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# Organic Action Plan for Aargau 2021

Strategy to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises in the organic sector

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## Foreword

### From Aargau - for Aargau - for Switzerland

Organic farming is booming - also in Aargau! Currently, more than 10 percent of our farms in Aargau are organic and there are more every year! Organic production is therefore an important part of agriculture in Aargau. The main reason for this is society's growing demand for organically produced food.

### Keeping added value in Aargau

I am pleased that the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in Frick, together with the organic sector in Aargau, has recognised the signs of the times and, with the Aargau Action Plan, is strengthening organic farming along the entire value chain. Healthy and sustainably produced food is important to us. We want to know where the meat, vegetables or cereals come from and how they were produced. It is a matter of great concern that added value is created in Aargau, from production and processing to the trade and sale of agricultural products.



### Aargau in a pioneering role

With this action plan to strengthen the organic sector in Aargau, we are breaking new ground: in Switzerland, a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) country, Aargau is the first canton to launch an organic action plan focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). I am delighted and proud that we in Aargau are taking on this pioneering role. In the sense of "From Aargau - for Aargau - for Switzerland".

### Active support from the Canton

Promoting sustainable agriculture is our mission. That is why my department actively supports this development with the Aargau Department of Agriculture and the Liebegg Agricultural Centre. In addition, the government is supporting the expansion of the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in Frick with a substantial contribution from the Swisslos Fund.

On behalf of the government, I thank the initiators of the Aargau Organic Action Plan for their valuable work in favour of our organic agriculture and wish them every success in their implementation.

State Councillor Dr. Markus Dieth

Head of the Department of Finance and Resources, Director of Agriculture

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## Acknowledgement

The consumption of organic food is increasing worldwide and throughout Europe. More and more people have decided to support a cultivation method that focuses on a careful and responsible treatment of our environment, the soil, plants, animals, and the people.

All actors of the supply chain, including food processing, retail, and catering businesses and farms share this growth in demand for organic food. With this cantonal action plan, different fields of action have been developed, in close cooperation with partners from the food sector, for the Aargau organic sector to take advantage of this opportunity at the regional level. Exchange with various regions of Europe has also played an important role. It turned out that there is still much untapped potential, especially regarding the linkage of "organic" and "regional". The aim of this action plan is to use innovative approaches to exploit this potential and create added value for the actors in the organic sector. The action plan was drawn up with the support of the following partners:

- Numerous small and medium-sized enterprises in the canton of Aargau that are active in the field of organic farming and the production, processing and trade of organic foodstuffs.
- Bio Aargau (Association of Aargau Organic Farmers)
- Federal Department of Economics, Education and Research WBF
- State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO (Regional and Regional Planning Policy Department)
- Department of Finance and Resources Aargau (Office for Agriculture)

## Executive Summary

The organic sector and the demand for organic products continue to grow in Switzerland and worldwide. This growth provides opportunities for local and regional enterprises, so should be supported at cantonal as well as at the national level.

For some time now, individual countries and regions have been promoting organic farming with coordinated policy measures: so-called organic action plans. In recent years, the focus has increasingly been on the entire food value chain. In Switzerland, the canton of Jura and the canton of Fribourg have so far developed action plans to promote organic farming. The canton Aargau is the first canton in German-speaking Switzerland to support the entire organic sector with an action plan.

This proposed organic action plan for the canton of Aargau aims to promote entrepreneurship and support existing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the continuous improvement of performance and competitiveness. The aim is to promote the growth of the entire regional organic sector in regional, national and international markets. The focus on the canton of Aargau, which accounts for only about six percent of the agricultural area and eight percent of the population of Switzerland, is due to Switzerland's small-scale structures and a high level of federalism.

The strategy is based on increased cooperation between the players in the entire value chain, which will enable successful development of the local and regional market for organic products. These also include actors who do not yet, or only partly, produce or trade organic products, but who are interested in entering the organic market. The action plan thus contributes to the promotion of organic farming and increased added value with organic food in the canton of Aargau. The actors involved work in accordance with the principles of the Bio Suisse association and comply with the requirements of its bud label (the so called *Knospe* label). By producing, processing and trading organic food, they create added value for the region, while considering all areas of sustainability, and are committed to fair prices.

