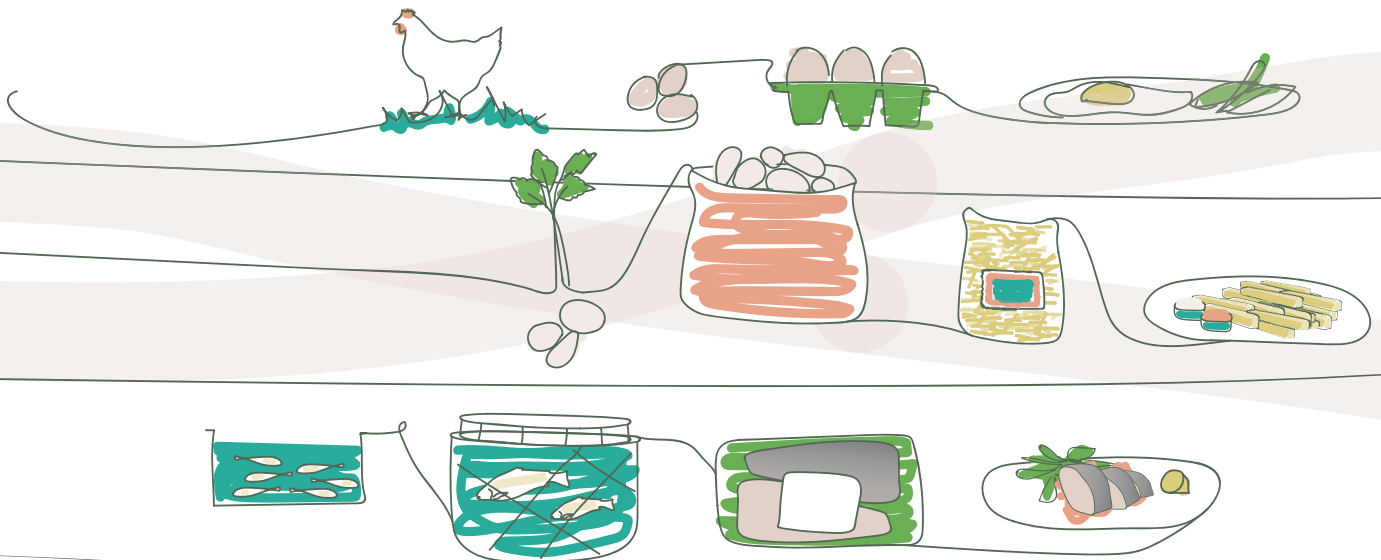


MALTA'S ACTION PLAN FOR **ORGANIC FOOD** 2023-2030

ACTION PLAN



AMBASSADOR FOR
**ORGANIC &
SUSTAINABLE
FOOD**

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MALTA'S ACTION PLAN FOR **ORGANIC FOOD**

ACTION PLAN DOCUMENT



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Foreword by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights Hon. Anton Refalo

As a nation, we recognise the importance of adopting sustainable practices in all aspects of our lives. One of the most critical areas where we must focus our attention is in our food system.

Our government is committed to ensuring that we produce food in a way that is sustainable, environmentally-friendly, and beneficial to our health. To this end, I am very proud to introduce Malta's first Action Plan for Organic Food and in doing so, also support the European Green Deal target of 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030.

This plan is a crucial step towards building a more sustainable food system in Malta and increasing organic production. The plan is ambitious and aims to substantially increase organic agricultural land in Malta, from 0.6% of utilised agricultural area to 5%, representing a near tenfold increase in just 7 years. The plan will also support the expansion of the sector to include meat, animal products, and organic aquaculture, thus benefiting both consumers and businesses.

The plan also seeks to promote the use of 'bio-districts' and 'bio-trails' to create a more organic food chain. These initiatives will bring together farmers, sellers, processors, restaurants, and other establishments that offer food, serving as a means to promote the sector.

Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food takes a cohesive approach to policy-making, fostering close collaboration with other government ministries to achieve its vision. We are implementing various initiatives, such as the reforms in the legislative framework for land tenure and in the markets for fresh fruits and vegetables, also in collaboration with partner ministries to realise shared ambitions for land use, organic production, and sustainable practices.

Strong financial incentives to support land conversion and maintenance are being introduced. Additionally, the plan aims to explore the use of photovoltaics in organic greenhouses as a means of boosting ancillary revenue streams for producers in addition to many other measures to build a stronger ecosystem around organic production.

The National Action Plan for Organic Food is a significant step towards achieving a more sustainable and organic agricultural sector in Malta. Its successful implementation requires the collaboration of all stakeholders, and I am confident that together, we can build a more sustainable, resilient, and organic food system for Malta that benefits everyone.

**Foreword
by the Parliamentary
Secretary
for Fisheries, Aquaculture
and Animal Welfare
Hon. Alicia Bugeja Said**



As parliamentary secretary for fisheries, aquaculture and animal rights, it brings me great pleasure to present Malta's first action plan for organic food.

As a scientist with a keen interest in biodiversity management and conservation, and being responsible for promoting healthier and more sustainable practices in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, this is something I am deeply passionate about. This document enables us to pave a clear path forward; one which promotes organic growth, the preservation of our bio-diversity, and the well-being of our society on all strata. Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food is designed to prioritise the well-being of citizens, protect natural resources, and support a resilient and thriving economy. I am proud to be a part of this important initiative and am confident that this plan will be a significant step towards creating a more sustainable and organic food system in Malta.

The development and promotion of organic practices in aquaculture is an area I am keen to see develop over the coming 7 years. To this end, our Government is committed to investing in research, innovation, and capacity-building in this area, in conjunction with the private sector and research organisations.

To this end, we are pleased to confirm that Malta's Multi-Annual National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture includes clear reference to maximising efforts to adopt locally relevant organic practices and further exploring the benefits of organic aquaculture. This will be substantiated in practice via projects financed through the EMFAF programme, which will adopt sustainable and clean research practices.

I am also delighted to report that the forthcoming Aquaculture Strategy will align with the objectives of Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food and complement our efforts to promote organic aquaculture. The Strategy will tap into all relevant concepts, guidelines, and policy directions adopted at EU Commission level.

Through close collaboration with stakeholders and partners, we will work to promote the transition to organic production in livestock farming and animal produce and increase public awareness and education about the benefits of organic produce with respect to health, biodiversity, and animal welfare. We will strengthen infrastructure required to ensure these sectors can flourish and boost resources for the organic certification and inspection systems.

Together, our efforts will contribute to a more sustainable, resilient, and organic food system for Malta that benefits both our citizens and our environment.

Foreword by the Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food Sonya Sammut



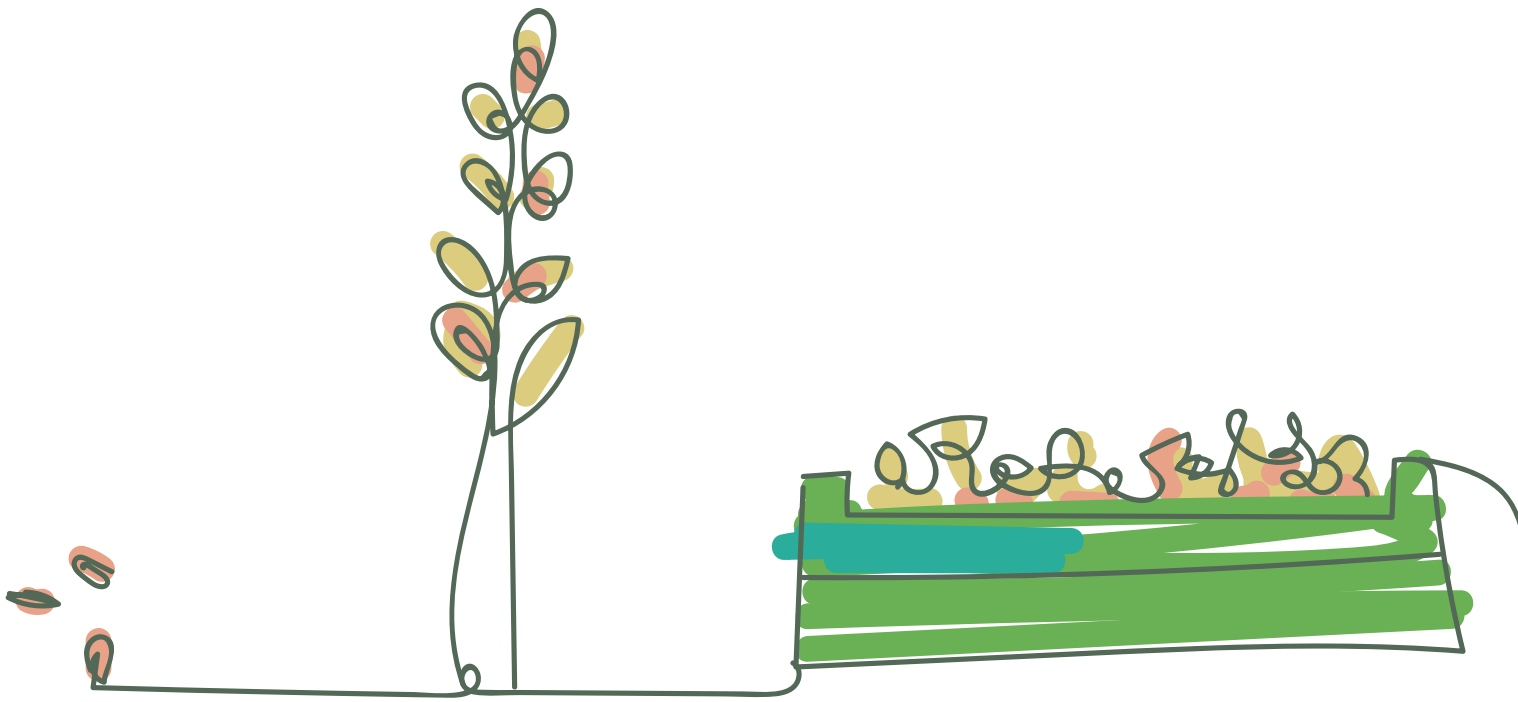
The publication of Malta's first National Action Plan for Organic Food is a proud moment for me, perhaps a greater satisfaction than my appointment as Malta's Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food and entrusted with the mission to promote organic farming and bring about ecological change in the food sector.

As a scientist, I have always looked for the evidence that would help me do my job. I was not always convinced that organic farming is one of the best solutions to the problems of modern agriculture. There was a time when I would consult the journal *Soil Use and Management* and its 2002 supplement on organically managed soils to validate my concerns about the challenges of managing soil fertility and transferring information on effective farm management techniques in organic farming systems.

