

GOING ORGANIC IN SOUTH OSTROBOTHNIA – AN ORGANIC REGION IN THE MAKING

Regional Action Plan

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Summary

This is a regional action plan for organic sector, produced for South Ostrobothnia region. The action plan is a document which provides details on how the lessons learnt from the cooperation will be exploited in order to improve the policy instrument tackled within that region. The action plan specifies the nature of the implemented actions, timeframe, the players involved, the costs and funding sources.

This regional action plan focuses on developing the organic sector in South Ostrobothnia region by affecting ERDF/EARDF funds in order to enhance SME competitiveness and sustainability in the organic sector.

Responsible organization information

Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences

Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK) is a multidisciplinary institution of higher education and an efficient actor in education and research, development and innovation (RDI) in the region of South Ostrobothnia in West Finland. The number of full-time students is 4800 and academic and other staff members 350. Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences has 19 Bachelor and 8 Master degree programmes. Three degree programmes are totally taught in English (International Business, Nursing and a Master's Degree in International Business Management). Also double degree programmes are available in the fields of technology and business.

SeAMK profile areas are food solutions, smart and energy efficient systems, welfare and creativity and entrepreneurship and growth. Under food solutions, SeAMK focuses on developing bioenergy solutions for farms in a low-carbon society, ICT solutions for food and agriculture, safety in the food chain and green care and tourism as a side activity of farms.

SeAMK is strong regional rural developer. SeAMK conducts research, development and innovation (RDI) with a distinctly practical emphasis, serving teaching and supporting industrial small and medium enterprises (SME) and service production within the region. RDI is carried out in co-operation with regional and national enterprises and organizations. Nearly 100 persons-years have been invested in RDI work yearly. Approximately 70% of the RDI funding comes from external sources. Many RDI projects involve partners from foreign countries.

SeAMK constantly cooperates with SMEs, large enterprises and with regional development authorities. SeAMK has broad expertise in the development of collaborative regional and international projects dealing with competitiveness of SMEs in the following programs: COSME, CIP;ESF;EAFRD, Interreg BSR and Horizon2020.

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia

The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia is a statutory federation of municipalities consisting of 18 municipalities. Council does it best to achieve the goal set forth by the Regional Strategy.

The Regional Council have built an expert development organization that acts as an active and cooperation-orientated initiator in regionally important development projects and acts in a flexible and practical manner with consideration to the region's special characteristics.

In order to reach the common goals of the region, the Regional Council works to form a common drive for development and to gather resources for this purpose. The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia is an advocate for the region's success. The objective of the activities of the Regional

Council of South Ostrobothnia is a competitive and co-operative region known for its high-level education, know-how, welfare and entrepreneurship.

One of the tasks of the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia is to promote internationalization. The Council informs about the possibilities of international co-operation and funding programmes, advises applicants and is an active member in international networks. The Council acts, for example, as a partial investor or partner in many international projects as SME ORGANICS and NICHE.

Action plan - South Ostrobothnia, Finland

I. General information

Project	SME ORGANICS – Enhancing SME competitiveness and sustainability in the organic sector
Partner organisation	Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences
Other partner organisations involved (if relevant)	
Country	FINLAND
NUTS2 region	Länsi-Suomi / West Finland
Contact person (e- mail and phone number)	anna.tall@seamk.fi +358 40 830 2136

II. Policy context

SME ORGANICS is an EU Interreg funded project bringing together 8 European regions, which main objective is to improve policies and programmes under the Investment for Growth and Jobs goal in order to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the SMEs in the organic sector. The project aims at improving the performance of the SMEs in order to enforce the growth capacity of the organic regional sector in regional, national and international markets. The interregional learning process took place within four areas of theorganic value chain: production and processing, commercialization and marketing, training and advice and efficiency and governance of the organic value chain.

