

CORDIS Results Pack on agroecology and organic farming

Accelerating the transition to a more sustainable and resilient agri-food system

A thematic collection of innovative EU-funded research results

January 2026



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Editorial

By working more with nature and ecosystem services, agroecology and organic farming have the potential to increase the circularity, diversification and resilience of farms, and drive a full transformation of farming systems.

Agroecology and organic farming are holistic approaches that rely on and maximise the use of ecological processes to support agricultural production. As such, these approaches can help mitigate climate change and at the same time strengthen the sustainability (economic, environmental, climate, social) and resilience of farming. The systemic approach has implications for the whole span of agricultural practices, from cultivars used, to soil management practices, integration in value chains and locally adapted business models.

This new CORDIS Results Pack highlights 12 EU-funded research and innovation activities focusing on how agroecological approaches and organic farming can be a key enabler to boost more sustainable farming in Europe.

A more sustainable, resilient agri-food system

Agroecology has the potential to become a fundamental tool for a more sustainable and resilient farming sector that can respond to the needs of climate and people. Agroecological practices are among the ones that can be supported through the eco-schemes under the [first pillar of the common agricultural policy](#), and singled out as one of the sustainable approaches with the potential to contribute to achieving the ambitious targets of the [European Green Deal](#). Moreover, under the Green Deal, the [EU action plan for the development of organic production](#) was published. The plan places a strong focus on R&I to boost the organic farming sector. More recently, the EU's [Vision for agriculture and food](#) has highlighted the role of organic and agroecological farming in making agriculture an attractive activity for current and future generations, combining economic possibilities with environmental results and social responsibility. The Vision has also highlighted the key role of research, knowledge, innovation and skills for Europe's agri-food economy.

Consequently, the EU is boosting its support for agroecology and organic farming research to foster a deeper understanding of how these sustainable approaches can foster competitive, sustainable, resilient and fair farming systems. Under Horizon 2020, several dedicated R&I projects contributed to a better understanding of agroecology's and organic farming's potential, and this work continues under Horizon Europe, with increased support to R&I in these approaches. One of the examples is the AGROECOLOGY Partnership. Launched in January 2024, the Partnership is joining forces of EU countries and regions as well as several other key actors to drive the transition towards sustainable European farming systems.

Boosting the transition towards agroecology builds on the knowledge and advances of organic farming, the best-known farming approach and closest to agroecology. At the same time, organic farming is benefiting from research in agroecology to further boost its sustainability and competitiveness, in line with the EU action plan for the development of organic production. R&I integrating agroecology and organic farming are a win-win for both approaches.

Accelerating the transition to agroecology through Living Labs

An ambitious collaboration building the infrastructure needed to harness agroecology's transformative potential, the EU-funded AGROECOLOGY Partnership aims to deliver improved sustainable farming and food security.



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Europe's food production and land use practices have ensured food security, but at a cost: the agricultural sector accounts for over [10 % of EU greenhouse gas emissions](#). "For European agriculture to adapt to pressures such as climate change, reduced biodiversity and depleted soil and water resources, it must pursue alternatives to the model of highly intensive and

input-dependent systems," says Ulrike Ziegler, scientific officer at [Projekträger Jülich](#) (PTJ). "Agroecology offers that."

Such an agricultural paradigm shift in science, policy and practice must be balanced against a continued reliable provision of food for a growing European, and indeed global, population.



For European agriculture to adapt to pressures such as climate change, reduced biodiversity and depleted soil and water resources, it must pursue alternatives to the model of highly intensive and input-dependent systems.

Member States, regions and associated countries, alongside research organisations and the European Commission, have joined forces to realise these ambitions in the [AGROECOLOGY](#) Partnership, coordinated by PTJ in Germany under the leadership of Ziegler, and co-coordinated by [ANR](#) in France. The Partnership has an expected duration of 7-10 years, with a tentative total budget of EUR 300 million, half of which is provided by the EU. The initiative involves so far 74 partners from 26 countries and regions.

across 16 European countries, the network is identifying specific support needs for impactful co-created place-based innovations, and knowledge production and sharing.

Up to seven transnational co-funded calls for proposals are planned within the Partnership to tackle various challenges. The first 19 co-funded projects are already running, [covering activities in both conventional and organic farming](#).

Aligned with the [European Green Deal](#), AGROECOLOGY is working to forge productive and prosperous farming systems that are resilient and place-sensitive, while being climate-, environment-, ecosystem-, biodiversity- and people-friendly.

While based on the [Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda](#), the co-funded calls will be flexible enough to encompass evolving needs and challenges of the Partnership.

“This is the first integrated European attempt to monitor agroecological transitions across environmental, social, economic and governance dimensions, and at various scales, with diverse stakeholders developing innovative tools and new thinking,” notes Ziegler.

“Countries, regions and our scoping team will collaborate to ensure the necessary scientific research and innovation at different scales for the agroecology transition. Simultaneously, agroecology research will benefit organic farming and help tackle its challenges,” adds Ziegler.

Building the foundations of evidence-based practices

Against a background of increased agricultural vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, the agricultural sector also faces growing public and media scrutiny about its carbon footprint.

An annual Expert Panel for Agroecology Transitions (EPAT) has been established, bringing scientists, policymakers and other stakeholders together to discuss policy implications from AGROECOLOGY's findings, supported by National Mirror Projects and the [CORE Organic Network](#).

Additionally, there are significant disparities within the agricultural sector. Approaches and their impacts are context-specific and vary across farms and regions.

The AGROECOLOGY team will also develop joint training for scientists and civil servants to improve science advisory services to policymakers, while also creating policy benchmarks showcasing the most effective national and regional interventions, and identifying policy enablers and barriers for transformative governance by local communities.

Consequently, a key focus of the Partnership is to monitor the performance and impacts of the agroecological transition, ensuring sustainability (economic, environmental and social) and equity. “Guided by participatory techniques, we are identifying what key dimensions and indicators to monitor; what data, scales and methods to use; and who the key stakeholders are. This will help build a coherent yet flexible foundation for evidence-based policy and practice,” explains Ziegler.

Facilitating a co-created agricultural transition

AGROECOLOGY is also building a network of agroecology Living Labs and research infrastructures to drive collaboration and exchange among members. Currently consisting of 55 members

PROJECT

AGROECOLOGY – European partnership on accelerating farming systems transition – agroecology living labs and research infrastructures

COORDINATED BY

Jülich Research Centre in Germany

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101132349

PROJECT WEBSITE

agroecologypartnership.eu

Developing knowledge-sharing networks to boost agroforestry practice and policy

Rearing crops and livestock on the same land can boost biodiversity and cut reliance on external inputs. The EU-funded AF4EU project aims to promote the historic agricultural practice through new collaborative networks.