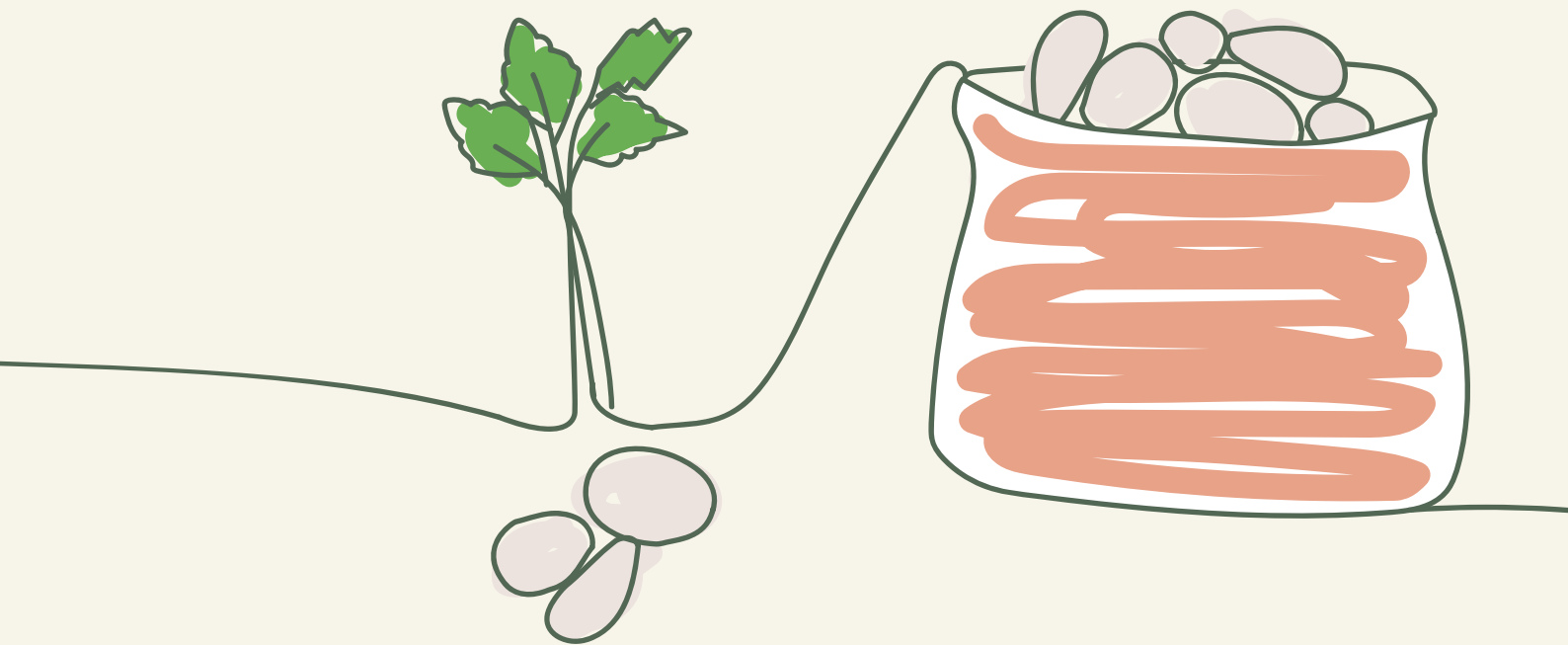
In twenty years, we have witnessed remarkable innovations in agriculture and in organic farming, but the one thing that is truly different right now is that we stand in front of a unique opportunity made possibly by Europe's "difficult target" of committing to convert 25% of its agricultural land to organic farming by 2030 as part of its drive and determination to follow a roadmap to sustainable economies through the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy. This commitment, translated into the EU's own organic action plan, also meant that, in designing their CAP strategic plans, EU countries would have the flexibility to tailor support schemes around local and agronomic realities. That Malta could offer financial support that better reflected the true costs of converting to and maintaining organic farms was a game changer. Financial compensation is not an artificial incentive, but a much-needed investment in the start-up to building a successful enterprise around organic farming. It echoes my belief that our journey to sustainability starts with taking care of money and profitability to ensure continuance in the future, with due respect for people and the environment. Another crucial ingredient is the know-how, and here we are doing our best to ensure that organic farmers and producers have access to all the information, training, and mentoring they need.

Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food is a tool for farmers who want the benefits of delivering food by employing healthier and more natural production methods. It is a gift to consumers who demand to have access to food that is free from unwanted substances. Above all, this action plan is the fruit of collaboration by those who pushed the agenda, those who protested with justified reason, those who put in the effort without questioning, and those who had the grand vision.

I am grateful for the work of all involved and augur we will continue to be inspired by those local producers, processors, traders, and retailers who are already certified to organic standards and offering organic food.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



THE MINISTRY FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND ANIMAL RIGHTS (MAFA) IS PROUD TO PRESENT THE COUNTRY'S FIRST-EVER ACTION PLAN FOR ORGANIC FOOD, ALIGNING WITH THE NATIONAL BUDGET'S EMPHASIS ON FOOD SECURITY, AS WELL AS THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL FOR SUSTAINABILITY.

The plan is based on a vision to offer consumers high quality local organic food from farming and aquaculture, whilst driving sustainable income for Maltese and Gozitan producers.

This will result in the diversification of local organic production, more access to organic produce in retail stores and markets to meet rising domestic demand and strengthen ecosystem around the organic food sector in Malta. Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food also focuses on promoting organic food production for public health, climate change mitigation and biodiversity protection aims.

In line with the European Commission's 'Farm to Fork' Strategy, the EU has set a target of 25% of its agricultural land being organic by 2030 and while also substantially increasing organic aquaculture by the same year. Malta's share of organic production should reach 5% of total cultivated area by 2030, up from its current 0.6%. This target is also in cohesion with the National Food Policy that is currently being developed for Malta and other national strategies that support organic production and consumption.

Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food is built on three pillars:



Pillar 1: Create a favourable ecosystem around the producer.



Pillar 2: Strengthen organisational leadership.



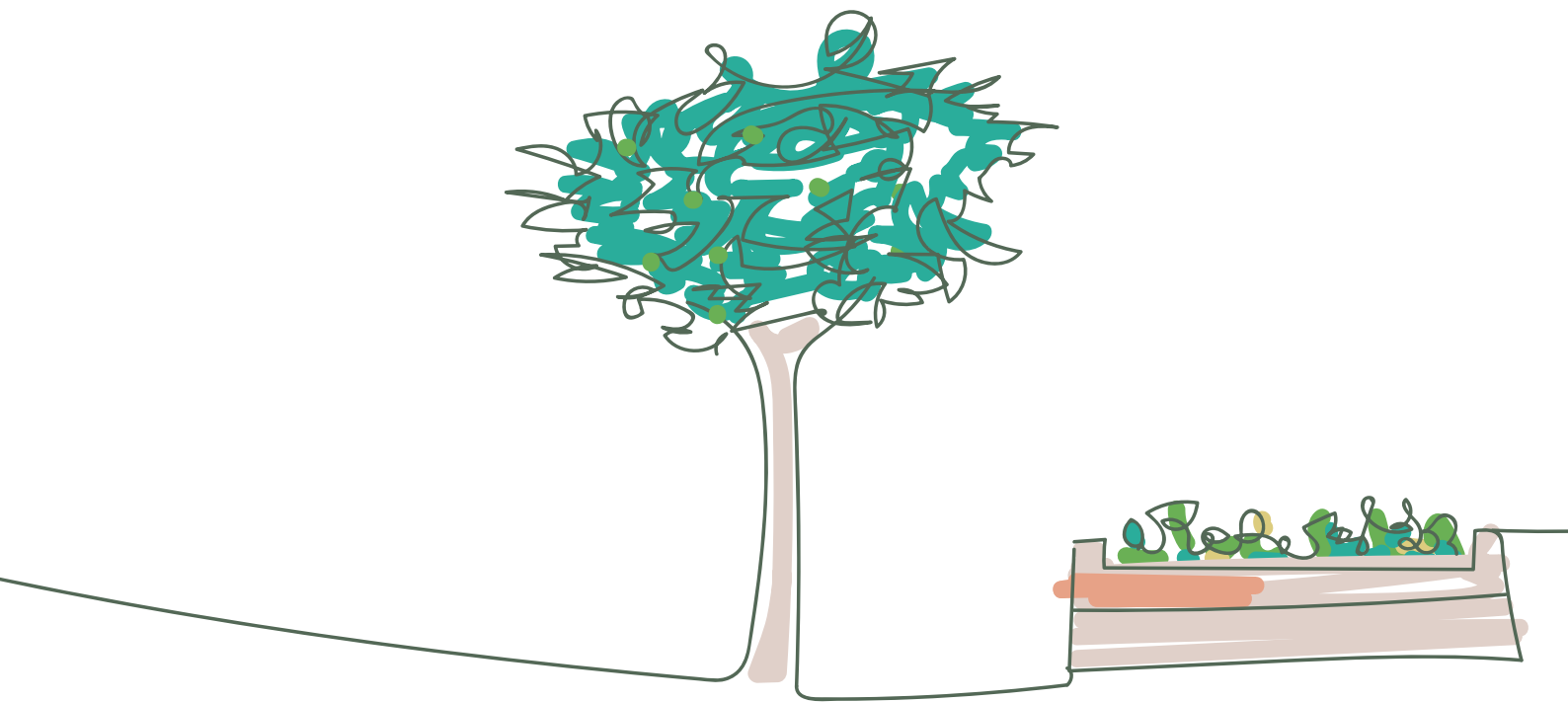
Pillar 3: Stimulate the markets.

Pillar 1 focuses on creating a favourable ecosystem around producers, who are the backbone of the organic sector. Actions include increased financial support and incentives for organic production conversion and maintenance and key policy actions that aim to strengthen the organic ecosystem. These include facilitating access to government-owned agricultural land, facilitating private land-owners to lease their land for organic production, training, mentoring, and advisory services in organic farming, initiatives to support access to EU approved plant protection products and other financial measures to support organic farm set-up and investments.

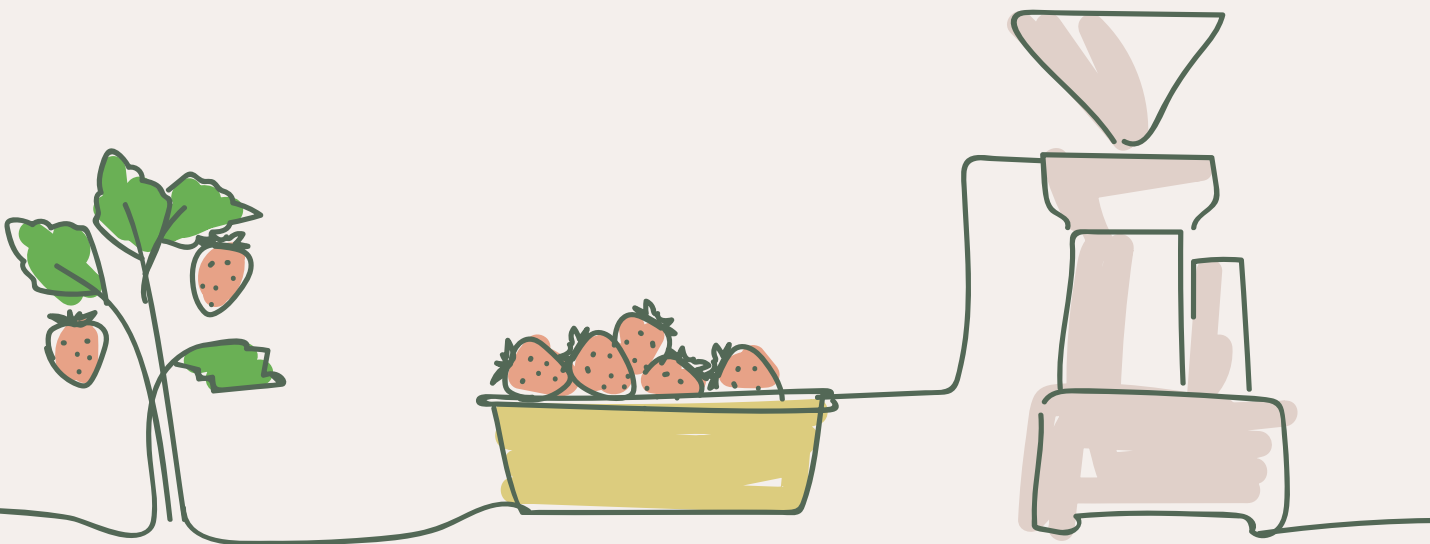
Pillar 2 focuses on creating the right government capabilities, structures, and infrastructure for the organic sector to develop and flourish. This includes strengthening the role of the Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food to lead the promotion of organic production through consumer education. Furthermore, Farm Advisory Services will be improved through the Agricultural Knowledge and Information System (AKIS). The government will also assess and invest in building the organisational capacity, capability and infrastructure of the responsible authorities.

Pillar 3 focuses on stimulating the organic market by increasing demand and supporting the creation of new markets for organic products. The actions in this pillar include supporting producers with new direct sales channels which aim to increase producer earnings and raise consumer awareness. Furthermore, government will also facilitate access to organic food across the HoReCa sector.

To ensure the success of a thriving organic sector in Malta, a monitoring and implementation committee will be established to track progress and make any necessary adjustments. Achieving these goals requires an Action Plan based on a long-term vision motivated by reasons which are in the interest of the general public and involves producers. Therefore, the National Action Plan for Organic Food brings together a set of actions designed to stimulate the growth of the local organic production sector and address key issues. This is an action plan spanning over a number of years from which different operational programmes will be rolled out over the period, aligning with annual budget allocation.



