

How much organic land in Europe?

Data from the EU's statistics office –Eurostat – illustrates strong growth in the area of organically farmed land across member states.

The figures show the proportion of total Utilised Agricultural Area (land used for arable production, permanent grassland, permanent crops and horticulture) dedicated to organic production has increased to 4% overall in the European Union.

However, the rolling changes in the political make-up of the European Union over recent years make clear trend spotting rather difficult. Looking at new members - as well as old - the figures suggest that the current membership of 25 countries has 3.9% of agricultural land farmed organically. Tracking just the 15 member states from the baseline in 1998, then organically farmed land as a percentage more than doubled from 1.8% to 4.1% by 2005.

Star organic performer is Austria with 11 per cent of agricultural land now farmed organically – a figure still on the up. At the bottom of the heap is Poland where just 0.6 per cent of land is classed as organic. UK figures are closer to the EU average at 3.8% but are falling slightly, and that's mostly as a result of hill land re-classification.

The Eurostat data also shows how much EU land area is in conversion - a useful indicator of near future changes/trends in the sector. Member countries can roughly be divided into three categories, those that have high, medium and low growth potential, dependant upon the levels of on-going conversion –

High growth potential

Latvia Cyprus Lithuania Malta Slovakia

Medium growth potential

Ireland Greece Italy Hungary Slovenia

Low growth potential

Norway Belgium UK Luxembourg France Czech Republic Finland The Netherlands Denmark