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Agroforestry is a traditional farming practice in which animals, crops and trees are integrated on the same land. Agroforestry can not only boost food production but also improve rural habitats, provide ecosystem services such as improving soil health, and bring further benefits to biodiversity.

This sustainable agricultural approach has seen a recent resurgence in interest both in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Yet a lack of understanding, practical expertise and scalable business models is slowing its implementation.

In the [AF4EU](#) project, a research consortium made up of 12 partners across 10 countries is promoting the use of agroforestry through the development of knowledge-sharing networks.

AF4EU aims to put European agriculture in a new direction, becoming more resilient and sustainable in line with the broader environmental, ecological and climate goals, while ensuring economic benefits to farmers.

How agroforestry can boost biodiversity

One example of agroforestry explored in the project is forest grazing, a traditional form of farming from Finland in which sheep graze in the forest. This system helps to maintain rural habitats and brings biodiversity benefits.

In the United Kingdom, [apple orchards were planted with rhubarb](#), a perennial shade-tolerant crop that controls weeds, and increases biodiversity and pollinator populations.

Belgian farmers are also experimenting with hedgerows, which give animals necessary nutrients and minerals in a natural way, rather than through supplementation with other feed types, while supporting wildlife such as birds and hedgehogs.

Expanding agroforestry knowledge networks

To foster sustainable agroforestry solutions, AF4EU built on the network of knowledge hubs set up by predecessor project [AFINET](#), known as [Regional Agroforestry Innovation Networks](#) (RAINs). RAINs comprise groups of researchers, farmers and other key stakeholders who can share knowledge, experiences and challenges related to agroforestry.

Each RAIN features an 'innovation broker', a person who can translate recent research to the farmers, while passing on the needs of farmers to relevant researchers.

AF4EU established eight new RAINs, in Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain. All RAINs are connected through the innovation brokers.

The project also developed the [AF4EU Knowledge Platform](#) to further improve knowledge sharing and capacity building across the EU. The platform acts as a central hub for agroforestry information, and includes best practices, business model analysis along with massive open online courses (MOOCs) on agroforestry.

Integration with key European policies

Another major aim of the project was to bring agroforestry into line with other European policies, including the [European Green Deal](#). In November 2025, [AF4EU hosted a session at the European Parliament](#), highlighting the role of agroforestry in supporting these strategies. This high-level policy event involved European policymakers, international experts and researchers to discuss how best to integrate innovations from agroforestry into European farming.

By showing the economic viability of agroforestry practices, the researchers hope to contribute to the modernisation of European agriculture and support a more sustainable food system for the future.

PROJECT

AF4EU – Agroforestry Business Model Innovation Network

COORDINATED BY

University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101086563

PROJECT WEBSITE

af4eu.eu



Agroforestry as a route to more sustainable agriculture

By mixing different land uses, especially agroforestry, into traditional agriculture, farmers can decrease income instability while increasing sustainability.



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Agriculture and land use are at a crossroads. Go one direction, and it can continue to be a leading cause of climate change and land degradation. But go the other way, and it can become part of the solution.

According to [Ulrich Schmutz](#), a professor of Organic Horticulture and Ecological Economics at [Coventry University](#), that other way is agroforestry.

“Farming that follows agroecological practices with more agroforestry and mixed farming offers an opportunity to transform landscapes and become a key part in the fight against climate change,” he says.

With the support of the EU-funded [AGROMIX](#) project, Schmutz led an effort to help agriculture become more sustainable across Europe. The project brought together farmers, researchers and policymakers to not only explore agroecological solutions for

more resilient land use but also develop practical tools for putting these solutions into action.

“The project integrated the environmental, socio-economic and policy aspects of agroforestry, mixed farming and supply chains to market these innovations,” adds Schmutz. “In doing so, it filled knowledge gaps about trees and how we can support agroforestry through participatory co-design, both in policy and on the farm.”

Unlocking agroforestry’s full potential

With the goal of unlocking the full potential of agroforestry, the project collected information from eight long-term, replicated agroforestry trial sites, along with the practical experiences of farmers and land managers.

"This work involved analysing the socio-economic performance of agroforestry and mixed farming, assessing value chain networks, and researching what motivates farmers to make the shift towards agroforestry," explains Schmutz.

Tools for transitioning to agroforestry

Researchers then used these findings to develop practical solutions to transition towards more sustainable land use systems. "We had the proof that implementing agroforestry allows farmers to diversify their production, reduce their dependence on the success of a single product, and improve their income stability," notes Schmutz.

The challenge was putting this proof into practice. "We learned how to integrate agroforestry into all systems and, based on this, we decided to not promote mixed farming without the use of trees," adds Schmutz.

The project co-designed and developed [intuitive models and user-friendly tools](#) to assist farmers and land managers in implementing and monitoring climate-resilient land use based on mixed farming and agroforestry principles. Many of these tools were then tested via 12 in-depth [pilot projects](#) implemented in Europe's Atlantic, continental and Mediterranean climate zones.

An agroforestry strategy for Europe

To maximise the project's impact and legacy, researchers conducted extensive training and outreach with farmers, and published a [handbook of collaborative design](#) for agroforestry implementation.

Researchers also conducted bottom-up co-development of agroforestry policy with farmers, a process that resulted in 14 workshops being held in various European countries. The project's policy-focused work was condensed into country-specific [policy fact sheets](#) and a comprehensive [white paper](#) that lays the groundwork for a 'European agroforestry strategy'.

"By involving both farmers and policymakers from across Europe in the process, I am confident that our work will fundamentally change the relationship between agriculture and land use – a change that will ultimately benefit the environment and citizens alike," concludes Schmutz.

Building on AGROMIX's legacy

Since the AGROMIX project was completed in late 2024, project tools and insights are finding new relevance, with partners such as the [University of Trier](#) in Germany receiving further funding to explore agroforestry's role in flood mitigation.

AGROMIX's participatory approach has also evolved into new initiatives. Its co-design methods have inspired new 'living lab' projects under the EU's [Mission Soil](#) and [AGROECOLOGY Partnership](#), turning research into practical change. Pilot sites continue to inform follow-on studies focusing on silvo-arable, silvo-pastoral and silvo-horticultural systems.

The results are also helping to shape the policy transition to sustainable food and farming systems: Evidence that agroforestry can significantly boost biodiversity (from bird and bat activity to improved microclimates and crop stability) is feeding into EU debates on sustainable farming. The project's white paper and policy recommendations, launched at a Brussels summit in 2024, are informing new approaches to a transformative 'agroforestry strategy' and further [common agricultural policy](#) (CAP) reform.