INTRODUCTION



THE MINISTRY FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES, AND ANIMAL RIGHTS (MAFA) IS PUBLISHING MALTA'S FIRST EVER ACTION PLAN FOR ORGANIC FOOD, WITH AN AMBITION TO DRIVE THE LOCAL ORGANIC PRODUCTION SECTOR FORWARD.

This document is in line with the European Commission's (EC) target to increase organic farming in the EU. EU member states have been encouraged to design their own national organic action plans and set their own timelines and targets. The vision is to offer consumers high quality local organic food from farming and aquaculture whilst driving sustainable income for Maltese and Gozitan producers. For this purpose, MAFA has developed this document, following research and consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

1.1 Structure of the document

This first chapter acts as an introduction to Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food, outlining definitions as well as the benefits which one is to expect from organic farming, concluding with a SWOT and PESTLE analysis of the Maltese context. The second chapter outlines the ambition behind Malta's organic farming 2030 targets being set, whilst the third chapter analyses enablers for our vision. The fourth chapter specifies the measures being recommended in this Plan to reach said targets. The fifth chapter lays out the timelines envisaged to execute the Plan. Chapter six sets out the framework for monitoring and evaluation and chapter 7 is the conclusion to this document.

The National Action Plan for Organic Food is supplemented by a Background Document which provides background information and acts as an introduction to Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food, bringing to light current organic production both internationally and locally.

1.2 Definitions

The European Commission (EC or the Commission), under the Regulation No 2018/848, defines organic production as “an overall system of farm management and food production that combines best environmental and climate action practices, a high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources and the application of high animal welfare standards and high production standards in line with the demand of a growing number of consumers for products produced using natural substances and processes.”¹

Regulation No 2018/848 states that: “Primarily, it should cover products originating from agriculture, including aquaculture and beekeeping, as listed in Annex I to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Moreover, it should cover processed agricultural products for use as food or feed because the placing of such products on the market as organic products provides a major outlet for agricultural products and ensures that the organic nature of the agricultural products from which they are processed is visible to the consumer. Likewise, this Regulation should cover certain other products which are linked to agricultural products in a similarly close way as processed agricultural products for use as food and feed because those other products either constitute a major outlet for agricultural products or form an integral part of the production process. Finally, sea salt and other salts used for food and feed should be included in the scope of this Regulation because they may be produced by applying natural production techniques, and because their production contributes to the development of rural areas, and thus falls within the objectives of this Regulation. For reasons of clarity, such other products not listed in Annex I to the TFEU should be listed in an Annex to this Regulation.”²

Organic farming is a particularly resource-conserving and environmentally friendly farming system based on the principle of sustainability. It mimics the natural cycles and processes of ecosystems (to the extent possible) and relies on ecosystem management rather than external agricultural inputs to support production.

Organic farming is regulated and imposes strict limitations on the use of artificial processes and substances to aid agricultural production. Chemical and synthetic pesticides, additives, and livestock antibiotics, amongst others, are limited, whilst the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is banned. Water and air quality of the area also need to be monitored regularly to ensure that no pollutants or chemicals seep into the agricultural land.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 2018/848 of 30 May 2018 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No 834/2007. (2018). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 150/1.

² *Ibid.*

Organic farming encourages the use of the existing ecosystem services to enhance the production process. Examples include crop rotation for replenishing the soil's nutrients and growing endemic plants and vegetables which require little additional water and are resistant to diseases. Livestock is to be raised in open-air free-range environment, as close to their natural habitats and processes as possible. There are also specific requirements relating to aquaculture, which amongst others include a strict maximum stocking density; water quality requirements; minimising handling to avoid stress and physical damage; and the provision that organic feeds should be used.³ Organic production, however, does not stop only at the appropriate use of land and processing within the farm. The consecutive steps of the supply chain must also be as chemical-free and as natural as possible, from food processing through to delivery. All steps are strictly regulated if a product is to be labelled and certified as organic. This allows the final customer to be sure that the product is as genuine as possible and respects both animals and the environment.

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) sets out four pillars for organic production, as follows:

- **The Principle of Health**, whereby agriculture should support and ensure the health of the environment, animals and humans as one whole.
- **The Principle of Ecology**, whereby agricultural systems should work as closely and in tandem with natural life cycles as possible.
- **The Principle of Fairness**, making sure that the processes used give equal opportunities with regards to our common environment.
- **The Principle of Care**, whereby the agricultural practices are managed responsibly to protect the well-being of current as well as future generations, as well as that of the environment and animals as a whole.

EU Regulation No 2018/848 outlines that organic aquaculture is a relatively new field of organic production as compared to organic agriculture, where long experience exists at the farm level. It is expected that production rules may evolve as the organic aquaculture sector grows in line with demand, driven by increased experience, technical knowledge and development. The regulation sets out that: "Organic aquaculture should be based on the rearing of young stock originating from organic production units. Organic aquaculture animals for breeding or on-growing purposes are not always available in sufficient quantity and quality to meet the needs of operators that produce aquaculture animals. Under certain conditions, it should be possible to bring wild caught or non-organic aquaculture animals to an organic production unit."⁴

³ European Commission. (n.d.). *Organic production and products*. Retrieved September 26, 2022, from https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-production-and-products_en

⁴ Council Regulation (EC) No 2018/848 of 30 May 2018 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No 834/2007. (2018). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 150/1.

1.3 Benefits

Organic production holds several benefits for the various stakeholders involved, ranging from the environment itself, to farmers as well as the end consumers.

Organic livestock and animal husbandry farming favours the environment and the welfare of animals, since it maintains the natural rhythms of their habitats, without the use of any chemicals or synthetic additives. Animals are reared in open spaces, much like they would be in a 'natural setting' and are not confined in small areas for the detriment of their health. Moreover, organic crop production is known to have higher long-term soil fertility, benefits to pollinators and it has been proven to maintain 30% more biodiversity than conventionally farmed land.⁵

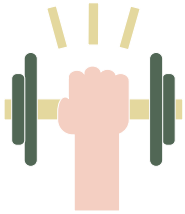
The organic aquaculture industry also serves to provide an array of benefits. The industry creates jobs and economic opportunities in coastal and rural communities. This sector can also help to decarbonise the economy, fight climate change and minimise its impact, reduce pollution, contribute to improved ecosystem protection and maximise resource utilisation. The aquaculture industry in Malta has considerable socio-economic value and potential as it enhances the overall economic diversification, contributes to employment generation, provides valuable export earnings, and contributes toward the EU trade deficit for fishery products.⁶ Native varieties are well suited to organic production since they have evolved to be well adapted to survive climatic conditions and are naturally resistant to common pests and diseases. Hence, farmers who opt to produce such varieties stand to benefit by minimising the need to use further resources beyond the local natural ecosystem.

There are a growing number of sustainably conscious consumers in Europe. They benefit from organic production knowing that the environmental footprint of their consumption is kept at a minimum, whilst enjoying food which is produced in a natural manner and has been certified and regulated at international level in following strict protocols that favour sustainability.

⁵ European Commission. (2021). Action plan for the development of organic production. agriculture.ec.europa.eu. Retrieved 16 September 2022, from https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-action-plan_en

⁶ Malta Aquaculture Research Centre. (2022). Malta National Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture 2022-2030. <https://agrikultura.gov.mt/en/fisheries/Documents/maltaAquacultureResearchCentre/mnpsa2022-2030.pdf>

1.4 SWOT and PESTLE analysis of organic production in Malta



S
strengths

W
weaknesses

O
opportunities

T
threats

The following SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis summarises the internal strengths and weaknesses of the sector and looks at external opportunities and threats which the organic production value chain might be facing or will face in the future years.

Figure 1: SWOT analysis of organic production in Malta



Strengths

Well-established EU policy, regulation and funds

- EU regulation provides a clear legal framework and certification mechanism that offers protection and reward.
- Green Deal and the new EU CAP support organic production further. Increased levels of financial assistance are being made available to farmers to support conversion and production.

National political support

- The Maltese government is committed to drive the shift towards organic production, through measures in the CAP Strategic Plan and the government programme of works.

Local Farming

- The last decade saw an increase in organic farmers, who could assist new farmers in adopting such practices.
- Some of the local farmers already use traditional and natural practices, also in respect of the scarcity of resources; hence, moving to organic production would be possible through gradual and incremental changes.
- Many local farmers already opt for polyculture; hence, crop rotation and similar processes to organic production might already be employed.
- There is a need for Malta to collaborate with EU partners to address bottlenecks affecting local organic farming through research and innovation efforts.



Weaknesses

Local Farming

- The agricultural industry in Malta is already dwindling, with most labourers being older, and resistant to change. Younger generations who may be more open to organic practices are opting for different careers.
- Farmers using traditional and conventional methods may lack the skills and knowledge required for organic production.
- At this stage, organic farming technical assistance and advisory services are limited.
- The human capacity and technical infrastructure for certain organic sub-sectors is still missing or underdeveloped (fish products, certain crop products, livestock products [e.g. beef, pork, poultry], animal products [e.g. milk, eggs], secondary activities [e.g. wine, cheese]).
- Limited local organic markets and supermarkets.

Local Aquaculture

- Complex licensing process.
- Insufficient investment in R&D and a lack of private investment.
- Transport limitation.

Local Aquaculture

- Experienced offshore sector and experienced operators with proven track record.
- Sheltered bays suitable for aquaculture production.
- Geographical position and good water quality.
- Established tuna production capabilities and global recognition as a leading producer of farmed Bluefin tuna.

Costs

- Certification imposes an additional cost for farmers and aquaculture producers.
- Organic farming tends to bring lower yields for farmers and therefore might be more costly per unit produced.
- Premiums that consumers are willing to pay may be relatively low⁷ and hence may not adequately compensate for lower production yields and increased risks.
- Retailers import a significant percentage of organic produce from overseas markets.
- Considering the local small market as well as the small land parcels for farming along with space competition for aquaculture producers, economies of scale might not be achievable.

Time lag

- Prepping the land and converting from conventional to organic operating methods takes times (2-3 years depending on area to be converted) and farmers may not be able to generate an adequate premium on products when the farm is in transition.

Land

- Many agricultural tenements are leased, and rural lease laws needed to be reformed to give farmers and landowners the security to transition and to invest in organic farming.
- Maltese farmland consists of small land-parcels often bordering other farmers, raising concerns that pesticides or any other contaminant sprayed in other fields used for conventional farming end up in the organic land parcels.

Market transparency

- Limited data on the organic sector (production, pricing, volumes, trade, consumer preferences, and marketing channels).

⁷ Bonafide Research. (2022). Europe organic food and beverage market outlook 2021-2027. Retrieved September 17, 2022, from <https://www.bonafideresearch.com/product/210229933/europe-organic-food-and-beverage-market>

Demand

- Both the consumer and business markets are still relatively undeveloped in comparison to major Western market, with low awareness and demand.
- Limited influence on international markets.

Governance, certification, and support

- The availability of pesticides that can be used in organic farming and that have been registered for use in Malta is still limited.
- Advisory, knowledge and information systems are still relatively undeveloped in terms of organic production and lack investment for organic food research and innovation.
- The Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA), the entity responsible for organic certification, may not have sufficient capacity to certify new organic producers if demand for certification services increases.
- Financial support for conversion and maintenance of organic farming has previously been inadequate in reflecting the real costs of transitioning to organic.



Opportunities

Demand

- Increased demand for organic products if the local market follows global and EU trends, including growing prioritisation of health awareness and better diets.
- Growing interest from the HoReCa sector to source local organic produce.
- New niche to tap into, given the overall agricultural declining sector, including in terms of agritourism.
- Increased consumer awareness and concern over the long-term health effects of consuming conventionally grown produce treated with antibiotics and pesticides.
- Increased demand for local organic produce as the food sector gives more attention to food miles and ESG metrics.
- Continuing to play a major role in the world's Bluefin tuna industry.
- Global demand for high-quality seafood.

