this is also partially because Italy's figures are once again missing (410,775 tonnes in 2015), Spain is also the cause of these low figures. In one year time, the grape yields were halved in Spain (211,623 tonnes in 2016 compared to 410,775 tonnes). On the other hand, Turkey had a significant increase: from 47,048 tonnes in 2015 to 83,451 tonnes in 2016. The other countries in the top five follow at a respectful distance: Greece (31,329 tonnes), Bulgaria (7,690 tonnes) and Croatia (3,443 tonnes). In 2015, Romania had a peak year with 6,405 tonnes, but fell back to its 'old level' in 2016: 2,904 tonnes.

The lack of figures relating to the organic grape yield from Italy is now clearly seen: after all, the Italian acreage has been growing for five years in a row (103,545 hectares in 2016), very closely following superpower Spain (106,720 hectares). The fact that the increase in the Spanish acreage increased by 10,000 hectares compared to the previous year could not compensate for the fact that yields almost halved in 2016.

Lien article : <http://www.freshplaza.com/article/191013/Growth-of-European-organic-acreage-slowly-continues>