The team has also shared findings at major agroforestry and organic farming conferences – continuing the conversation between farmers, scientists and policymakers.



Farming that follows agroecological practices with more agroforestry and mixed farming offers an opportunity to transform landscapes and become a key part in the fight against climate change.

PROJECT

AGROMIX – AGROforestry and MIXed farming systems – Participatory research to drive the transition to a resilient and efficient land use in Europe

COORDINATED BY

Coventry University in the United Kingdom

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-FOOD

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/862993

PROJECT WEBSITE

agromixproject.eu

A digital framework to fight food fraud across Europe

Lax oversight of food supply chains can result in food fraud and other problems, impacting consumer health and safety, and damaging trust in producers. The EU-funded ALLIANCE project is redefining food supply chain management by uniting digital technologies to boost transparency and traceability.



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[ALLIANCE](#) combines distributed ledger technologies, internet of things (IoT) sensors and portable testing devices to verify the origin and authenticity of food products, and artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to turn data into evidence for preventive action. This integrated approach supports Europe's transition to more sustainable food systems, and strengthens traceability, transparency and interoperability across quality-labelled food chains such as organic certification and protected designation of origin (PDO) products.

"If we want safer, more transparent food systems, we have to move from isolated tools and databases to real collaboration," says Stavroula Maglavera, ALLIANCE coordinator and research engineer at the [University of Thessaly](#) in Greece.

Connecting Europe's food integrity networks

Rather than adding another standalone system, ALLIANCE focused on linking existing tools and data flows. The framework connects laboratory testing, on-farm sensors, logistics tracking and certification databases through a secure digital backbone. This joined-up approach allows earlier detection of irregularities and faster responses to potential fraud.



We wanted to show that Europe can act as one digital ecosystem, not 27 disconnected efforts.

Maglavera emphasises that ALLIANCE's impact was as much human as it was technological. "Fighting food fraud means building trust between people and systems," she remarks. "Technology only works if the ecosystem works."

That ecosystem brought together 25 partners across 12 countries, spanning smallholder cooperatives, laboratories, national authorities and large retailers. For many, it was the first time they had shared data across borders in real time. Despite

the complexity, the collaboration showed that digital cooperation could benefit all actors, particularly smaller producers who often lack access to advanced tools.

"Bringing so many actors together was not easy," Stavroula adds. "But the diversity of partners gave us a realistic picture of Europe's food landscape, and that's what makes the results transferrable."

From pilots to policy

To test its framework, ALLIANCE ran seven pilot supply chains in Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Serbia and Spain, covering feta cheese, olive oil, honey, faba beans, pasta, potatoes and raspberries. Each pilot reflected real production and inspection practices, showing how the tools could improve oversight and collaboration along the chain.

In Italy, blockchain tracking helped verify olive oil authenticity more efficiently. In France, spectroscopy identified honey quality deviations before products reached market. The Greek feta pilot used IoT sensing data to monitor conditions across the feta

cheese value chain and AI to conduct analysis on the data, thereby improving compliance with PDO requirements, while in Serbia, AI analytics detected sourcing inconsistencies that supported corrective action.

Together, these trials showed that ALLIANCE's digital framework can make compliance checks faster and improve communication between producers and authorities. Meanwhile, national partners are now exploring how to integrate the tools into their certification and inspection systems. Participants also noted that digital cooperation helped build trust among farmers who traditionally work in isolation, providing a foundation for long-term resilience.

Beyond the pilots, ALLIANCE also helped knit together Europe's food integrity community. It launched the [Food Fraud and Authenticity Cluster](#) linking 12 EU-funded projects to share data models, best practices and policy insights, and created the [Digital Knowledge Base for Food Fraud](#). The consortium also produced recommendations aligned with the [European Green Deal](#) showing how open digital collaboration can strengthen food safety governance and contribute to wider sustainability and agroecology goals. "We wanted to show that Europe can act as one digital ecosystem for food integrity, not 27 disconnected efforts," concludes Maglavera.

PROJECT

ALLIANCE – A hoListic framework in the quality Labelled food supply chain systems' management towards enhanced data Integrity and verAcity, interoperability, traNsparenCy, and tracEability

COORDINATED BY

University of Thessaly in Greece

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101084188

PROJECT WEBSITE

alliance-heu-project.eu



Evaluating digital tools for Europe's agroecology

Digital tools are often promoted as the future of farming, but not all of them serve ecological goals. The EU-funded D4AgEcol project set out to understand how digitalisation can support agroecology.



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While many initiatives aim to boost the uptake of digital tools in agriculture, few assess how these tools align with agroecological principles such as diversity, circularity and knowledge co-creation. [D4AgEcol](#) addressed this gap systematically.

“Digitalisation is not automatically good for agroecology,” says project coordinator Andreas Meyer-Aurich from the [Leibniz Institute for Agricultural Engineering and Bioeconomy](#).

“We didn’t want to add more technology, but to assess what’s already there and understand its real value.”

As a Horizon Europe [coordination and support action](#) (CSA), the consortium reviewed more than 100 digital tools and systems across Europe, analysing how each contributes to sustainable farming. A framework based on the [FAO’s 10 Elements of Agroecology](#) – including resource efficiency, resilience and social equity – guided the evaluation.

“We used the FAO’s 10 Elements as a compass to see where digitalisation supports or conflicts with agroecology,” explains Meyer-Aurich. The result is an [online inventory](#) providing open-access data on each tool’s functions, costs and ecological relevance. The inventory helps researchers and policymakers compare technologies and identify gaps where innovation could better serve agroecological goals.

Mapping what works

Through 12 multi-actor case studies spanning arable and livestock farming, orchards and agroforestry systems, the team explored how farmers, advisers and developers view the

potential of digitalisation as an enabler for agroecology and for organic farming, and the barriers that limit its potential. For example, a workshop to assess the use of farm robots for sowing and weeding on organic sugar beet farms identified erosion control and out-of-date regulations as key challenges to wider adoption.

Results showed that while digital tools can improve data collection, traceability and soil management, many remain designed for high-input systems and inaccessible to smaller or more diversified farms.

The D4AgEcol [assessment framework](#) for digital tools can help address these challenges and further these technologies.

Evidence for policymaking

A key output is a set of [fact sheets](#) indicating the potential of digital tools to enable agroecology and a thorough analysis of the barriers of the technologies.

Furthermore, the project delivered seven national roadmaps outlining needs for involved European countries and a European roadmap to indicate actions supporting the [common agricultural policy](#) (CAP) and the [European Green Deal](#).