Supply

- Greater efficiency as the local organic ecosystem develops and organic collective organisations progress.
- As new skills and knowledge will be required, the industry might attract new and younger generations.
- Opportunity to leverage Malta's strength in traditional aquaculture in the development of an organic aquaculture sector.



Threats

Markets and competition

- Food fraud along the organic value chain is a risk. Such instances will not only tarnish the reputation of organic farmers but might also nip the industry at the bud, given it is still at inception.
- Large foreign competitors may be able to outprice local producers due to economies of scale.
- Organic producers will also need to compete with conventional farmers who have lower costs and higher yields.
- Other types of incentive and compensation measures might be more financially attractive and farmer-friendly than organic farming.
- Increased competition from aquaculture companies inside and outside the EU along with competition in the tuna sector.

Local Aquaculture

- Fish diseases and parasites along with co-existence with other marine activities.
- Natural occurring events such as algal blooms and diseases.
- Spatial restrictions on aquaculture activities.
- Environmental impacts of climate change on aquaculture and the impact on biodiversity from alien species.

Local ecology, culture, and well-being

- Biodiversity of local land will increase, with farmers using such systems already mentioning that they are witnessing an increase in various insect species in their fields⁸ resulting in healthier soils.
- Developments and improvements of rural and natural heritage⁹.
- Improved environmental and health outcomes, including improved local water table, as fewer toxins will seep through the soil, animal nutrition, reduced use of chemical synthesis resources, thus improving animal and human nutrition.

Governance, certification, and support

- Green procurement might increase demand for organic (e.g., Food and Beverage outlets).
- Compliance obligations may bring about better governance and planning at farm level which could increase efficiency.
- Introducing quality control schemes for organic aquaculture.
- Reinforcing the leadership in offshore aquaculture.
- Fits well in the EU's Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy ambitions.
- Legislative updates to agricultural land ownership and tenement framework serve as a vehicle to support the increase in organic farmland.
- There is a need for Malta to collaborate with EU partners to address bottlenecks affecting local organic farming through research and innovation efforts.

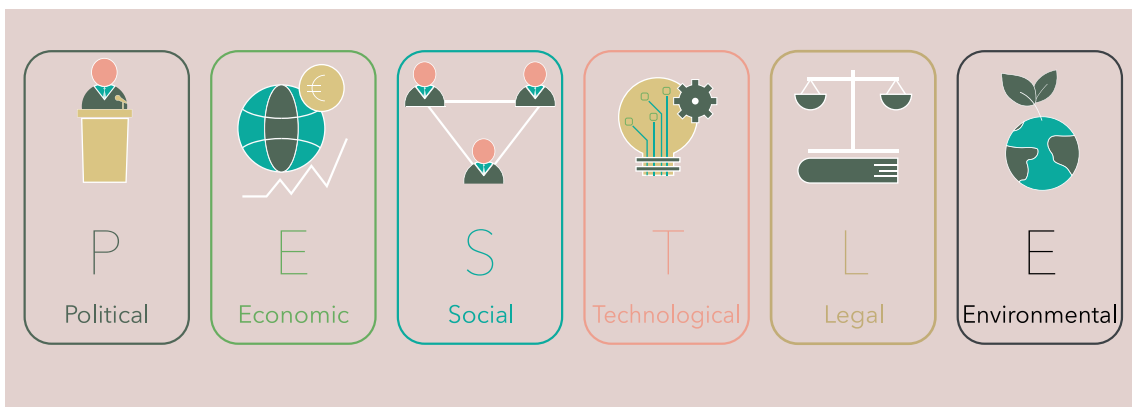
Land and soil

- With Malta's small size, there is an intense competition for land use, not only in terms of conventional vs organic agriculture, but also other uses, such as recreation and construction. Agricultural land has declined by 6.2% in 10 years.¹⁰
- The size of local farms does not permit adequate buffer zones, which might lead to contamination of the soil, air, and water.
- Given the lack of availability of locally registered pesticides for use in organic farming, there is an increased risk of damage and loss from pests, fungi, and diseases.

⁸ Borg, K. (2013). *The potential of organic farming to promote and develop agri-tourism in the Island of Malta*. Retrieved September 17, 2022, from <http://um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/7307/1/13BTOU006.pdf>

⁹ European Commission. (2021, April 19). *Organic action plan*. Retrieved September 16, 2022, from https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-action-plan_en

¹⁰ National Statistics Office. (2022, February 1). *Census of agriculture 2020 (News release 015/2022)*. Retrieved September 16, 2022, from https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2022/02/News2022_015.pdf



To better comprehend the external forces and context to organic production in Malta, a PESTLE analysis has also been conducted; the aim here was to outline the political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental influences impacting organic structures locally.



Political

Policies are a major driver for ensuring that organic production, processing, and sales are given due importance. The Maltese government follows closely policies being outlined by the EU and related targets and obligations.

The Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights through this National Action Plan for Organic Food commits to supporting and sustaining the organic market in Malta and commits to bringing more awareness with regards to organic farming processes and produce amongst the public, to increase demand for such products, whilst also supporting farmers from the supply side.

Moreover, as the EU CAP is revised and new funds and schemes are prepared in support of organic producers, farmers might be better supported to make the conversion. In addition, the EMFAF and other EU funds will support the transition to organic aquaculture.



Economic

With disposable income having increased in the past years in Western economies, an increasing number of consumers who value health and the environment are willing and able to pay a premium price for organic produce. Even though local demand is still in its infancy, this is forecasted to change as global and EU trends catch up in the local market. Moreover, local farmers can also export their produce to other regional markets.

Tapping into this niche market will provide the opportunity for local farmers to expand their customer base, whilst also selling at a higher price. Given that the agricultural market in the local economy has been declining, organic production and sales could turn this around and revitalise the industry. Yet, operators must be cognisant of competition from foreign operators who produce higher quantities and thus can enjoy greater economies of scale.

When looking at employment in the agricultural sector, it has been outlined that the local market is mostly characterised by older generations; yet, given the need for specific skills and knowledge, starting organic farming might attract new generation farmers to the local agricultural scene, thereby increasing and diversifying the local labour force in the primary sector.



Social trends are also driving more awareness and demand for organic produce, through a greater human focus on health awareness and diet, which are driving individuals to purchase organic products. As health awareness and better diets are becoming a priority, individuals are seeking to purchase better-quality food and drinks, and consume more genuine, wholesome ingredients.

Furthermore, organic options are becoming more on-trend, not only with individual consumers but also with hotels and restaurants offering premium and more sustainable dining options.

Even though demand for local organic produce is still limited, these trends and consumer behaviours being witnessed are expected to become mainstream in the local market. The export market is a key driver for the aquacultural sector. It is expected that international consumer demand for organic aquacultural produce will grow as more consumers opt for other types of organic produce, including vegetables, meat and animal products.



When converting from conventional to organic farming, farmers will have to adopt new technologies and change the processes they employ in their agricultural work. Organic farming is much closer to natural eco system processes and, therefore, the use of artificial technologies remains limited.

Nevertheless, research and innovation would be required to identify ways in which organic farming could eventually yield closer to conventional farming, as well as to allow biodiversity to thrive, and/or change the behaviour of consumers and farmers. The EC has committed to dedicate more budget (around 30%) to R&I in the fields of agricultural, forestry and rural areas, including on topics such as organic.¹¹

¹¹ European Economic and Social Committee. (2021). Action plan for the development of EU organic production

The AKIS and European Innovation Partnership Agri will be two of the major channels through which the R&I will happen. Extensive research is also underway on regenerative agriculture to combat climate change.



As already mentioned, the organic industry is heavily regulated and therefore farmers must have the resources, skills, and knowledge to ensure that all prerequisites are in place for their land and their production to be considered as organic. Regulations and certification also enable increased consumer trust of organic produce, allowing producers to sell more and at a higher price.

In the EU, the Regulation (EU) 2018/848 governs organic productions and processing. Moreover, this legislation is supported by the local laws through the Subsidiary Legislation 427.93.

The Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA) is the authority making sure that these regulations are adhered to by those farmers applying for the organic certification locally. Providing assistance for applications will promote the uptake of organic farming. If application for organic certifications do increase, the MCCAA would require further resources to meet this demand (application and enforcement).



Agriculture is very much dependent on the environment and ecosystems in which it operates. The quality of the resources such as soil fertility and water quality are two major variables which influence farming.

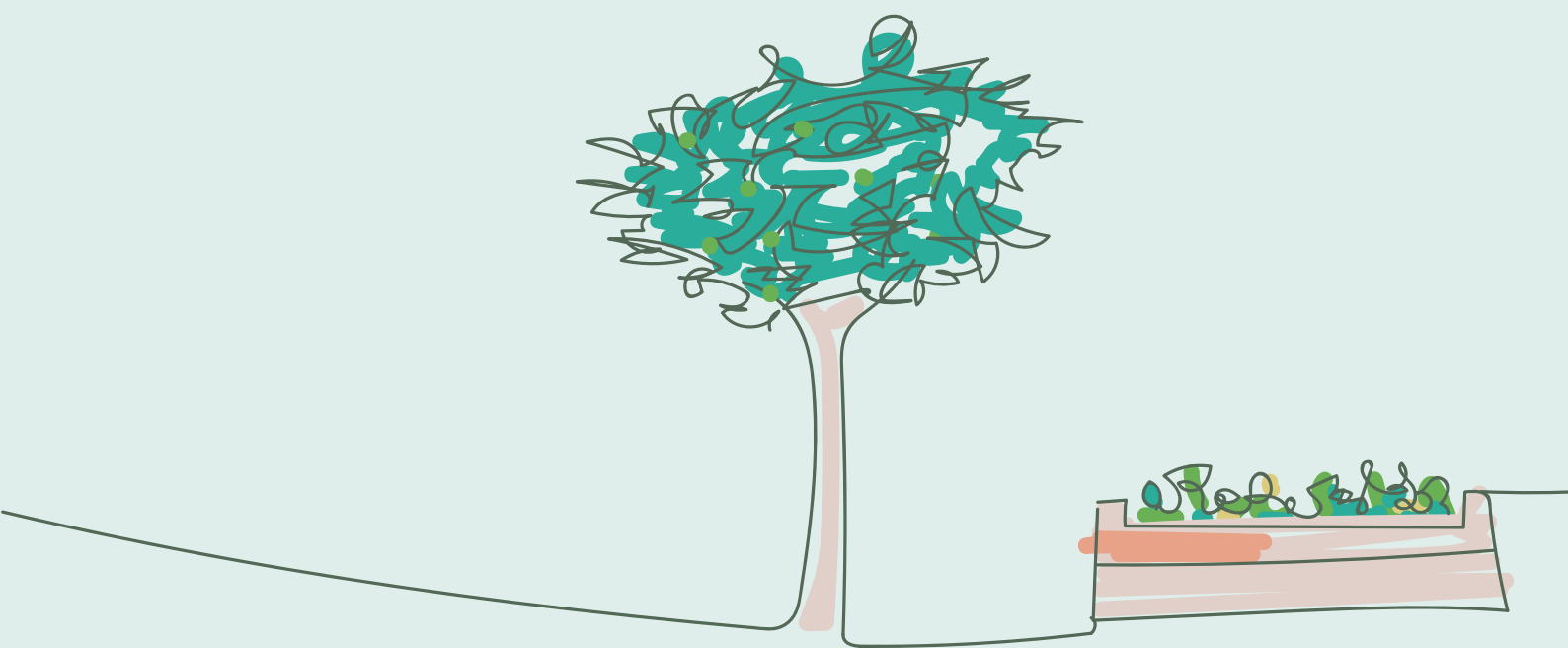
As specified in the National Agricultural Policy for the Maltese Islands 2018-2028, one of the major environmental concerns for agriculture in general remains water supply and pollution. Currently, the water resources, especially those of the natural water tables, are found to be suboptimal, with demand for groundwater being too high for the supply to keep up.