The Action Plan aims to impact:	X Investment for Growth and Jobs programme European Territorial Cooperation programme Other regional development policy instrument	
Name of the policy instrument addressed	Sustainable growth and jobs 2014-2020 - Structural Funds Programme of Finland - Regional Operational Programme ERDF 2014-2020 Finland (CCI 2014FI16M2OP001) REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2040 & REGIONAL PROGRAMME 2014–2017 (Regional Strategy RS)	

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The Regional Operational Programme ERDF 2014-2020 of Finland steers the selection of development projects and investments. Investment Priority 3d will support SMEs through measures drawing from smart specialisation that aim to renew and increase productivity in companies and the strong sectors of the specific Finish regions, as well as to develop new products and services, introduce them to the market and increase added value.

ERDF Regional Operational Programme for Western Finland is the ROP implemented in South Ostrobothnia region. Under the ROP, each region has their own regional strategy. In South Ostrobothnia, it is called "South Ostrobothnia's Future Path: Regional Development Plan 2040 & Regional Programme 2014-2017" (RS). The recently updated RS can be found from via this link in English https://www.epliitto.fi/images/A44 SouthOstrobothniaRegionalCouncil FuturePath 2014.pdf.

RS guides the allocation of Structural Funds in the region and sets the priorities for the development of activities. The main target of the RS, is the creation of a unique, attractive and innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem consisting of services, infrastructure and entrepreneurial spirit in the region.

Owner of the Regional Strategy is the Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia, which is the regional authority. Seinäjoki University of Applied Science (PP8) implements the strategy in the region together with other regional actors.

The SME Organics Action Plan targets the ROP/RS 4.1 Thematic Objective 1: Regenerative Local Industry and Commerce

- 4.1.1 Target 1: Growth and Promoting Activities That Support Regeneration: Investment Priority 1: Grow Up: Services for growth entrepreneurs and promoting growth entrepreneurship
 - -To build a supply of services for growth entrepreneurs by creating new kinds of cooperation patterns and attaching business trainers and experienced growth entrepreneurs to the process more closely.
 - -To ensure the execution of the growth entrepreneurship programme.
 - -To inspire people to engage in growth entrepreneurship by means of positive information and communication.
 - -To activate growth entrepreneurship, for example, by the Grow Up growth company competition.
 - To develop venture capital investment activities for the financing needs of companies at different stages of development. To motivate companies to utilise capital investment activities. - To create a network of growth entrepreneurs (e.g. a Grow Up Guild made up of Grow Up competition participants).
 - To support the structuring of service packages directed at the international market and encourage the region's operators to become regular participants in Team Finland's activities. The Team Finland network consists of various ministries and the organisations under them. It promotes, for example, Finland's economic relations with other countries, the internationalisation of companies and foreign investments made in Finland. In connection with their operations, Team South Ostrobothnia's activities will be intensified to promote companies' internationalisation.
 - To invest in the management training of a company that is becoming international.
 - To promote research connected to growth entrepreneurship and the acquisition of customer data.
- 4.1.2 Target 2: Selections of Focus Areas for Commercial and Industrial Life: Investment Priority 2: Selections of Focus Areas for Commercial and Industrial Life: Creating sustainable and efficient food systems and new bioeconomy solutions
 - To strengthen the national and international level innovation cluster specialising in food systems.
 - -The elements of the sustainable and efficient solutions for food systems involve primary production, agrotechnology and production technology, food processing, logistic and environmental solutions, trade, marketing, consumption and user experience.
 - -To promote the creation of business activities in cutting edge projects involving users, companies, researchers and public operators.

- -To promote the knowhow and innovation environments (incl. investments in Ruokatalo, pilot plants and laboratories) related to food systems, the structuring of the development platform of user networks and national and international networking.
- -To systematically seek new sources of growth in the different components of food systems and their interfaces. South Ostrobothnia's Future Path I 38
- -To develop the smart use of ingredients and materials in food systems and support the creation of new product innovations involving a high level of processing.
- -To support the growth of exports and internationalisation in companies that produce solutions for food systems.
- -To develop sustainable and efficient processes for food systems and support the creation of new product and service innovations relating to this.
- -To develop the chain of locally produced food.
- -To consolidate the visibility of the food region by highlighting the theme of food as an experience and regional attraction factor through combining, for example, food, wellbeing, culture and physical exercise.
- -To secure the availability of highquality, clean, safe and traceable ingredients for the food industry.
- -To promote natural food production and develop the chain of organic food.
- -To strengthen the competitiveness and profitability of primary production and the food industry and secure their continuity.
- -To promote the diverse and efficient utilisation of commercial forests by taking also new kinds of product innovations and uses into account, for example, as a substitute for mineral oilbased materials.
- -To increase the processing level of ingredients sourced from forests and secure the availability of the ingredients.

Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia has participated to the developing of the regional Organic Action Plan and supports the implementation of the Action Plan in the region with the regional development plan.

In Finland, there is also national organic action plan called More Organic! until 2020 (Government development programme for the organic product sector and objectives to 2020). This is the premiere action plan and South Ostrobothnia organic action plan supports the objectives of the national action plan. South Ostrobothnia regional Organic Action Plan has more objectives, which proposes more concrete actions for the benefit of the regional organic sector compared to the national action plan.

The Regional Action Plan is also anchored in the **Action Plan for future of the Organic Production in the European Union** launched by the European Commission in 2014, being consistent with both the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Cohesion Policy of the European Union. The elaboration of the SME ORGANICS action plan is based on the methodology of the SME Organics project, with the contribution of the most important organizations in supporting the development of organic sector in Europe, IFOAM-EU and FiBL from Switzerland, through interaction with success stories from partner regions and by the significant contribution of the members of the Local Stakeholders Group (LSG) of the project.

The committee consists of 11 members including local public and urban funding agencies, inspection and certification bodies for organic, agriculture vocational school, university and research institutes, farmers association, chamber of commerce and the biggest Finnish retail chain.

Part III. Details of the actions envisaged

The content of the SME Organics Action Plan is anchored in two main actions performed within the Stage 1 of the project:

- 1). Local and national exchange of information and documentation as for the elaboration of the regional diagnosis for the organic sector performed by analysing the statistical data, trends and potential, coupled with the needs, challenges and solutions pointed out by the representatives of the value chain of the organic sector, stemming from the transfer of experience
- 2). Interregional exchange of experience occurred in the field visits performed in the partner regions, where representatives of the Local Stakeholders Group participated and witnessed directly the benefits of successful initiatives and realized also the possibility of adopting and sometimes adapting the best practice to local environment.

ACTION 1. Increasing the use of organically produced ingredients in public and private-sector

1. Background

In South Ostrobothnia, organic food is available only in few restaurants. During the interregional exchange, it was noticed that organic products were widely available in other regions from private-sector restaurants and also in public caterings.

Especially visit to Nouvelle-Aquitaine was eye opening since organic food was available very widely. During field visit to Nouvelle-Aquitaine, they presented Public Catering Cluster Restauration Collective https://www.restaurationcollectivena.fr/. The cluster gathers multiple actors under the cluster (hospitals, prisons, all degree of schools, army etc) and introduces high quality, local and organic products to the public catering.

The national goal is, that 20 % of the offered food in public kitchens is organic. At the moment, South Ostrobothnia has a lack of organic products for especially public catering.

In the region, we need to resolve the availability problem of properly refined organic products which are suitable for restaurants and public caterings. In South Ostrbothnia, there is only four public and private SMEs operating in catering business who offer organic food every day. The amount of restaurants should be higher by 2020. The products must be introduced to restaurants and public caterings. Only this way, there can be more food available in restaurants and the 20 % can be achieved.

The number of organic restaurants will rise by encouraging and supporting organic refining sector (for example SME root vegetable peeling companies) and producers (for example SME root vegetable producers) to produce products which are more suitable for the public catering. In addition, restaurants and catering services needs to be encouraged in offering organic food in their daily menu.

2. Action description

Aim of this action:

- 20% of the food provided by the regional public kitchens in its purchasing units and food services is organically produced.

In charge of the action will be Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK), School of Food and Agriculture. Seinäjoki city catering services will also acquire information how to increase organic products in the elementary school menus. They need to find organic products and producers suitable for they needs.