## General information

<b>Project</b>	SME Organics
<b>Partner organisation</b>	FiBL Research Institute of Organic Agriculture
<b>Other partner organisations involved (if relevant)</b>	LZ Liebegg (Agricultural Centre of the Canton of Aargau)
<b>Country</b>	Switzerland
<b>NUTS2 region</b>	CH03 (Northwestern Switzerland)
<b>Contact person (e-mail and phone number)</b>	Rebekka Frick (rebekka.frick@fibl.org, 0041 62 865 72 23) Robert Obrist (robert.obrist@fibl.org, 0041 62 865 72 21) Otto Schmid (otto.schmid@fibl.org)

## Policy context

<b>The Action Plan aims to impact:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Investment for Growth and Jobs programme <input type="checkbox"/> European Territorial Cooperation programme <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other regional development policy instrument
<b>Name of the policy instrument addressed</b>	<p><b>PRE (Projects for regional development)</b></p> <p>National programme to support regional development by focusing on agriculture and to support the development of local/regional agricultural products.</p> <p>Conditions: Regional focus, Collaboration between sectors (i.e. agriculture and other sectors such as food industry, gastronomy, tourism, etc.)</p> <hr/> <p><b>Cantonal programme to support organic agriculture</b></p> <p>The canton of Aargau supports the development of organic agriculture by setting up specialized extension services responsible for knowledge transfer, training and extension on organic agriculture. This includes contracts with FiBL Research Institute of Organic Agriculture for organic research and extension services. Moreover, the canton supports the development of the regional organic action plan by providing staff support from the regional agricultural centre (LZ Liebegg) to the SME Organics project.</p>

	<p><b>QuNaV (Fostering quality and sustainability in agriculture)</b></p> <p>QuNaV is a national program aiming at market development and increase the added value in the agricultural sector through fostering quality and sustainability. The program promotes innovative projects, which lead to an improved competitiveness of the agricultural sector and the food industry.</p>
	<p><b>NRP (New policy for regional development)</b></p> <p>The programme for regional development supports remote and economically underdeveloped areas by funding projects aiming at improving the competitiveness of local and regional industries, promoting networking and collaborating and developing regional value chains. The programme targets all industries. It does not support projects that are related to agriculture only.</p>
	<p><b>Cantonal programme to support innovative SMEs</b></p> <p>The canton of Aargau aims at strengthening the innovative capacity of the regional businesses through its programme “Hightech Aargau”. This programme focuses on creating optimal conditions for small and medium enterprises from all sectors. Among others, the programme supports research projects including market studies and project development.</p>
	<p><b>Organic Farmers Association Support Programmes</b></p> <p>The Swiss organic farmers association supports the development of the organic sector by co-funding projects of the regional member organisations. The areas of application are broad including production, education, marketing, etc. The Federal Office for Agriculture funds the policy through their sales promotion programme for agriculture.</p>

# Details of the actions envisaged

## ACTION 1: Coordination Office

<p><b>1. Background</b></p>	<p>In Switzerland and in the Canton of Aargau there are a number of measures which support the development of the organic sector. Apart from the policy measures listed in section 2, this also includes private initiatives. The exchange with the stakeholders in our region showed that many actors are not aware of all the different support schemes. This is especially the case for programmes for economic development, which are not solely targeting agriculture. Moreover, the stakeholder consultation process revealed that many actors of the regional organic sector do not know each other and that the network has to be strengthened.</p> <p>The exchange with the SME Organics partners and the field visits confirm that in order to develop the regional organic sector it is crucial to strengthen the collaboration between the actors and to coordinate different measures in order to create synergies. In Nouvelle Aquitaine, we learned about the structure of Interbio an organization which gathers actors from the entire food value chain and supports them in promoting regional organic products. One focus is the introduction of organic products in public catering where one core action is linking public catering businesses with suppliers of organic products. Within the Aargau Organic Action Plan 2021 this sector was identified as important when it comes to the promotion of organics (see Action 2).</p>
<p><b>2. Action description</b></p>	<p>Setting up a coordination office is a crucial action within the Organic Action Plan for Aargau. The coordination office ensures that the actors of the regional organic sector make better use of existing support schemes by coordinating and matching different measures. This is to foster collaboration among different actors from the entire value chain and by doing so to create synergies. The office is the contact point for people who are interested in developing a new product or start a new partnership or collaboration. The coordination office helps to connect and to make sure that those people who have a stake on a specific issue or people who have similar problems get together and develop solutions.</p>