Similarly, the soil quality and availability are also dwindling. 6.2% of agricultural land has been lost over the past 10 years.¹² In 2018, Malta had the highest percentage of soil sealing in the EU, at 17.9%, whilst the average EU27 figure stood at 1.76%.¹³ This means that c.18% of the local soil has been removed or covered up with impermeable material, which is irreversible. Moreover, decades of tilling the local soil have decreased its quality and therefore organic farming might assist to start regenerating our local soil and make it more nutrient rich.

¹² National Statistics Office. (2022, February 1). *Census of agriculture 2020 (News release 015/2022)*. Retrieved September 16, 2022, from https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/Documents/2022/02/News2022_015.pdf

¹³ Eurostat. (n.d.). *Soil sealing index*. Retrieved September 19, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_15_41/default/table?lang=en

OUR VISION
AND AMBITION
FOR ORGANIC PRODUCTION
IN MALTA



MOVING TO MORE SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS SERVES SEVERAL AIMS OF THE EU GREEN DEAL, WITH THE AMBITION TO TRANSFORM THE EU INTO A MODERN, RESOURCE EFFICIENT AND COMPETITIVE ECONOMY ENSURING: NO NET EMISSIONS OF GREENHOUSE GASES BY 2050 AND ECONOMIC GROWTH DECOUPLED FROM RESOURCE USE WHILST LEAVING NO PERSON AND NO PLACE BEHIND.

Core elements of the EU's Farm to Fork strategy are the objectives of at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land to be under organic farming by 2030, and for a significant increase in organic aquaculture.¹⁴

Through the European Commission's 'Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production', each Member State has been encouraged to develop a national organic action plan to increase their national share of organic farming - so that collectively, the EU can reach the 25% target. Malta is currently the EU member state with the lowest share of agricultural land under organic farming at 0.6% equivalent to 67 hectares in 2020.¹⁵ Most farmers in the Maltese economy engage in conventional mixed farming and do not specialise in their practice. A large segment of farmers and livestock breeders continue to farm as they used to in the past and seek to compete with their neighbours by quantity and variety rather than focus on high-value products. Contributing factors include funding challenges, an ageing farming population and a lack of professional education and guidance especially about novel techniques.

The vision for Malta's first Action Plan for Organic Food is to offer consumers high quality local organic food from farming and aquaculture whilst driving sustainable income for Maltese and Gozitan producers. As showcased in the previous chapter, many of the initial barriers associated with moving from conventional to organic farming, can be addressed. The ambition is to capture the whole value chain by boosting both supply and demand through various balanced measures. It includes expanding the local organic product range on offer, from fruit and vegetables to include meat, animal produce and dairy. The aim is to have a broad and diverse range of fresh, as well as processed local organic food products and food.

¹⁴ European Commission. (2020). *Farm to fork strategy*. Retrieved September 21, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf

¹⁵ Eurostat. (n.d.). *Organic farming statistics*. Retrieved September 16, 2022, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Organic_farming_statistics#Total_organic_area

A strategic approach has been devised as part of the National Action Plan for Organic Food that supports producers and enables all operators within the organic food value chain to offer and deliver the range of products that consumers need, including fresh fruits and vegetables, but also food of animal origin, such as eggs, meat, and dairy products, as well as processed food and food that is prepared and sold through catering and restaurants.

Converting from conventional production to organic production generates several important benefits as it contributes to more resilient players along the value chain and a sustainable future. Farmers will be able to tap new niches and create more resilience by converting to organic production. Consumer demand for organic food, which is considered as healthier and more environmentally sustainable, is increasing, presenting an opportunity in the market. In addition, organic production contributes to healthy soils, reducing pollution of air and water, and improving biodiversity. Furthermore, animals that are organically farmed enjoy a higher degree of animal welfare and are exposed to fewer antibiotics.¹⁶

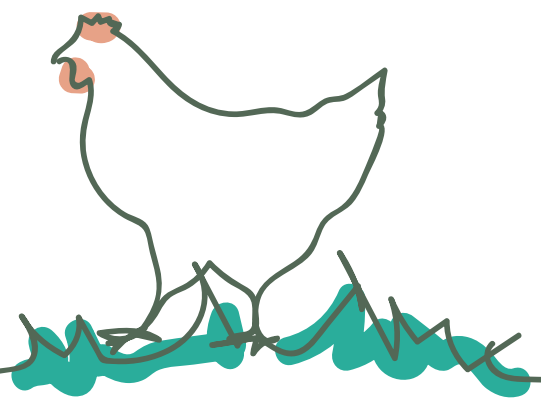
Acknowledging the current trends in agriculture and the benefits and opportunities organic production can deliver for the Maltese agriculture sector but also the wider value chain including food processors and retailers as well as the wider society and consumers, we are setting a bold ambition, and strive to:

ACHIEVE A 5% SHARE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND IN MALTA UNDER ORGANIC FARMING BY 2030, WHICH WILL POTENTIALLY SEE MALTA REACHING 500 HECTARES OF ORGANIC FARMLAND

Through the actions identified in Malta's first Organic Production Action Plan, the country is embarking on an ambitious journey to achieve a very significant increase in the amount of agricultural land used for organic farming, to achieve a target of 5% of utilised agricultural land (UAA) by 2030 in Malta.

Turning this bold vision for organic production into reality to reap the benefits of organic production for now and beyond, will require concerted, coordinated action by means of an all-government approach led by MAFA and dedicated buy-in from all local stakeholders across the value chain. The next chapters will set out crucial enablers and key areas of action, milestones, and timelines.

¹⁶ European Commission. (2021, April 19). *Organic action plan*. Retrieved September 16, 2022, from https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-action-plan_en



THE FRAMEWORK FOR A VIBRANT ORGANIC SECTOR IN MALTA



To bring the vision for the organic production sector in Malta to fruition and ensure that the actions can deliver maximum impact, we have identified 8 key enablers. The respective enablers are evolving around the 3 pillars of the Action plan, being the following:



Pillar 1: Create a favourable ecosystem around the producer, through the right mix of financial support, policies, and access to knowledge.

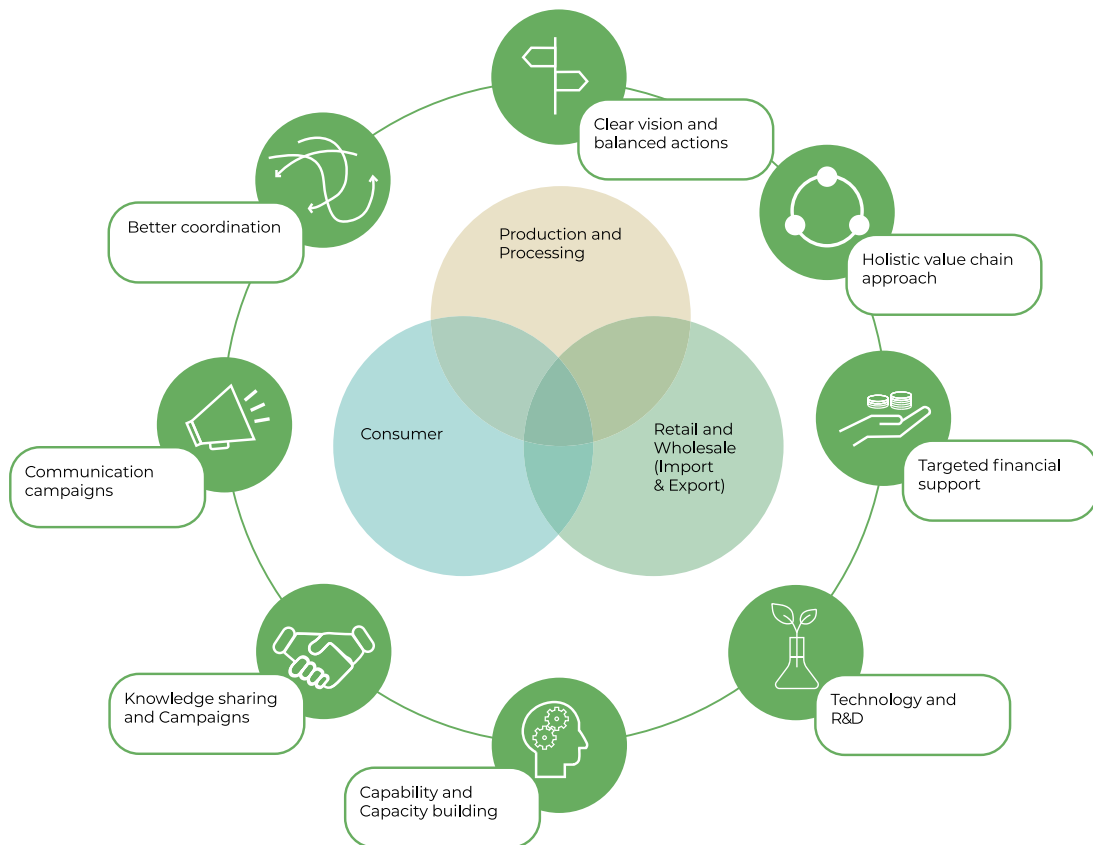


Pillar 2: Strengthen organisational leadership, to promote organic production, foster dialogue and collaboration among partners, and drive the implementation of the action plan.



Pillar 3: Stimulate the markets, with a focus on creating new markets and short supply chains and expanding existing ones for organic products.

Figure 2 Enablers for a holistic value chain action on organic production



1. Clear vision and balanced policy actions

Stakeholder involvement and buy-in is critical to the successful ramp of organic production, to enable fruitful collaboration and foster synergies across the whole value chain. The proposed policy framework aims to provide clear long-term signals for investors (producers and processors) to give them certainty and an outlook on the financial returns for the investments to be made such as conversion of land or setting up dedicated organic food processing and production lines and facilities. The policy vision is complemented by various short and medium-term measures, clear timelines, and, where relevant, targets. Further insights into what is driving market demand and what the industry needs to success will be gained through ongoing internal and external stakeholder consultations in the Maltese context.

2. Holistic value chain approaches

Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food takes a holistic approach by considering all the players in the organic value chain, from producers to processors, retailers to consumers. This ensures a balance between actions and measures that support both supply and demand. The action plan focuses on a mix of supportive measures, including those that boost production and processing, and those that improve marketing and sales by increasing channels for organic products. Additionally, the plan aims to increase demand by supporting advertising campaigns and raising consumer awareness, as well as fostering connections between different players in the value chain to align supply and demand.

3. Targeted financial support and incentive schemes

Dedicated financial support programmes are needed to support organic production because the transition to organic farming can be financially challenging for farmers. The conversion process can result in income losses and lower yields, as well as significant capital and operational expenses. The organic farming practices also tend to be more labour-intensive and require more inputs than conventional farming. Financial support and incentives can help farmers cover these costs and mitigate the risks associated with the transition, making it more feasible for them to adopt organic farming practices. Additionally, financial support for processors can help them establish dedicated organic production lines. This support is crucial for the development and growth of the organic sector and to ensure sustainable and environmentally responsible farming practices are implemented.

4. Leveraging novel technology and supporting research and innovation

Research and innovation play a crucial role in improving the competitiveness and productivity of the organic farming sector, as well as enhancing its sustainability. Several EU-level R&D funding programmes, such as Horizon Europe Cluster 6, the EIP-AGRI focus group on new organic farming approaches, and EIT FOOD, support organic farming by fostering innovation and research. Boosting the local organic food R&I ecosystem through MAFA's agriculture research and innovation centre, the Agriculture Research and Innovation Hub (AGRIHUB), through collaboration with relevant government entities, such as the Ministry for Education, Sports, Youths, Research and Innovation (MEYR), The Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST), and the Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST), and promoting Maltese involvement in these pan-European programmes, will also be key to success.

5. Investing in skills by capability and capacity building

Developing necessary skills and qualifications will also be important for government entities involved in the organic farming process, such as the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority as a certification body. This is particularly true if the organic production expands to include livestock and animal husbandry, as additional qualifications and expertise will be required to review applications and conduct inspections. As the growth rate of organic production in Malta increases, additional staff may be needed to efficiently carry out these duties.