SeAMK in cooperation with other partners arranges 1-2 match making event with regional public caterings, restaurants and organic SME's (producers and refiners) in order to increase the cooperation between the different organizations and to increase

	competitiveness of the SMEs. In these events, SMEs can introduce themselves to the buyers and buyers will see what organic products are available.	
3. Players involved	Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK), School of Food and Agriculture - in charge of the action.	
	Seinäjoki City Catering Services – one of the biggest public catering service in the region searching for more organic products to offer in their menu.	
	Rural Advisory Service South Ostrobothnia – Coordinates and educates regional organic SMEs. Will help in finding the SME rural organic producers interested in to supply for public catering and restaurants.	
	Various regional and national Food Sector developing projects (ERDF/EARDF funded). Will help in finding restaurants interested in increasing organic food in their menus.	
4. Timeframe	2018-2020	
5. Costs (if relevant)	100 000 €	
6. Funding sources (if relevant):	ERDF – Competitiveness Operational Programme TO1 Research and innovation, Priority 2: Producing and utilizing the latest knowledge and know-how	
7. Monitoring	Key indicators	
	- increase use of organic in public kitchens and private restaurants up to 20% by 2020	
	- 10 restaurants offering organic food every day in the region	
	-1-2 local matchmaking event arranged for local SME's:	
	26.3.2019 Food Business Summit: Meet the Buyers-Speed Date-event In the event the buyers meet small-scale local food producers. The buyers may be Seinäjoki City Catering and other wholesales from the region (The Hospital District of South Ostrobothnia, S-Ryhmä and Kesko, region's biggest private restaurants). The producers/sellers are local SME's producing both organic and conventional products suitable for restaurants and public caterings. The aim of the event is get more customers and more sales for the participating SMEs. On the other hand, the buyers will find new products and increase organic in their daily menu. The event will be organized in cooperation with other food related projects. This is an annual event, the organizing month will vary. Aims: - 5-10 participating buyers	
	- 5-10 participating SMEs/sellers	
	24.8.2019 Ruokakarkelot – Local Food Day-event	
	In the annual public event, restaurants, hotels, cafeterias and public kitchen representatives ad regular consumers can meet local organic and conventional food producers, refiners and SMEs and taste new flavours and find new products. In the event, participating SMEs can create new connections and get more sale by meeting customers and potential buyers. SME ORGANICS-project will organize exhibition stand to the event together with local organic SMEs and Rural Advisory Service. Organic SMEs will meet potential buyers and new consumers.	
	One more optional event in year 2020 TBC if there is resources available	

ACTION 2: Increasing organic production

1. Background

South Ostrobothnia is region called as Food Province of Finland, because of the strong agri-food sector and big amount of SMEs/farmers in the primary production.

One main aim of South Ostrobothnia Rural Advisory Service (ProAgria Etelä-Pohjanmaa) is to inspect organic farms and advice and educate new farmers about organic. Representative of the South Ostrobothnia Rural Advisory Service participated actively to each Local Stakeholder Group meetings held in South Ostrobothnia region in order to learn from the interregional exchange, good practices and the organic sector development in other regions of the Europe. He also participated in three field visits arranged during the SME ORGANICS project.

During the field visit, we learned that other regions has much stronger organic sector starting already from the primary production. Even though South Ostrobothnia is the Food Province of Finland, we have to increase organic production by supporting the rural SMEs by educating farmers. For example, in Nouvelle Aquitaine they have Pôle Maraîchage Bio- Val de Garonne Agglomération. https://www.vg-agglo.com/

This cluster for fair organic market gardening gathers an agricultural incubator, a back-to-work organisation and an educational garden. It aims at supporting the installation of young farmers, maintain the market gardening and promote organic farming and develop training and professional integration.

Also in Puglia Region they have training for organic farmers in Madonna dell'Assunta, agricultural school http://agriturismomadonnadellassunta.it which supports and increases the competitiveness of the organic production by educating new SMEs and farmers.

In the South Ostrobothnia region, we have to increase the amount of new organic farmers by educating farmers.