The results were published in a [policy brief](#). Together, these outputs can guide policymakers in integrating digitalisation more effectively into Europe’s transition towards ecological farming. Moreover, D4AgEcol results are informing research agendas and signalling future funding priorities for digitalisation in agriculture.

D4AgEcol also plays a central role in the [Digital Agroecology Cluster](#), a network of seven Horizon Europe projects, including [PATH2DEA](#), working at the interface between technology and ecological farming. Its inventory and framework now feed into the Cluster’s shared knowledge base and will contribute to the [European R&I AGROECOLOGY Partnership](#).

“While some potentials of digitalisation for agroecology can be seen, there is a lack of knowledge about the effects for many aspects of agroecology,” adds Meyer-Aurich. “There is a clear need for more holistic research on the impact of digital tools and technologies on farming systems and the environment.”

In essence, D4AgEcol has shown how digitalisation, used thoughtfully, can strengthen Europe’s move towards farming that works with nature, not against it.

PROJECT

D4AgEcol – DIGITALISATION FOR AGROECOLOGY

COORDINATED BY

Leibniz Institute for Agricultural Engineering and Bioeconomy in Germany

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060759

PROJECT WEBSITE

d4agecol.eu



Nourishing the green shoots of livestock grazing

Collaboration between farmers and other stakeholders on the EU-funded Grazing4AgroEcology project unearths, supports and monitors innovative solutions for more sustainable grazing-based farms.



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Properly managed, grazing livestock can offer a range of benefits. Often referred to collectively as ecosystem services, these benefits include improved animal welfare, cleaner air and water, and even fire prevention.

Grazing also holds economic and social value: as Arno Krause from the [Grassland Centre](#) (website in German) in Germany notes, "Grazing animals work as an agroecology advertisement, with research indicating that up to 90 % of consumers prefer knowing

animals have been out in fields, at least during summer. But we can't take these bucolic scenes for granted. Once grazing is gone, it's gone."

"It's much harder to revert to grazing from indoor farming, than the reverse," adds Krause, coordinator of the [Grazing4AgroEcology](#) project. "We have to actively invest in grazing."

With the trend towards larger herds, requiring more pasture and labour, grazing is [declining in some European countries](#), such as Germany and the Netherlands. The Grazing4AgroEcology project aims to provide European ruminant livestock farmers with the necessary grazing 'know what' and 'know how'.

Grazing relies heavily on local knowledge to be effective, with variations in topography, soil chemistry, water availability and weather conditions. "Optimised grazing is site-specific," explains Krause. "For example, knowing where parasite hot spots are is vital to avoid diseases spreading. Grazing farmers have to be like chefs, experimenting until they find the right ingredients. We want to give them cookbooks."

Knowledge sharing is the key to success

Grazing4AgroEcology was guided by five agroecology principles: adopt management practices that improve animal health, reduce both production inputs and pollution, enhance diversity to strengthen animal resilience, and preserve biodiversity.

The project worked with [120 conventional and organic partner farms](#) and 18 partner organisations in [eight Member States](#): France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Sweden.

To discover, embed and share the most impactful innovations, two online platforms were developed, enabling multiple tiers of networking and knowledge exchange.

The [first](#) focused on peer-peer exchanges, sharing experiences and best practice related to specific innovations, such as using solar panels to provide shade for grazing animals. A searchable database was created to host farm profiles and assets such as videos, for farmers to find inspiration relevant to their circumstances. Regular networking activities also allowed farmers to meet face to face and online.

The second tier concentrated on [Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems](#) (AKIS) bringing together individual, organisational and institutional stakeholders along the value chain, to build capacity related to agroecological practices, such as for water management.

Evidence-based agroecology policies

More effective agroecology practices would contribute to a range of EU ambitions such as those under the [European Green Deal](#), [biodiversity strategy](#) and [organic action plan](#), as well as [Vision for agriculture and food](#).

But the success of the Grazing4AgroEcology approach will ultimately be determined by increased grazing quality and quantity.

To measure this, the team developed an '[integrated self-assessment tool](#)', which generates a score against five agroecology pillars (reducing inputs, enhancing diversity, reducing pollution, biodiversity, and animal welfare), helping farms monitor their progress. Indicators of success are being collated to help inform policy recommendations, currently under development.

To ensure sustainability, the project's platforms will be maintained by French partners, linked to the [EU-FarmBook initiative](#). Meanwhile Krause is promoting continued network engagement through activities such as study tours.

"The best hope for the future of grazing is our network; researchers and practitioners, men and women, old and young, all committed to the same agroecology goals," concludes Krause.



We can't take these bucolic scenes for granted. Once grazing is gone, it's gone.

PROJECT

Grazing4AgroEcology – European Network to promote grazing and to support grazing-based farms on their economic and ecologic performances as well as on animal welfare

COORDINATED BY

Grassland Centre in Germany

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101059626

PROJECT WEBSITE

Grazing4AgroEcology.eu

Antique cultivars bear fruit for more sustainable orchards

By delivering cultivars better suited to organic fruit production, the EU-funded InnOBreed project is enhancing the sustainability, competitiveness and resilience of fruit supply chains.



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While consumer demand for organic fruit continues to grow, significant barriers stand in the way of European producers, including increased prevalence of pests and diseases, climate change and the limited availability of cultivars specifically adapted to organic growing conditions.

“For many years conventional cultivars were bred for maximum yield under high-input conditions, meaning they couldn’t adapt to climate change-driven altered conditions, making them unsuitable for organic systems,” explains Khaled Djelouah from the [Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari](#) and coordinator of the [InnOBreed](#) project.

InnOBreed's solutions, including clearer identification and prioritisation of organic-friendly cultivars, extend to the whole fruit supply chain: from growers to nurseries, distributors and regulatory bodies.

Co-designed solutions and participatory evaluations

InnOBreed focuses on perennial fruit crops – especially pome (apple, pear) and stone fruits (peach, apricot, plum, cherry), with additional work on citrus and grapes.

"While economically important for European organic production, these crops face major challenges under current farming arrangements. But they do benefit from strong stakeholder networks and rich breeding resources," explains Djelouah.



We look forward to the day when we can translate our experimental innovations into clear pathways for validated propagation and supply-chain solutions.

InnOBreed found that many desirable cultivar traits could already be engineered using existing pre-breeding material (where genetic traits have been introduced from wild relatives to cultivated crops). But crucially, these had not been fully characterised for organic farming production.

Additionally, while fruit tree genetic resources (FTGRs) open-dataset collections provide comprehensive inventories and historical records of existing plant cultivars, biological materials (such as seeds, tissues and DNA sequences) and local accessions (unique samples) often lack evaluation for traits of interest to organic growers.