6. Fostering knowledge sharing and collaboration

Fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing across the organic sector, both locally and internationally, is crucial for sharing best practices and implementing new technologies in organic food production. The Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights aims to encourage and facilitate the formation of producer cooperatives and organisations, with the aim of supporting and enabling new business models and approaches to organic production and marketing. Alternative mechanisms, such as a knowledge transfer scheme connecting certified organic farmers with aspiring farmers, can also reap big benefit. Hence, funding is being earmarked for programmes that foster knowledge transfer in various ways.

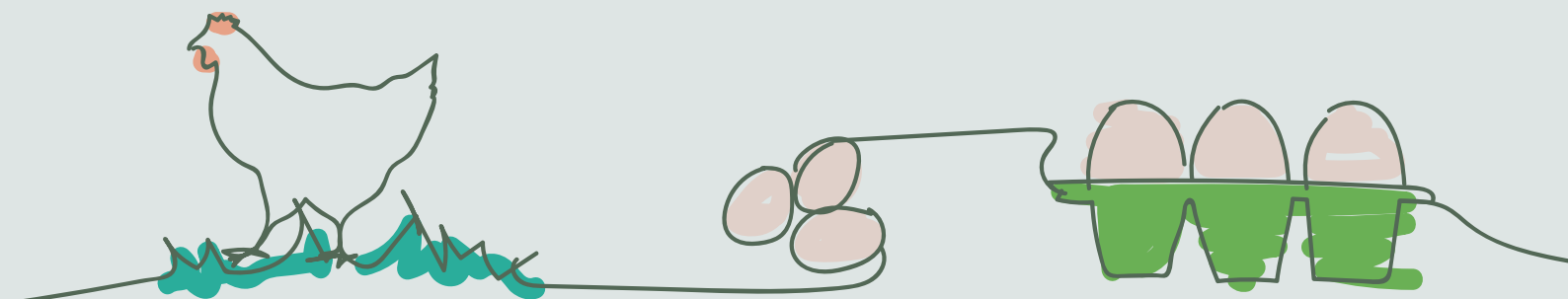
7. Creating additional impact by integrated awareness raising campaigns

Creating additional impact by implementing integrated awareness raising campaigns is key in promoting organic and sustainable food. These campaigns will be led by the Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food and will target all stakeholders in the food value chain, including consumers. By raising awareness about the benefits of organic farming and organic foods and showcasing local players and their role in the communities, these campaigns will help to widen the customer base and boost demand for organic products. They will also serve to create additional momentum for the organic food market.

8. Champion better coordination within and across the public sector

Effective coordination among various government agencies and public sector entities involved in the organic value chain is crucial for the successful development of the organic food sector in Malta. This includes close collaboration with the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority as a certification body, targeted reforms related to land ownership and leasing for organic agriculture, and strong policy coherence in areas related to human health, food, and agriculture. Additionally, coordination is needed to address issues such as climate change and loss of biodiversity through organic agriculture, and to raise awareness about the benefits of organic farming through educational programmes and campaigns. Strong coordination with the tourism ministry is also important to meet the demand for organic produce from the HoReCa sector as some examples of where strong policy coherence is needed.

OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS



THIS NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR ORGANIC FOOD IS ORGANISED ALONG THREE INTERLINKED PILLARS THAT ACCOMMODATE THE ENTIRE FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN - FROM PRODUCTION, TO PROCESSING, TO RETAILERS AND CONSUMERS. TO ENSURE AN ATTRACTIVE MARKET FOR OPERATORS IN THE ORGANIC SECTOR ALONGSIDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE CHANGES, IT IS IMPERATIVE TO INCREASE THE OVERALL DEMAND FOR ORGANIC PRODUCTS.



Pillar 1: Create a favourable ecosystem around the producer, through the right mix of financial incentives, policies, and access to knowledge.




Pillar 2: Strengthen organisational leadership, with the purpose to promote organic production, foster dialogue and collaboration among partners and drive the implementation of the action plan.



Pillar 3: Stimulate the markets, with a focus on creating new markets and short supply chains for organic products.

4.1 **Pillar 1. Create a favourable ecosystem around the producer**

Organic farming in Malta is still in its infancy, accounting for only 0.6% of agricultural farmland. To accelerate the development of the sector, producers need financial incentives which better align with the real costs of conversion and maintenance, as well as robust technical support and training programmes to support the transition. They also need a favourable ecosystem beyond this including the right organisational constructs, cohesive policies pertaining to organic agricultural land use, and access to products, substances, and seeds to support organic production.


<p>Objective 1</p> <p>Increase the percentage of organic farmland</p>		<p>Action 1.1</p> <p>Provide tailored financial support for organic farming conversion and maintenance.</p>
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Strategic enabler/s	Targeted financial support
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The financial support rates to support organic farm conversion and maintenance have been revised under the newly approved CAP Strategic Plan to better reflect the real costs of transitioning to organic. The rural development organic farming scheme is intended to attract and support farmers to transition towards organic production. For 2023 - 2027, Government has allocated €2.3 million through the CAP strategic plan, and in addition, a complementary €3 million in national budget to contribute to the 5% national target by 2030.

The support rates for the conversion and maintenance of horticulture (crops cultivated on arable land) to organic farming has been established at €4,377.60/ha and €3,614.40/ha respectively, while the support rates for the conversion and maintenance of permanent crops have been revised and now stand at €3,222 and €1,057 per hectare per year respectively while analysis is underway to determine whether certain types of permanent crops, such as vines, may require dedicated support measures.

Support rates for organic production of livestock and animal products will be determined at a later stage through a dedicated exercise.

<p>Objective 1</p> <p>Increase the percentage of organic farmland</p>		<p>Action 1.2</p> <p>Incentivise landowners to lease out agricultural land for organic farming.</p>
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Strategic enabler/s	Clear vision and balanced policy actions
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As part of the package of measures for the long-term reform in the access to agricultural land and land tenure, Government is proposing a scheme that offers an incentive to landowners to lease agricultural land to farmers on condition that it is converted to organic farming. This type of private contractual agreement between the landowner and the farmer is now possible because of the recent amendments made to Chapter 199 of the laws of Malta.

With this proposal, when the landowner leases agricultural land for organic farming for a 5-year period, they will receive a one-time flat-rate financial incentive that covers the first 2 years, followed by an annual payment proportional to the land area.

Objective 1



Action 1.3

Increase the percentage of organic farmland

Drive organic farming in protected horticulture

Strategic enabler/s

Clear vision and balanced policy actions

Government is driving the shift to organic farming in protected horticulture by aligning its policy for renewable energy and the use of photovoltaics in rural areas and agricultural land to organic production and certification, thereby increasing the percentage of land that is converted to organic farming. Government is proposing that one of the eligibility criteria for the setting up of an effective photovoltaic greenhouse would be the commitment that, within 2 years, the applicant would convert to organic production.

Objective 2



Action 2.1

Support investment in organic production

Support on-farm productive investments; organic farm start-ups; and off-farm processing of organic products.

Strategic enabler/s

Targeted financial support


MAFA shall be engaging in continuous discussions with the Ministry responsible for EU funds and the Managing Authority for rural development to enable the uptake of CAP SP investment funding for use across organic production, by means of favourable selection criteria for organic production across various schemes.

The CAP SP (INSTAL) On-farm Productive Investment Measure for 2023 - 2027 will aid farmers to overcome initial investment costs and maintain organic farms in the long-term. The measure provides resources for adopting new practices, investing in technology and infrastructure, and enhancing animal welfare, all of which will help to optimise organic production and maintain organic farming practices. The Government has allocated €21 million through this measure.

The off-farm productive investments measure of the CAP SP can support organic farmers and processors to carry out projects that serve to add value to primary products, improve the quality of food, or develop new products. Government has allocated €6.6 million for 2023 - 2027 and MAFA shall be facilitating access to these funds by organic producers and processors through the selection process.


Young farmers and new entrants to the agricultural sector can benefit from the RD INSTALYF measure of the CAP SP which offers start-up aid in the form of a lump sum that is to be used for the implementation of a business plan. This intervention also includes a specific intervention related to the purchase of agricultural land in the form of financial guarantees and reduced interest rates.

For 2023 - 2027, Government has allocated €7 million for setting up of agricultural activity by young farmers, part of this budget can be used by new entrants to the sector who wish to set up an organic farm. This process shall be facilitated in collaboration with the Managing Authority in the same way as for other competitive calls.

<p>Objective 3</p>  <p>Provide the know-how for organic production</p>		<p>Action 3.1</p> <p>Provide training, mentoring, and advisory services in organic farming</p>
Strategic enabler/s		Knowledge sharing and collaboration

Funding will be provided to run training, knowledge, and upskilling programmes to support producers to transition to organic farming. The activities will include demonstration sessions and topics covered would include techniques for pest management and nutrient management that are compatible with organic farming practices. Activities may also extend to on-site mentoring and advising by qualified agronomists, to ensure that producers have the confidence throughout the transitioning period and are fully supported on their own fields.

MAFA will also promote training and the exchange of best practices through the curricula, courses, and materials offered by secondary, tertiary, and vocational education providers. The aim is to offer robust and wide-ranging training programmes in organic production to interested stakeholders and strengthen the general curriculum. The programmes will also present innovative solutions for the organic sector, including production, processing, retailing, and consumption. These initiatives aim to attract the next generation and seasoned farmers to the organic production sector.

<p>Objective 4</p>  <p>Support improved access to resources</p>		<p>Action 4.1</p> <p>Facilitate access to plant protection products for organic farming</p>
Strategic enabler/s		Clear vision and balanced policy action

In 2022, in collaboration with the Ministry responsible for pesticides and consumer affairs, MAFA launched a new administrative process to facilitate the registration of plant protection products in Malta once these would have been approved and registered in another EU Member State. This process is intended to facilitate access to products and substances that may be used in organic farming, but which are not registered directly in Malta being a very small market.

MAFA will engage in discussions with the competent authorities and with stakeholders to ensure the availability of organically certified seeds and propagation material that may be used in organic farming especially in view of the need to identify source material for plant varieties that are adapted to local climatic conditions and agricultural technology.

Objective 5



Support organic aquaculture

Action 5.1

Encourage operators to shift to organic production and certification through aid schemes for organic aquaculture

Strategic enabler/s

Targeted financial support

Conventional producers will be encouraged to move to organic production and organic certification by putting in place aid schemes for those operators interested in investing in organic aquaculture. Organic aquaculture producers will be encouraged to scale-up operations to provide fresh, organic and sustainable quality products to consumers. Activities may be financially supported via National Funds, co-funded by EMFAF or other EU Funds.

Objective 5



Support organic aquaculture

Action 5.2

Facilitate the permitting process for operators in organic aquaculture

Strategic enabler/s

**Clear vision and balanced policy actions
Better coordination**

Discussions will be held with aquaculture operators to facilitate the permit and application process for organic aquaculture. Activities may be financially supported via National Funds, co-funded by EMFAF or other EU Funds.

As stated in Malta's Multi-Annual National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture, MAFAs shall be maximising its efforts to adopt locally relevant organic practices and further explore the benefits of organic aquaculture. These efforts shall be substantiated in practice via projects to be financed through the EMFAF programme, which shall as a baseline adopt sustainable and clean research practices, including a focus on innovative fish species, technology, the use of Integrated Multitrophic Systems, recirculating systems, and alternative sustainable feeds. The department responsible for fisheries and aquaculture is already managing a research project on Integrated Multitrophic Systems (Self-sufficient Integrated Multitrophic AquaPonic - SIMTAP). The same department shall also continue to invest in Recirculating Aquaculture Systems. This shall ensure that water is better used and its potential maximised, at the same time reducing cost and dependency on fresh water. This commitment is also included in Malta's Multiannual Plan and will also be further investigated during the design of the upcoming aquaculture strategy.

4.2 Pillar 2. Strengthen organisational leadership

Pillar 2 focuses on creating the right government capabilities, structures, and infrastructure for the organic sector to develop and flourish. This includes dedicated investments in human resources and physical infrastructure to extend the range of products that can be certified as organic. Currently, the knowledge base and human capacity within governmental organisations is limited, and hence such actions are viewed as an over arching priority to enable Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food's 5% target and supporting objectives to be achieved. Investments in the needed infrastructure across the organic value chain will also be prioritised, and a gap analysis undertaken to identify where investments are needed, and what implications missing infrastructure brings.