	<p>Furthermore, the office coordinates the different measures and links them to existing projects and initiatives in the region. It helps identifying suitable support schemes and provides assistance in the application process.</p> <p><b>Planned measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of an office responsible for implementation;</li> <li>• Coordination of measures;</li> <li>• Coordination with other projects in the region;</li> <li>• Ensuring long term funding for the coordination office.</li> </ul> <p>The coordination office is based at FiBL Research Institute of Organic Agriculture. The office is staffed with a part time position filled with an existing staff member. The person is well connected in the region and has thorough knowledge on the regional agri-food sector. The office organises two stakeholder meetings every year and fosters networks and collaboration on the basis of bilateral conversations all year round.</p>
<p><b>3. Players involved</b></p>	<p>Development: Various stakeholders of the organic sector, FiBL, Canton of Aargau</p> <p>Implementation: FiBL, Canton of Aargau</p>
<p><b>4. Timeframe</b></p>	<p>Start in April 2018 (Phase 2 of SME Organics Project)</p>
<p><b>5. Costs (if relevant)</b></p>	<p>CHF 77'000/year (corresponding to 67'000 Euros/year)</p>
<p><b>6. Funding sources (if relevant):</b></p>	<p>Main funding source: Cantonal programme to support organic agriculture</p> <p>The coordination office is financed by both public and private sources. The activities of the office are funded by start-up support from the canton, as well as from the Bio Suisse and the regional organisation Bio Aargau. Participating companies in the areas of production, processing, trade/retail and catering make their own contributions and participate financially according to their possibilities. To achieve the strategic objectives for the organic sector in Aargau in the long term, additional funds will be needed and will be applied for in the context of the 2019 budget planning.</p>
<p><b>7. Monitoring</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of people getting in touch with the coordination office</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of meetings with the stakeholder group</li> <li>• Number of collaborations established by coordination office</li> <li>• Number of projects started with the involvement of the coordination office</li> </ul>
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## ACTION 2: Business Plan for Logistical Collaboration

<p><b>1. Background</b></p>	<p>The analysis of the organic sector in the canton of Aargau and the discussions in the stakeholder workshops showed that there is a high potential for optimizing logistics in the organic food sector and in raising the share of organic foods used in public catering. Promoting short value chains and small/medium enterprises comes along with the challenge of low competitiveness on the market and high logistical costs. The latter is due to the fact that the companies produce small quantities and usually sell their products to different customers. Most of the organic market actors have their own logistical infrastructure and there are only few actors collaborating when it comes to transporting and storing their products.</p> <p>The introduction of organic products in catering has great development potential in Switzerland, however the procurement and logistics have to be better organized. This also includes the potential for buying organic food directly from the farm. Different projects concerning public catering are running at the regional level. A strong collaboration is indispensable in order to make best use of potential synergies.</p> <p>From the field visits, we learned about the important role of existing distribution centres such as Biocoop in France and about innovative projects such as the REKO circles in Finland promoting short supply chain products on social media and the Romanian online marketing platform TargulAgro with a special software service. These various examples showed us different ways of improving logistics through cooperatives (Biocoop) and informal networks (REKO circles, TargulAgro). Moreover we learned how important background information on existing value chains, production volumes and transportation itineraries is in order to increase efficiency of logistics. In Italy (Apulia), we got to know the regional observatory on the development of organic agriculture which closely monitors the activities of the organic sector and administers a comprehensive data base. It gives inspiration when</p>
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	<p>it comes to the definition of indicators for the analysis of the logistical structures in our region.</p>
<p><b>2. Action description</b></p>	<p>The analysis of the organic sector in Canton Aargau and the discussions in the two workshops showed that there is still potential for optimisation in logistics. Within the framework of the action plan, opportunities for cooperation between different companies are being sought and tested. It was also found that processing and trading companies often have too little information about available organic products from the Canton of Aargau. The possibilities of using existing marketing platforms are being examined in order to better find and market regional organic products.</p> <p>This action is about setting up a business plan in order to seek opportunities for logistical cooperation between different companies in order to improve the efficiency of short value chain logistics. The first step of the action is to map the existing logistical structures and actors involved in logistics of regional organic products. The second step is about identifying the actors who are interested in a logistical collaboration and to get to know their exact needs. The third step is about identifying ways of logistical collaboration, including questions of journeys travelled, fleet, companies in charge of transporting, costs and funding. The business plan should be a feasibility study that shows whether and how logistical collaboration is cost-efficient and beneficial to the interested actors. This action is coordinated by the coordination office.</p> <p><b>Planned measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map existing logistical structures;</li> <li>• Map actors involved in logistics of regional organic products;</li> <li>• Carry out needs analysis of actors in production, processing, trade/retail, and catering of organic foods in relation to their organization of logistics;</li> <li>• Establish working group with actors in the organic sector who are interested in setting up a logistics platform based on existing structures;</li> <li>• Identify new ways of logistical collaboration;</li> <li>• Carry out feasibility study including cost calculation for logistics platform.</li> </ul>

<b>3. Players involved</b>	<p>Development: Stakeholder Group</p> <p>Implementation: Coordination office and farmers, processors, retailers and gastronomy actors who produce/process/sell organic products and for whom logistics and especially transportation includes a considerable effort.</p>
<b>4. Timeframe</b>	January 2019 – December 2019
<b>5. Costs (if relevant)</b>	CHF 30'000.- (26'200 Euros)
<b>6. Funding sources (if relevant):</b>	<p>PRE (Projects for regional development)</p> <p>QuNaV (Fostering quality and sustainability in agriculture)</p> <p>NRP (New policy for regional development)</p> <p>Cantonal programme to support innovative SMEs</p> <p>Private funding by actors interested in logistical collaboration</p>
<b>7. Monitoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of interviews carried out to identify existing logistical structures and the different actors' needs</li> <li>• Number of meetings with actors interested in logistical collaboration</li> <li>• Completion of business plan including cost accounting</li> </ul>