"In practice, this means that growers can already mine old local fruit landraces for late-leaving traits to avoid spring frost, or cross apricot cultivars with pre-breeding material for resistance to sharka [Plum pox] or bacterial canker, for example," adds Djelouah.

To help growers make the most of these opportunities, solutions are being co-designed with participants from universities, research institutes, nurseries, breeders, germplasm curators, farmers, producer associations and technology centres from multiple EU countries.

The resulting tools facilitate a range of operations, such as high-throughput genotyping to identify molecular markers for breeding, and modelling that assesses climate risk or fruit quality and evaluates plants during selection processes.

Validating a toolbox of solutions

Twelve [regional case studies](#) have been selected to test the maturity and transferability of 110 project innovations.

One of them is the long-established Danish Apple Oasis project, which has been developing new organic apple cultivars and promoting local varieties using the [Pometum](#), the Danish national apple genebank, which holds around 280 original Danish cultivars among the 800 or so in their collection.

In southern Italy, the project supported the Regional center for the *ex situ* conservation of native fruit, vine, and olive through field trials that [investigated the resistance of traditional cultivars to pathogens and environmental stress](#).

Benefiting sustainability, food security and rural livelihoods

InnOBreed directly supports the [European Green Deal's](#) ambition of expanding organic farming to at least 25 % of EU farmland by 2030.

The various innovations should also help reduce costs and increase profits for growers, benefiting consumers with better quality longer-lasting produce. "We look forward to the day when we can translate our experimental innovations into clear pathways for validated propagation and supply-chain solutions," says Djelouah.

PROJECT

InnOBreed – Innovative Organic Fruit Breeding and uses

COORDINATED BY

Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari in Italy

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101061028

PROJECT WEBSITE

innobreed.eu

Seed and cultivar innovation to support organic farming systems

Conventional crops often lack the traits needed in sustainable farming systems. The EU-funded LIVESEEDING project brings farmers and scientists together to develop improved organic cultivars.



© Ravinder/stockadobe.com

Despite a growing market for organic produce, European farmers are struggling to find suitable seeds and cultivars.

According to Monika Messmer, scientific co-coordinator of [LIVESEEDING](#): “In 2018 it was estimated that only about 50 % of seeds used in organic farming [were actually organic](#). Most organic fields are cultivated with varieties developed

for conventional farming, and seldom tested under organic conditions.”

LIVESEEDING is increasing the availability of vigorous and resilient organic seeds and cultivars, across a range of crops. A central focus is testing and promoting varieties adapted for organic farming, alongside the creation of newly bred cultivars.

‘Pull–Push–Enable’ methodology

Organic farming can thrive if given access to cultivars specifically bred for the unique conditions and management practices of organic systems, such as avoiding synthetic fertilisers and pesticides.

LIVESEEDING adopted a ‘Pull–Push–Enable’ methodology to: encourage market demand (pull); increase the availability and suitability of organic seeds from cultivars adapted to organic farming (push); and foster a supportive policy and regulatory environment (enable).



In 2018 it was estimated that only about 50 % of seeds used in organic farming were actually organic.

The project unites [37 value chain organisations](#), from breeders to consumers, working through 17 local Living Labs across 16 European countries, focused on organic breeding, cultivar testing and seed production.

“By introducing organic criteria at the start of the value chain, with seeds and cultivars, we can unlock pathways to more sustainable farming and food systems,

grounded in LIVESEEDING biodiversity,” explains Mariateresa Lazzaro, scientific co-coordinator of LIVESEEDING.

Planting the seeds of policies and practices

Thanks to the LIVESEEDING consortium, organic produce based on newly developed and heritage varieties are already reaching consumers, including onion and turnip sold in Swiss supermarkets and Blanco de Villena peppers in Spain.

Running until September 2026, the project is now developing business plans to support the growth of the organic seed and breeding sector, with an emphasis on less developed markets, especially in eastern and southern Europe.

LIVESEEDING also plays an active role in science–policy dialogues, supplying evidence to a variety of key regulatory topics. Annual seed policy conferences in Croatia, Poland and Portugal laid the groundwork for national roadmaps towards 100 % organic seed use, amplified by a 2025 webinar attracting over 100 participants, including seed suppliers.

“By supporting policies that integrate cultivated biodiversity and organic seeds into urban agri-food systems such as community seed banks, municipalities are increasing people’s health and more food security,” says LIVESEEDING coordinator, Mariano Iossa from project host [FiBL Europe](#).

Stakeholder participation

Responding to a lack of suitable varieties, the ‘Resilient Rice’ Living Lab in Italy created genetically diverse rice populations and promoted a ‘culinary breeding’ approach – combining genetics and gastronomy – with tasting panels formed by farmers, technicians, citizens and chefs.

“Living Labs like this show how cooperation delivers innovative biodiverse and resilient local food systems,” adds Lazzaro. The rice populations are now in the [organic heterogeneous material](#) (OHM) notification phase, a milestone for community plant breeding.

The project is also building [digital support tools](#) for population breeding management, OHM notification, and a user-friendly platform supporting farmers with cost-effective cultivar trials. Meanwhile, the EU router database links seed supplier offers to national repositories.

PROJECT

LIVESEEDING – Organic seed and plant breeding to accelerate sustainable and diverse food systems in Europe

COORDINATED BY

FiBL Europe – Research Institute of Organic Agriculture in Belgium

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101059872

PROJECT WEBSITE

liveseeding.eu



Building a European network for non-chemical weed control

Building on the outcomes of EIP-AGRI operational groups, the EU-funded Oper8 project set out to uncover the root causes of reliance on chemical weed control, and boost the adoption of more sustainable alternatives.



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Weeds are a [persistent problem](#) and one of the major challenges of farming. They cause major difficulties in both conventional and organic crops, including vineyards, arable and horticultural crops, making their control essential.

While the use of synthetic herbicides has allowed increased food production, this has brought a range of costs to the environment, natural resources and human health. While other options exist, their use remains limited.

"Many farmers are hesitant to adopt non-chemical weed control methods and avoid the use of herbicides due to their complexity, cost and time requirements," explains project manager [Olga Kriezi](#), research associate at the [Agricultural University of Athens](#). "Farmers need to be aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches, understand how they work, and gain hands-on experience in sustainable farming."

In [Oper8](#), project coordinator Spyros Fountas and his team set up an EU-wide network to spread relevant information and promote the use of sustainable, non-chemical weed control.

The project built on the existing knowledge and outcomes from eight [Operational Groups](#) (OGs) established under the [EIP-AGRI](#) framework.

"The need to exploit, maintain and further develop the research and results of OGs, while continuing to support and empower farmers, was a major motivation for our project," says Kriezi.