Setting the tone from the standpoint of organisational leadership will promote organic production, foster dialogue and collaboration among partners and drive the implementation of the action plan.

Objective 6



Ensure adequate institutions for organic production

Action 6.1

Strengthen the role of the Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food

Strategic enabler/s

**Clear vision and balanced policy actions
Capability and capacity building**

The role of the Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food will address the need for advocacy and engagement with stakeholders. Key responsibilities of the Ambassador will include promotion of the organic food sector, coordination of the national action plan, facilitating the exchange of best practices among Member States, and consumer awareness campaigns. The Ambassador will also engage with policy makers and other key stakeholders to ensure the needs of the organic sector are considered when agricultural support schemes are designed, refined and implemented.

Objective 6



Ensure adequate institutions for organic production

Action 6.2

Assess the organisational capacity, capability and infrastructure needs of the responsible authorities

Strategic enabler/s

Capability and capacity building

MAFA, in collaboration with the authority responsible for certification, will carry out an assessment to identify and address organisational capacity, capability, infrastructure, and equipment needs of the competent and certification authorities for organic production, to ensure that Malta has adequate institutional resources to reach the 5% target for organic agricultural land by 2030. This review and assessment will feed into the wider organisational change strategy leading to the setup of a dedicated national authority for food security and sustainability.

Objective 6



Ensure adequate institutions for organic production

Action 6.3

Set up of organic food forum and website

Strategic enabler/s

Capability and capacity building Clear vision and balanced policy actions Better coordination

MAFA will create a forum for organic food where all players and stakeholders in the organic food chain can come together and explore ways to collaborate with the aim to have a balance between supply and demand. One of the main purposes for this forum is to allow producers to market their products and for consumers to be more aware of local production. This forum shall also act as the precursor to the producers' organisation for organic food.

Objective 6



Ensure adequate institutions for organic production

Action 6.4

Invest in advisory, knowledge and information systems for the organic sector

Strategic enabler/s

Technology and R&D Knowledge sharing and collaboration

Financial and operational resources will be made available, also through the CAP SP, to strengthen Farm Advisory Services, notably as part of Agricultural Knowledge and Information System (AKIS), involving all relevant actors and public, commercial, and third-party sectors to plan and invest in knowledge exchange, advice, and innovation in a coordinated way. These services will aim to improve organic agricultural knowledge amongst farmers and take the sector forward through more efficient and digitised agricultural management systems. This will ensure that all farmers in Malta can access appropriate organic training and advice.


Funding will be allocated to set up demonstration activities at the MAFA's agriculture research and innovation centre, AgriHub, with a focus on organic food R&D&I to provide a point of reference for organic operators. The key role will be to engage in research, trials, and development across organic production. The purpose will extend to collecting and disseminating knowledge and solutions about organic production to organic farmers and advisors.

4.3 Pillar 3. Stimulate the markets

The third pillar focuses on stimulating demand and boosting access to organic products. By connecting farmers and processors directly with consumers, the organic food industry can strengthen local food systems and foster the growth of organic agriculture.

In addition, linking organic farmers and producers of organic products to the HoReCa sector will also provide benefits. By connecting directly with high-volume buyers, sellers can secure a stable demand for their organic produce, and HoReCa businesses can source fresh or locally produced organic ingredients to offer their customers. This direct connection also supports local economies and promotes sustainable food systems.

The diversification of locally produced organic products will enhance the value proposition for processors, resulting in the creation of new jobs and a more robust local value chain. This will ultimately support the long-term resilience of the organic agriculture value chain.

<p>Objective 7</p>		<p>Action 7.1</p>	<p>Increase visibility of the organic food market</p>	<p>Establish dedicated data initiatives to collect, analyse, and disseminate data on the organic food sector</p>
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Strategic enabler/s	Holistic value chain approach
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The availability of data related to production and prices along the organic food value chain, trade, consumer preferences, and specific marketing channels is essential to act as a vehicle in implementing and monitoring the organic sector in Malta.

Further efforts will be made to collect, analyse, and disseminate data on a regular basis to increase transparency and confidence in the organic sector. Initiatives for data will include a national survey to collect data on organic farming and consumer awareness.

Objective 8



Increase consumer awareness of organic food

Action 8.1

Organise and engage in promotional activities to increase awareness and demand for organic food, including low-trophic and organic aqua-cultured food.

Strategic enabler/s

Communication campaigns

Information, promotion, and awareness raising initiatives will be launched to showcase the benefits of organic production and promote organic food and the EU organic logo. Awareness will be raised among food processors and producers regarding the development and operation of the organic quality assurance scheme and the potential benefits. Additionally, initiatives will increase awareness and understanding of consumers and public about the organic quality assurance system.

Funding will support the organisation of events and events planning, publicity costs, communication and networking, and marketing activities. Supported initiatives include the organisation of national activities on EU Organic Day, and part of such activities will be awards given to organic operators.

Objective 9



Develop short supply chains for organic products

Action 9.1

Assess the feasibility of designating 'biodistricts' and 'biotrails' through pilot projects

Strategic enabler/s

Holistic value chain approach

'Biodistricts' have been defined in the EU Organic Action Plan as a geographical area where farmers, the public, tourist operators, associations and public authorities enter into an agreement for the sustainable management of local resources, based on organic principles and practices. The aim is to maximise the economic and sociocultural potential of the territory.

MAFA will undertake research to assess the feasibility of designating 'biodistricts' and 'biotrails' for the purpose of creating and strengthening short-supply chain for organic products. Through this work, potential sites for districts and trails will be identified, and feedback shall be sought from farmers and landowners on the appetite, challenges, and opportunities in implementing such designations. 'Biodistricts' could be selected based on location, touristic appeal, rural heritage and agricultural capabilities, farmers' willingness to convert, as well as the presence or potential for sustainable businesses to set up shop.

Another possibility is to identify areas where organic producers are already set up, and to create zones around these nodes that can be expanded with the introduction of new operators, thereby having ‘organic growth’ of the spatial boundaries of these districts.

Within ‘biodistricts’ and ‘biotrails’, operators may utilise funding for co-operation, promotion of quality products, and LEADER-type activities. For 2023 – 2027, Government has allocated €1.5 million through the CAP SP Cooperation (Quality Schemes); €5.2 million through the CAP SP Cooperation (Leader); and €1.6 million through the RD COOP – EIP Operational Groups. Furthermore, producers within ‘biodistricts’ may wish to establish themselves as a legally recognised producer organisation.

Objective 9



Develop short supply chains for organic products

Action 9.2

Develop channels for the direct selling of organic food

Strategic enabler/s

Holistic value chain approach

MAFA will give special attention to organic products and allocate funding for the direct selling of organic food through the Pitkalija (the fresh fruit and vegetable market) and the Farmers’ Market. The direct selling of organic products and the development of short supply chains for organically certified food shall form part of the ongoing reform of the sales and marketing of fresh fruit and vegetables and the construction of a new Pitkalija and the development of the new Farmers’ Market as part of the Ta’ Qali regeneration masterplan.

Through these projects, Government shall be enhancing the physical, digital, and business infrastructure for direct selling of organic products, by integration of specialty sections for organically certified products within the planned spaces and business models. These projects include the creation of online selling platforms and are being driven through collaboration with key stakeholders and producers.

Objective 9



Develop short supply chains for organic products

Action 9.3

Facilitate access to local organic products by the HoReCa industry

Strategic enabler/s

Holistic value chain approach

MAFA has initiated discussions and is collaborating with the Malta Tourism Authority to ensure that hotels, restaurants, and catering outlets have adequate access and supply of locally produced certified organic products. This collaboration is linked to the further enhancement of the Quality Assured (QA) seal, a Malta Tourism Authority voluntary quality recognition scheme aimed at businesses offering high levels of quality, consistency, and professionalism.

The aim is to extend to the scope of the certification programme to recognise the taste and environmental impact of zero miles organic food products at hotels, restaurants, and catering establishments.

Short supply chain actors within the industry may benefit from funding to form partnerships that allow for vertical and horizontal integration along the food chain, and to encourage the inclusion of organically produced meals on menus, opening up B2B sales channels and promoting the development of business relationships by facilitating dialogue, events, and promotional activities.

Event organisers and businesses will also be encouraged to source organic produce from catering establishments as part of corporate social responsibility and ESG related initiatives.

Objective 10



Improve the marketing power of organic producers

Action 10.1

Promote the set-up of organic producers' organisations

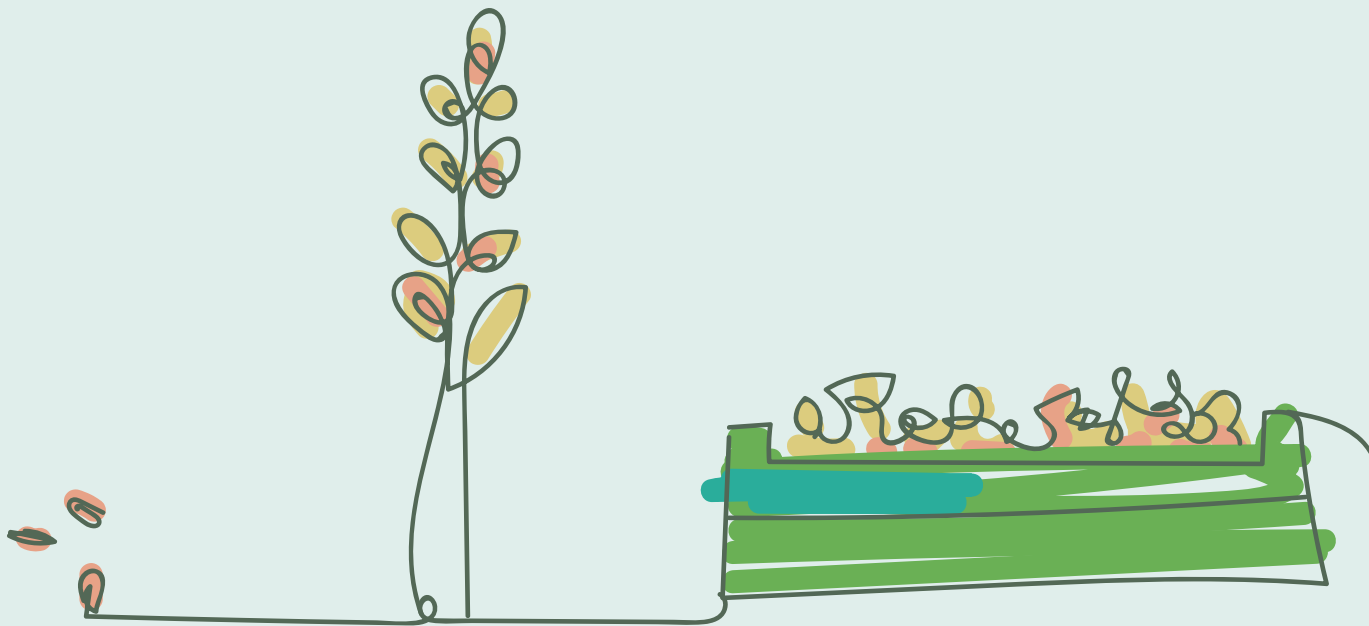
Strategic enabler/s




**Holistic value chain approach
Knowledge sharing and collaboration**



MAFA will actively promote the concept of collaboration among organic producers and processors and encourage the setup of producers' organisation through the formation of farmers' associations, cooperatives, or any other suitable legal vehicle. These organisations will provide a collective voice to organic farmers and processors, through which they can tackle common problems and achieve shared objectives such as increased revenue through collective negotiation, joint sales and marketing efforts, reduced administration costs, increased margins of scale, and improved communication with the farming community.