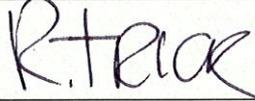
### **ACTION 3: Include organic food in professional training**

<b>1. Background</b>	<p>Most of the professional education programs in Switzerland do not teach about organic food production and its underlying principles. Only apprentices in agriculture who deliberately choose to specialize in organic production learn about it. The stakeholder group meetings in Aargau revealed that there is an important need to educate young generations about the relationships between food production and the environment and the role of organic agriculture. An important target group are apprentices in a food related education program. Moreover, employees from food related companies, including food processing, gastronomy and retail often have</p>
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	<p>insufficient knowledge on the characteristics and processing requirements for organic products.</p> <p>In Nouvelle Aquitaine (France) we learned about an innovative programme (Pôle Maraîchage Bio) supporting young farmers by facilitating them access to farm holdings with the requirement of managing the farm with organic principles. Also in France, we got insights into training courses on organic products for chefs. Finally in Poland, the University for Food Technology in Lodz is striving for introducing a specialized course on organic food processing. In Apulia Region, CIHEAM offers on-line courses for students and other interested persons on organic food and farming. All these examples show how important it is to include organics in education and training. At the same time, we realised that generally there is a lack in organic training and education offers for professions other than farmers such as the various food processing professions and food retailers.</p>
<p><b>2. Action description</b></p>	<p>The aim of this action is to improve the knowledge about production and trade of organic products in all the food related professions. Particularly in the case of young generations, knowledge about the relationship between food production and the environment should be promoted. Therefore, organic farming and the organic food industry should be included in the education plans of elementary school as well as of schools specialized in professions related to the food sector. This is to lay the foundation for a sustainable food industry, ranging from the production of food through to its consumption. Young people should get in touch and learn about jobs in the organic food sector and learn about their opportunities for development.</p> <p>Moreover, the action includes building up a course on organic products which can be taught at different professional education institutions. The aim is to enable teachers and professors to teach about organics and to provide them with teaching materials. At the same time, the integration of organics in the curriculum of education institutions specialized in professions related to the food sector is to be promoted. This is done through lobbying at the different professional associations who are involved in the design of the curricula, and also in cooperation with Bio Suisse, the national umbrella organisation for organic food and farming.</p> <p>Furthermore, courses offered to professionals should be strengthened. The action focuses on training of food processors and catering businesses in the use and</p>

	<p>processing of organic products. This includes the expansion of courses offered by existing institutions such as FiBL. The action is coordinated by the coordination office. Many companies lack knowledge about the requirements for organic food processing. On one hand, this concerns knowledge about the availability and the procurement of raw materials and components in organic quality. On the other hand, there is a need for training about processing methods, as well as additives and inputs which are approved in organic certification. This field of action focuses on improving this knowledge with the help of the expansion of courses and advisory services. In addition, the existing educational offer in the field of organic food processing is to be made better known.</p> <p><b>Planned measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen competences of elementary school teachers about sustainable nutrition and food production;</li> <li>• Build up a course to be taught at different professional education institutions;</li> <li>• Promote the integration of organics in the curriculum of education institutions specialized in professions related to the food sector;</li> <li>• Strengthen courses offered on organic processing and catering with organic products;</li> <li>• Strengthen advisory services for the processing of organic food.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Players involved</b></p>	<p>Development: Stakeholder Group</p> <p>Implementation: Professional education institutions, organic farmers association, professional associations of the food sector, coordination office</p>
<p><b>4. Timeframe</b></p>	<p>January 2019 – December 2020</p>
<p><b>5. Costs (if relevant)</b></p>	<p>CHF 50'000.- (43'670 Euros)</p>
<p><b>6. Funding sources (if relevant):</b></p>	<p>Organic Farmers Association Support Programmes</p> <p>Private Funding by actors of the organic sector</p>
<p><b>7. Monitoring</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching material developed</li> <li>• Number of contacts to teachers/professors of professional education institutions</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of meetings with representatives of professional associations responsible for education</li> <li>• Number of students and professionals reached</li> </ul>
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<b>Date</b>	07.12.2018
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Stamp of the organisation (if available)</b>	<p>Forschungsinstitut für biologischen Landbau FiBL Ackerstrasse 113 Postfach 219 CH-5070 Frick</p>