Creating best practices

The Oper8 team first gathered support from the OGs, before forming [seven National Networks](#) (NNs) to discuss weed control methods. This included focus groups, demonstration events, workshops and stakeholder engagement activities focusing on farmers.

The next step was to set up the EU-wide thematic network based on these NNs, supporting further engagement activities such as European workshops, surveys, webinars, cross-visits and e-learning courses.

"At this stage, the discussion took an EU-wide scope, with farmers, researchers, advisors, policymakers, citizens, students and industry people sharing difficulties and lessons learnt on adopting alternative weed control solutions," notes Kriezi.

The most significant results of Oper8 are the [87 'Best Practices'](#), which each represent an alternative weed control solution tailored to the specific needs, strengths and crops of specific countries.

The researchers developed these into 100 Practice Abstracts, 83 Fact sheets, 50 videos and one e-learning module, [available online](#) in the seven languages of the consortium.

"Through this comprehensive documentation and audiovisual materials, Oper8 supports farmers across the EU in adopting

sustainable and non-chemical weed control methods," says Kriezi. All material will be made available to the EU CAP Network, EU-FarmBook, Zenodo and Oper8's website.

Oper8 also promotes the adoption of alternative weed control solutions by providing information to all interested stakeholders through the [Oper8 Inventory](#), an online gateway to knowledge about weed control, and [collaborating](#) with EU-funded projects with similar goals, such as [AGROSUS](#) and [GOOD](#).

More sustainable farming

The team stresses the importance of placing farmers at the heart of every activity, to actively engage them in the transition to sustainable farming. Strong interest was reflected in the high level of participation, across 76 demonstration events that included a total of 5 051 stakeholders.

"Through the materials and resources developed by Oper8, we aim to empower people to explore and apply alternative weed control methods, adapt each solution to their specific needs, respect the environment and move closer to achieving truly sustainable and resilient farming systems," adds Kriezi.



Many farmers are hesitant to adopt non-chemical weed control methods due to their complexity, cost and time requirements.

PROJECT

Oper8 – European Thematic Network for unlocking the full potential of Operational Groups on alternative weed control

COORDINATED BY

Agricultural University of Athens in Greece

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060591

PROJECT WEBSITE

oper-8.eu



Assessing the drivers and barriers of the organic transition

Europe aims to shift a significant fraction of its farming and aquaculture to organic production. The EU-funded OrganicTargets4EU project provides insights into how this goal can be achieved.



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Progress in organic [farming](#) and [aquaculture](#) is one of the goals set out under the [European Green Deal](#), aiming to achieve 25 % of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming by 2030, and a significant increase in organic aquaculture.

"Achieving these ambitious goals requires a systemic transformation, a balanced upscaling of both production and consumption, with a huge transformation in farm structures and value chains," explains [Ambra De Simone](#), R&I associate manager at [IFOAM Organics Europe](#), the project host. "We need

ambitious research and innovation, strong advisory services, and extensive knowledge exchange and training across the organic value chain.”

Farmers face technical, economic and regulatory barriers, and need supportive policies, stable markets and accessible knowledge to convert to or remain organic. “We need to encourage farmers to convert to organic farming and create viable opportunities for attracting new generations and entrants in the sector,” says De Simone, [OrganicTargets4EU](#) project coordinator.

In the OrganicTargets4EU project, researchers and stakeholders formed plausible future scenarios of how 2040 could look if the targets were achieved by 2030, to find the most promising areas for investment and support.

Developing foresight scenarios

The project began with an extensive literature review to identify the driving forces for organic farming development. Stakeholders and experts then took part in EU-level workshops to develop storylines for two policy-driven scenarios and two demand-driven scenarios, as well as equivalent scenarios for organic aquaculture.

The team then analysed the socio-economic impacts of the various scenarios, exploring key factors, including promising targets for organic farmland expansion, market impacts and mechanisms behind demand. Further work explored how to achieve the target.

Organic farmland targets

The project results suggest that on current trends, the 25 % organic farmland target by 2030 is unlikely to be achieved and 16-18 % is more realistic. “We need both aspirational and realistic targets,” says De Simone. “The 25 % target holds a crucial motivational value motivating Member States to boost policy support, while realistic targets help align resources and measure progress,” she adds.

This is reflected in [CAP Strategic Plans](#) and the fact that, for the first time, all EU countries provided support for organic farming

and set targets for the organic land area by 2027 or 2030, she notes.

Progress will depend on supply chain development, policy support and ambition, market health and innovation, and access to knowledge. OrganicTargets4EU delivered a comprehensive analysis of the factors driving organic farming and organic aquaculture growth across Europe, including [29 country fact sheets](#), socio-economic assessment and multi-actor policy dialogue identifying key gaps and opportunities relating to the organic target.

Towards a sustainable food system

“In contrast to ‘normal’ innovation, organic farming relies on a highly complex multi-level knowledge system,” notes De Simone. “In addition to formal advisory and training systems and organic farming institutions, informal networks and peer groups are key.”

Due to complete at the end of February 2026, OrganicTargets4EU aims to deliver comprehensive policy recommendations on key areas in the organic sector, based on the perspectives of farmers, advisors, business, research and policy actors.



We need to encourage farmers to convert to organic farming.

PROJECT

OrganicTargets4EU – Transformation scenarios for boosting organic farming and organic aquaculture towards the Farm-to-Fork targets

COORDINATED BY

IFOAM Organics Europe in Sweden

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060368

PROJECT WEBSITE

organictargets.eu



Connecting digital innovation with agroecological farming

Digitalisation is transforming European agriculture, yet many farmers implementing agroecology and organic farming remain cautious about new technologies. The EU-funded PATH2DEA project explored how digital tools can strengthen the ecological principles of sustainable farming.



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Agroecology focuses on working with natural processes to create diverse, resilient and low-input farming systems. But digital tools for agriculture have often been developed with industrial models in mind, designed to optimise yields rather than biodiversity.

"Agroecology is based on both science and traditional knowledge," explains [PATH2DEA](#) project coordinator Stefan Pfeiffer from the [Austrian Institute of Technology](#). "We wanted to see how digital technologies could support that mix, helping farmers to work with nature more effectively."

Pfeiffer adds that this was central to the project's vision. "The big question for us was how digital tools can really enable agroecology," he says. "They should make it easier for farmers to work with nature, not push them towards more intensive systems."

To understand adoption barriers, the project carried out an EU-wide survey in nine languages. With 533 responses from farmers, advisers and organisations across eight countries, it revealed key obstacles: complex interfaces, high costs, lack of training and concerns about data ownership and security. Farmers, particularly those with smaller or more diverse holdings, worried about losing control over their information and becoming dependent on technology suppliers.