Organic farmers can benefit from EU CAP funds to enhance coordination within the organic supply chain and also to implement a system of group certification. This system enables farms that meet specific criteria to join together, thereby reducing the expenses associated with inspections and certification. Direct costs relating to the implementation of a project plan could also be supported through the RD COOP - EIP Operational Groups for which Government has allocated €1.6 million for 2023 - 2027.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

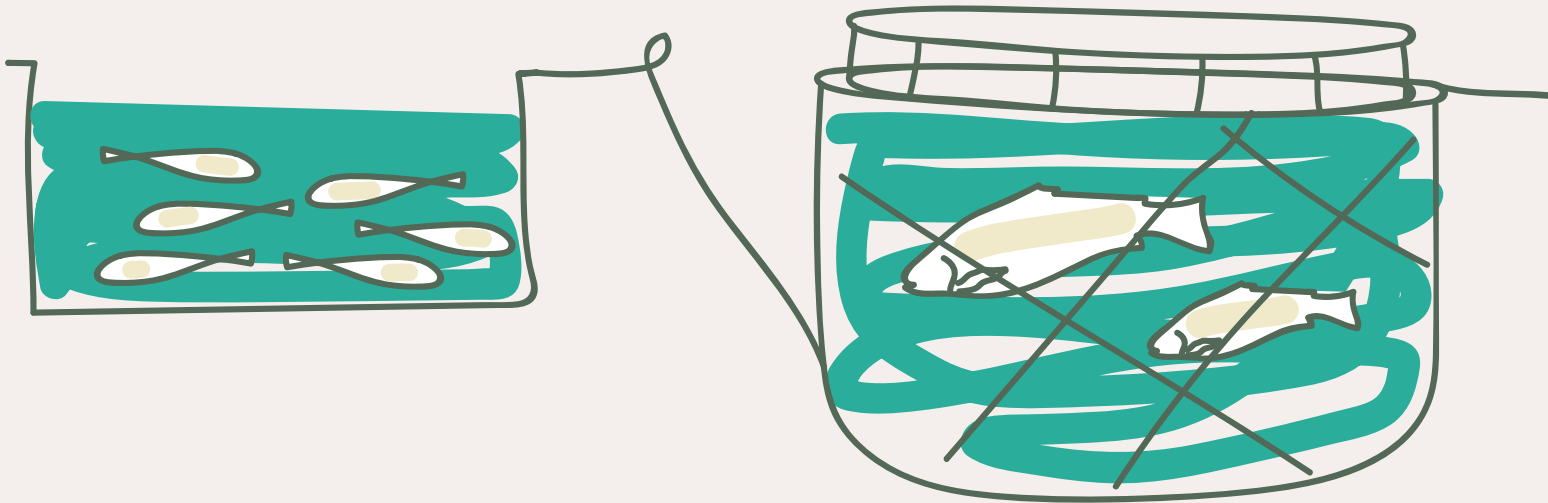


Pillar	Objective	Action	Effectiveness Indicators
1 	1 - Increase the percentage of organic farmland 	1.1 - Provide tailored financial support for organic farming conversion and maintenance.	Hectares of land converted to organic farming through financial support.
		1.2 - Incentivise landowners to lease out agricultural land for organic farming.	Hectares of land leased out for organic farming through land schemes.
		1.3 - Drive organic farming in protected horticulture.	Hectares of land converted to organic farming in protected horticulture.
	2 - Support investment in organic production 	2.1 - Support on-farm productive investments; organic farm start-ups; and off-farm processing of organic products.	Number of existing farms and start-ups optimizing or engaging in organic farming production through aid schemes.
	3 - Provide the know-how for organic production 	3.1 - Provide training, mentoring, and advisory services in organic farming.	Number of farmers provided with training and advisory services.
	4 - Support improved access to resources 	4.1 - Facilitate access to plant protection products for organic farming.	Percentage of products and substances which are registered for use in the EU which are registered for use with MCCAAs.
	5 - Support organic aquaculture 	5.1 - Encourage operators to shift to organic production and certification through aid schemes for organic aquaculture.	Number of newly certified organic aquaculture operators through aid schemes.
		5.2 - Facilitate the permitting process for operators in organic aquaculture.	Number of operators obtaining permit for organic aquaculture.

Pillar	Objective	Action	Effectiveness Indicators
2	6 - Ensure adequate institutions for organic production	6.1 - Strengthen the role of the Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food.	Number of events and activities organised by the Ambassador for Organic and Sustainable Food.
	 	6.2 - Assess the organisational capacity, capability and infrastructure needs of the responsible authorities.	Completion of assessment report for capacity and capability needs of the responsible authorities.
		6.3 - Promote the set-up of an organic food forum and website.	Set up an organic food forum and website.
		6.4 - Invest in advisory, knowledge and information systems for the organic sector.	Number of advisory services provided.

Pillar	Objective	Action	Effectiveness Indicators
3 	7 - Increase visibility of the organic food market 	7.1 - Establish dedicated data initiatives to collect, analyse, and disseminate data on the organic food sector.	Number of farmers provided with training and advisory services
	8 - Increase consumer awareness of organic food 	8.1 - Organise and engage in promotional activities to increase awareness and demand for organic food, including low-trophic and organic aqua-cultured food.	Level of awareness and understanding of organic farming and the EU logo
	9 - Develop short supply chains for organic products 	9.1 - Assess the feasibility of designating 'bio-districts' and 'bio-trails' through pilot projects. 9.2 - Develop channels for the direct selling of organic food. 9.3 - Facilitate access to local organic food by the HoReCa industry.	Number of 'biodistricts' and 'biotrails' designated Number of organic producers using direct selling opportunities Volume and value of organic produce purchased by the HoReCa sector
	10 - Improve the marketing power of organic producers 	10.1 - Promote the set-up of organic producers' organisations.	Set up an organic producer organisation

MONITORING AND EVALUATION



Effective monitoring and evaluation are crucial for ensuring the successful implementation of the National Action Plan for Organic Food for Malta. The monitoring and evaluation process will provide valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the plan and help identify areas for improvement. This chapter outlines the approach that will be taken to monitor progress, evaluate the effectiveness of the plan, and provide recommendations for improvement.

Objectives and Targets

The achievement of Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food's objectives and targets will be measured using designated effectiveness indicators. These indicators will be based on reliable data sources and regularly reviewed to ensure their relevance and accuracy. The indicators chosen reflect the specific goals and objectives of the plan, such as increasing the percentage of land under organic farming, promoting organic products, and supporting organic producers.

Annual Progress Report

A yearly progress report will be prepared to monitor and evaluate the implementation of Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food. The progress report will include information on the progress made towards achieving the plan's objectives and targets, as well as an assessment of the effectiveness of the measures implemented. The report will also identify implementation challenges and provide recommendations for improvement. The progress will be recorded by the responsible implementation authorities and the report will be prepared by the Monitoring and Implementation Committee.

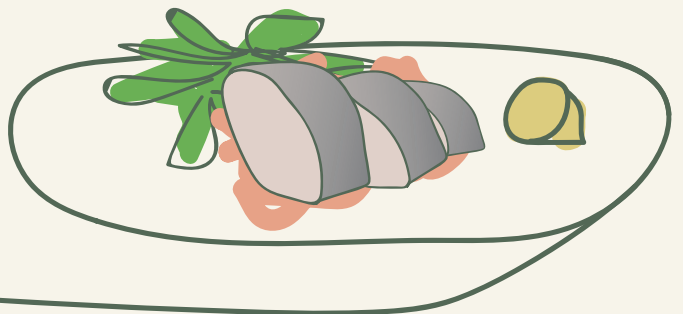
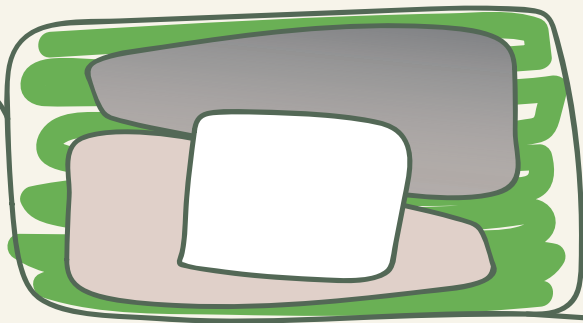
Monitoring and Implementation Committee

A Monitoring and Implementation Committee will be established to oversee the implementation of the National Action Plan for Organic Food. The Committee will be responsible for monitoring progress, identifying implementation challenges, and developing strategies to overcome them. The Committee will prepare and review the yearly progress report, identify areas that need improvement, and provide recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of the plan. The composition of the Committee should include both government and non-governmental stakeholders. It is being considered that the Organic Farming Advisory Board members will form part of the Monitoring and Implementation Committee, given its remit under Maltese law (Subsidiary Legislation 427.93).

Evaluation and Improvement

The effectiveness of the National Action Plan for Organic Food will be evaluated periodically to ensure that it remains relevant and effective. The Monitoring and Implementation Committee will assess the plan's achievements, identify challenges and opportunities, and recommend improvements. The evaluation and improvement process will ensure that Malta's Action Plan for Organic Food is continually refined and improved to achieve its objectives. Where necessary, funding will be reallocated towards the actions best suited to achieving the National Organic Plan's ambitions.

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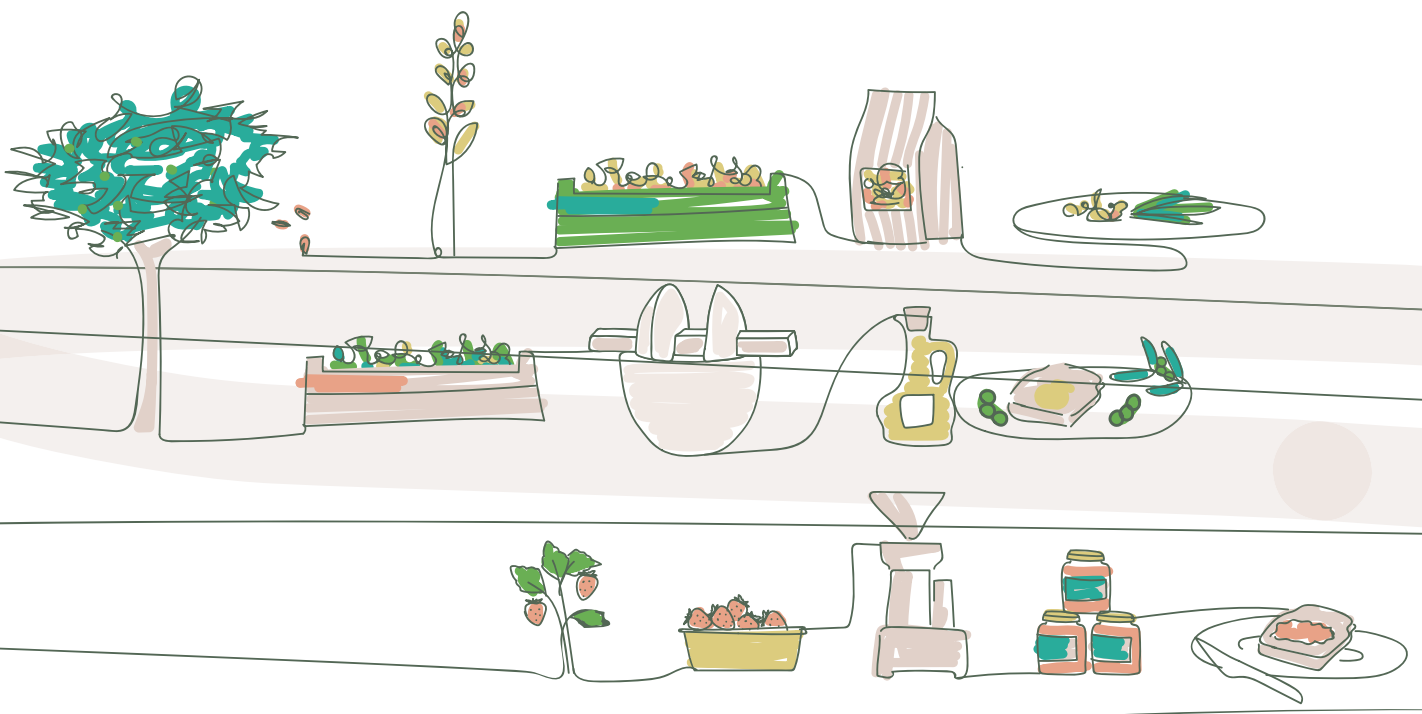
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