

Why are some organic foods imported to the UK in preference to UK sourcing?

New research study for Defra

Defra Research Project – OF0349

Christopher Stopes of EcoS Consultancy is leading a study commissioned by Defra working with Elm Farm Research Centre and Helen Browning of Eastbrook Farm.

The Organic Action Plan for England has a key target to increase the proportion of UK sourced organic food. A significant proportion of organic food that could be produced in this country is imported, the most recent survey for the England Organic Action Plan by BRC shows that in 2004 organic products such as beef, pork, brassicas (broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower) and potatoes are all imported to a far greater extent (only half is UK origin) than is the case for the same products conventionally produced (where almost all is UK origin).

Christopher Stopes of EcoS Consultancy is leading a study commissioned by Defra working with Elm Farm Research Centre and Helen Browning of Eastbrook Farm. This new study will build on earlier work on increasing the proportion of UK supply of key organic foods completed by EcoS Consultancy with the Organic Action Plan Retail Sub-group and the British Retail Consortium (BRC). This identified best practice amongst UK supermarkets to sourcing UK organic food; reviewed the opportunities and threats in supermarket organic supply chains; proposed key organic products where there appeared to be scope for increasing the proportion of UK supply; and proposed strategic objectives relevant to government, suppliers and supermarkets.

The aim of the new research is to analyse four organic products (pork, beef, potatoes and brassicas – all identified as priorities in the earlier report and highlighted in the BRC survey), where there are imports to the UK, and where UK production would be expected to be possible. Specific recommendations for policy (government and commercial) arising from the study will be proposed.

The research team will work with key stakeholders including the BRC, organic suppliers, retailers and producers and will draw upon study visits to countries producing the four organic products for import to the UK. We will also assess how and why imports can be an important part of the UK organic food supply chain.

The study objectives are:

- 1)** Define why and the conditions under which imported organic products (pork, beef, potatoes and brassicas) are selected instead of domestic product available in the UK;
- 2)** evaluate differences between countries (e.g. organic standards implementation, cost of organic production, supply chain and marketing routes);
- 3)** identify why key production and buying decisions are made;
- 4)** identify blocks in UK organic systems (e.g. investment, production, standards, certification);
- 5)** specify conditions necessary for more UK supply; **6)** make recommendations for government and other stakeholders.

It is expected that the research will contribute to increasing the supply of UK produced organic food through defining the opportunity for policy measures and other approaches to be considered by government and all other stakeholders to encourage more UK production of key organic primary products that are imported. We hope that retailers and their suppliers, as well as producers in the UK will be in a better position to overcome obstacles to UK production, hence contributing to the achievement of one of the key Organic Action Plan objectives – that of increasing the proportion of UK supply of key organic products.

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