Learning from Europe's pioneer farms

PATH2DEA then took its research into the field. Six showcase farms and cooperatives in Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy and Spain provided testing grounds for digital innovation. Each site represented a distinct system: glasshouse horticulture, viticulture, mixed farming, walnut agroforestry, olive groves and extensive organic cattle farming.

Rather than developing new tools, the project studied existing ones to see how they could be adapted to agroecological farming. In Belgium, sensors helped farmers monitor shade and water demand in walnut-based systems. In Italy, a biodiversity app enabled smallholders to track pollinators and insects as indicators of ecosystem recovery. Across sites, farmers and advisers used these insights to refine crop management and test how digital support could enhance decision-making.

Connecting farmers and developers

A key output is the PATH2DEA Open Repository, an online platform connecting farmers, advisers and technology providers. Designed to be low maintenance and user-friendly, it lets users explore, evaluate and recommend digital tools suited to specific crops, climates and management goals. Real examples and success stories from the showcases help farmers see how others apply similar tools, encouraging developers to adapt solutions to practical realities.

The project also established an evaluation framework for digital tools based on agroecological principles, and policy recommendations stressing open-access data, transparent governance, local training hubs and cooperative business models that share both costs and benefits.

A digital agroecology roadmap

Another of PATH2DEA's key outputs is a 10-year Research & Innovation roadmap that outlines how digitalisation can support agroecological farming system transformation, also in line with the [European Green Deal](#) and the [common agricultural policy](#) (CAP) objectives. The project's recommendations will feed into the [European R&I AGROECOCLOGY Partnership](#).

PATH2DEA also promoted farmer-led trials and knowledge sharing, echoing the goals of [EIP-AGRI](#) networks that link on-farm innovation with EU research and policy. Across its pilot farms, digital tools helped improve biodiversity monitoring, water use and crop management in Europe's main climate zones.

To sustain momentum, PATH2DEA has initiated the [Digital Agroecology Cluster](#), bringing together seven Horizon Europe projects and one [co-funded Partnership](#) in exploring the interface between technology and agroecology, including [REFOREST](#) and [D4AgEcol](#).

A [Cluster Conference in Brussels in November 2025](#) showcased findings and shaped the next steps for research and policy.

"Our aim was to show that digital tools can really support agroecology and not overburden farmers," notes Pfeiffer. "If we use them in the right way, they can help agroecology grow while keeping its local and traditional roots." For Europe's farmers, that means using innovation to strengthen what nature already does best.



Digital tools should make it easier for farmers to work with nature, not push them towards more intensive systems.

PROJECT

PATH2DEA – Paving the Way towards Digitalisation Enabling Agroecology for European Farming Systems

COORDINATED BY

AIT Austrian Institute of Technology in Austria

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment

CORDIS FACTSHEET

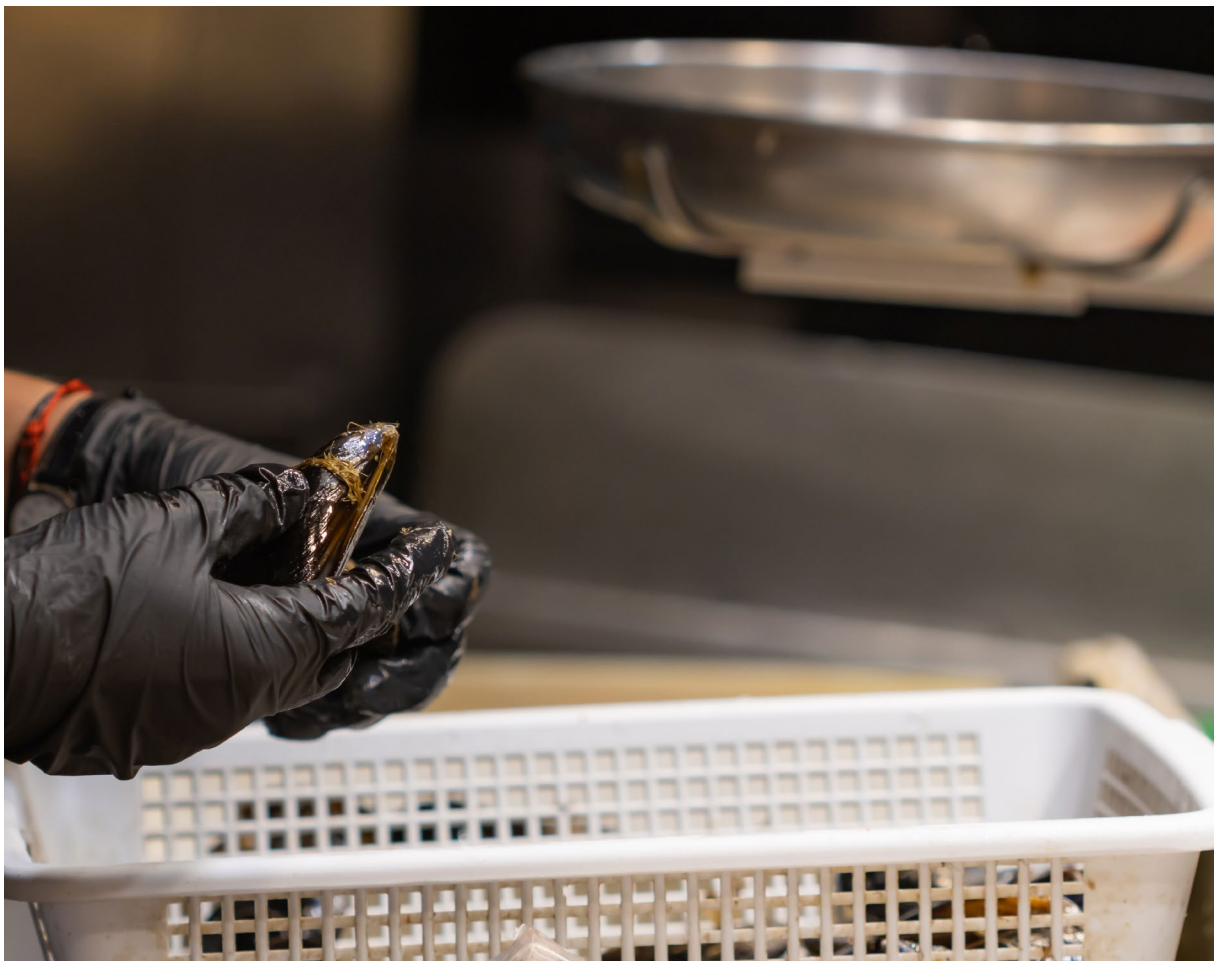
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PROJECT WEBSITE

path2dea.eu

Digital tools for verifying trust in organic and GI food labelling

As Europe's organic and Geographical Indication (GI) supply chains grow more complex, so too does the risk of fraud. The EU-funded THEROS project's digital toolbox verifies authenticity through sensors, satellite data, DNA testing and blockchain.