2. Action description

The aims of this action:

- to bring the number of organic primary production SMEs from the current 418 up to 600
- Reach 35,000 organically cultivated field hectares by 2020. At the moment, roughly 24,000 hectares South-Ostrobothnian fields are farmed organically

Rural Advisory Service South Ostrobothnia is in charge of the action since it is the only organization in the region who can directly educate farmers about organic, give direct advices concerning organic primary production (cattle, sheep, poultry etc) and support farmers in organic transition. The Rural Advisory Services will seek new farms and support rural SMEs during their transition period or start organic cultivation.

Rural Advisory Service South Ostrobothnia will arrange 5-10 organic farmer education and training days every year (total 10-20 events during 2018-2020) in cooperation with SeAMK School of Food and Agriculture and Sedu vocational training centre. The aim is to educate new rural SMEs and farmers how to transit the conventional farm into organic (fields, livestock, bureaucracy).

3. Players involved

Rural Advisory Service South Ostrobothnia (ProAgria Etelä-Pohjanmaa) – in charge of the action

Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK) School of Food and Agriculture – Education programme of Master of Natural Resources. SeAMK can educate farmers about organic but the main emphasis is on conventional farming.

	SEDU vocational education centre School Agriculture and Forestry – Rural Entrepreneur programme educates new farmers concentrating mostly in conventional farming		
4. Timeframe	2018-2020		
5. Costs (if relevant)	80 000		
6. Funding sources (if relevant):	ERDF – Regional Operational Plan - Creating sustainable and efficient food systems and new bioeconomy solutions ERDF – Competitiveness Operational Programme TO1 Research and innovation, Priority 2: Producing and utilizing the latest knowledge and knowhow and 5.1 strengthening the innovation activity of companies		
7. Monitoring	 Key indicators increase number of SMEs/farmers in the region from 418 up to 600 by 2020 increase organically cultivated field hectares from 24 000 up to 35 000 by 2020 arrange totally 5-10 organic farmer education sessions during 2019-2020 		

ACTION 3. Increasing awareness of organic production

1. Background	There is not enough information on the region about organic sector, food and farming. Based on the interregional exchange, other regions has regional organic actor, which promotes regional organic SMEs, organic food, local food and supports the growth of regional organic sector by increasing organic spirit among consumers and producers.
	During the SME ORGANIC project, we learned that in South Ostorbothnia region, we need to increase awareness of organic production and we need more activating activities concerning organic. Project partners in France Nouvelle-Aquitaine region (INTERBIO), Italy Puglia region (CIHEAM BARI) and Switzerland Aargau region (FiBL) are active regional operators, which work for organic sector, increase organic awareness and disseminate information to local SMEs.
	In Nouvelle-Aquitaine, there is a label called Le Label Territoire BIO Engagé TBE. INTERBIO Nouvelle-Aquitaine as regional organic activator (organic association and regional developer), grants the label in order to reward, highlight and encourage communities and operators who have succeeded in meeting the recommendations of French National Organic Action Plan (Ambition Bio 2017 Plan). The TBE label is admitted to communities, where at least 8,5 % of land is organically cultivated and also to collective restaurants which has at least 20 % organic products in their menus. This kind of label is highly inspirative since it increases regional organic spirit among consumers, producers and local SMEs both organic and conventional. It also increases awareness about organic production and encourages new produces to transit to organic.
	The aims of this action:

make customers and SMEs aware of the benefits of organic 2.Action description production to the environment and the welfare of people and animals alike shape the regional organic identity arrange 5 local dissemination events in cooperation with other partners take part to 5 national dissemination events Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK) School of Food and Agriculture will be in charge of this action in the region with the help of national organic NGOs. The people of South Ostrobothnia must be made aware of the benefits of organic production to the environment and the welfare of people and animals alike. Dissemination events directed at various target groups of all ages will be arranged. They will be implemented in cooperation with other organizations. The result will be increased customer ad SMEs awareness about organic in generally and regional organic products. 3. Players involved Please indicate the organisations in the region who are involved in the development and implementation of the action and explain their role Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK) School of Food and Agriculture will be in charge of this action. Finnish Organic Food Association Pro Luomu - promotes the production and consumption of organic food in Finland, marketing and communicating The Finnish Organic Association Luomuliitto – promote Finnish organic agriculture, food promotion and customer awareness, marketing and communicating Cooperation with national level food sector coordination projects (Food Sector Coordination, Rural Finland II, Natural Products). 4. Timeframe 2018-2020 5. Costs (if 10 000 relevant) 6. Funding sources ERDF - Competitiveness Operational Programme TO1 Research and (if relevant): innovation, Priority 2: Producing and utilizing the latest knowledge and know-how ProLuomu and Luomuliitto funding Local authorities funding for NGOs and events 7. Monitoring **Key indicators** -one regional organic information and marketing project funded -increase awareness about organic and create regional organic spirit - increase the consumption of organic -increase the production of organic - take part to 5 national dissemination events in order to acquire new information from the organic sector, create new connections and disseminate to national policy makers, public bodies, developers and researchers the regional organic action plan and the SME ORGANICS project. Events to take part are following:

Organic day in South Ostro Bothia 4/2019

- National Organic Product Day 2.10.2019 and/or 2020 (Luonnontuotepäivät)
- Sarka-exhibition 2/2019 and/or 2/2020 (Sarka-messut)
- National organic forum Tampere 13-14.3./2019 and/or 2020 (Luomu-foorumi)
- National Agricultural and Food Science Day 1/2020 (Maataloustieteen päivät)

Monitoring: meetings with national policy makers from ProLuomu and Luomuliitto, MTK, Rural Advisory Services

-arrange 5 regional dissemination events

Events in 2019

- 11/2019 TBC Organic Dissemination Event + tastings in local HyperMarket Prisma together with local organic SMEs. The event will be coordinated by SME ORGANIC implemented together with regional S-Ryhmä (grocery store chain), Rural Advisory Services, Luomuliitto and ProLuomu. SeAMK students will help in the organization. The main aim is to reach regular customers in order to make them aware of the benefits of organic production to the environment and the welfare of people and animals alike. The will also be able to taste and buy local organic products. Target group: regular customers ages 1-80 years, hundreds of visitors

Monitoring: Media appearance, positive feedback, increased organic sale numbers

- 9.5.2019 European Day in Seinäjoki. The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia will arrange a dissemination event for EUprojects. SME ORGANICS will reserve an exhibition stand from the event. The event is open for public. The project will share organic information and acknowledgement in the event in order to raise awareness of organic production, organic products and local organic SMEs. The regional OAP will be presented there. Target group: public consumers ages 1-80, hundreds of visitors.
- Farmers Best Practices 2019/Field Day-event in summer "Pellonpiennarpäivä" In this event, both conventional and organic farmers and primary producers will gather and share best practices about organic farming, crops and fertilizing for example. SME ORGANICS will participate to the event in order to disseminate about regional organic action plan. The event is organized by regional Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY-keskus) and Regional Rural Advisory Services. Target groups: conventional farmers, farms under transition, organic farmers

Monitoring: positive spirit and feedback form farmers, new farmers will transit to organic.

Events in 2020

Organic Dissemination Event + tastings in Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences Campus. In the SeAMK campus, there are over 5000 students and hundreds of SeAMK staff and local SMEs working every day. Organic Dissemination Day will be organized in the campus area in order to increase organic awareness among potential customers (students) and other consumers. The event will also will create regional organic spirit since regional organic SMEs

will be on display. SME ORGANICS will coordinate the event together with SeAMK faculties (Food and Agriculture, Business). Local organic SMEs are invited as exhibitors to inform about organic food and farming. Target group: students ages 19-30, staff members ages 25-65, SME staffs ages 20-65, hundreds of visitors. Monitoring: Media appearance, positive feedback, increased organic sale numbers - Farmers Best Practices/Field Day 2020-event in summer "Pellonpiennarpäivä"







Signature

The Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia agrees to support and promote the implementation (and where appropriate implement) of the plan detailed above. I confirm that I have the required authority to do so and that the required authorisation process of my organization has been duly carried out.

Date	Date of update: 11.1.2019	
Signature	Mr. Santenoja	Pohjanmaan
Stamp of the organisation (if available)		Regional County of the Bright