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"Organic and GI labels depend on consumer trust," says Angelos Amditis, R&D director of the [Institute of Communication and Computer Systems](#) at the National Technical University of Athens, and project coordinator of [THEROS](#). "Any case of fraud,

such as mislabelling or non-compliance with organic standards, undermines that trust. We wanted to make trust verifiable, affordable and data-driven across the entire value chain."

Digital tools for real-time verification

THEROS has developed an operational system for monitoring, verification, adulteration detection and traceability, integrating all components through its harmonisation and verification platform.

One key innovation is a portable near-infrared (NIR) spectrometer, which uses light to analyse a product's chemical fingerprint.

Linked to machine learning models, it provides quick, non-destructive checks of quality and authenticity. "It can detect adulteration or quality deviations in seconds, directly in the field," notes Amditis.

The DNA-based authenticity toolkit applies portable polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and high-resolution melting (HRM) analysis with artificial intelligence (AI) models to verify a product's species or origin on-site. In Spain, the system achieved over 95 % accuracy

in identifying mussel species within the Galician protected designation of origin (PDO) chain.

THEROS also integrated Earth Observation models based on [Copernicus Sentinel-2](#) imagery, using machine learning to detect crop types and organic management indicators even on smallholder plots. Combined with the internet of things (IoT) monitoring network, the system automatically records environmental and transport data, feeding into a Digital Product Passport and blockchain layer that securely store verified records.



Our vision is for THEROS to become a long-term reference for transparency and trust.

THEROS has also shifted verification from snapshot inspections to a continuous digital process. Earth Observation provides regular updates, sensors and blockchain ensure tamper-proof data, and DNA or NIR tools deliver immediate, lab-grade checks in the field. The result is faster detection, fewer repetitive audits and stronger evidence across the value chain.

Building lasting confidence

Beyond technology, THEROS is changing how verification systems work for both farmers and inspectors. Producers can upload verified data directly to the same platform used by certifiers, turning compliance into collaboration.

The project also developed the [Green Accountability Tool](#) to assess the environmental performance of farms and products over time. It aggregates indicators such as carbon footprint and soil health into a visual dashboard, helping producers improve their practices and providing clear sustainability performance data for authorities.

In the longer term, the project aims to make digital trust a shared asset across the food system. THEROS targets up to 30 % lower inspection costs and 40 % faster verification, while reducing fraud across the value chain. The team plans to ensure the system continues beyond the project, evolving into a digital infrastructure that supports authentic, sustainable food production in Europe.

"Our vision is for THEROS to become a long-term reference for transparency and trust in sustainable food systems," concludes Amditis.

Testing the toolbox across Europe

The project ran four pilots in Czechia, Greece, Serbia and Spain, each representing different parts of the organic and GI-labelled food chain. In Serbia, the combination of satellite data and NIR sensing revealed inconsistencies between declared organic practices and real field conditions. In Spain, the DNA toolkit confirmed mussel species authenticity, while in Czechia, IoT devices and blockchain demonstrated automatic issuance of digital transport certificates.

The pilots also validated each tool in real operating conditions, confirming that the integrated system could detect inconsistencies and speed up verification decisions. Certifiers and farmers reported reduced paperwork and easier access to compliance data, while the platform's interoperability ensured smooth data exchange between all actors in the value chain.

PROJECT

THEROS – An integrated toolbox for improved verification and prevention of adulterations and non-compliances in organic and geographical indications food supply chain

COORDINATED BY

Institute of Communication and Computer Systems,
National Technical University of Athens in Greece

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural
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CORDIS FACTSHEET

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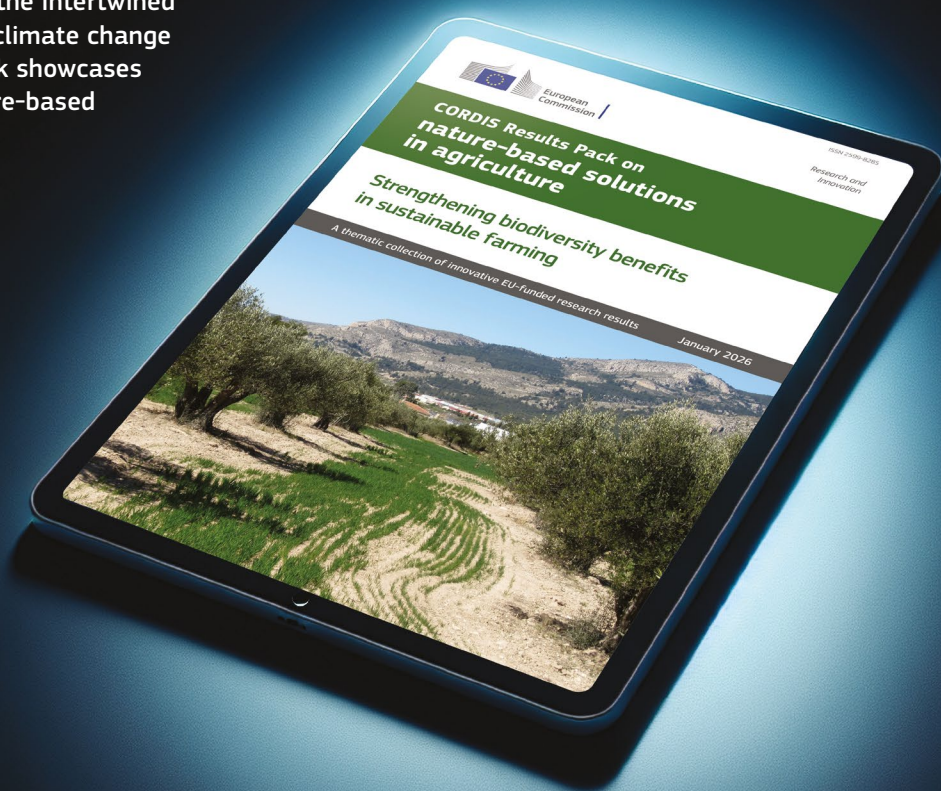
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RESULTS PACK ON NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS IN AGRICULTURE

Integrating biodiversity and nature conservation with farming practices can help to address the intertwined global challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution. This CORDIS Results Pack showcases 12 EU-funded projects delivering nature-based solutions in agriculture.



Check out the Pack here:
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