

## Focus On.... Organic Farming and Agriculture

This resource guide aims to provide useful, detailed, high quality sources of information on organic farming and agriculture for students in Higher and Further Education. It is not a definitive list of Web resources on the subject, but a collection of interesting examples of what is available. More resources can be accessed from the Intute: Health and Life Sciences agricultural gateway at <http://www.intute.ac.uk/healthandlifesciences/agriculture/>

This Focus On... guide is located at:  
<http://www.intute.ac.uk/supportdocs/focuson/farming.pdf>

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# intute : health & life sciences

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## Introduction

This document focuses on some of the major issues and organisations concerned with organic farming that have been indexed in the Agriculture, Food and Forestry section of Intute. It does not include resources on specific organic farming techniques, although you will find these topics covered if you search our database. For each entry here, we give a very brief description of what you will find at that website; there is no ranking of the resources.

## Definitions of the term “Organic”

The term organic has in some respects become a fashion statement, competing with ‘green’ ‘environmental’ ‘holistic’ ‘traditional’ to describe what advertising executives might call a “lifestyle aspiration”. The word’s popularity and use/misuse makes it harder to define in a more specific (scientific) context. For the purpose of this Focus therefore, we need to examine what ‘organic’ means.

### IFOAM

*“The role of organic agriculture, whether in farming, processing, distribution, or consumption, is to sustain and enhance the health of ecosystems and organisms from the smallest in the soil to human beings. In particular, organic agriculture is intended to produce high quality, nutritious food that contributes to preventive health care and well-being. In view of this it should avoid the use of fertilizers, pesticides, animal drugs and food additives that may have adverse health effects.”*

### Soil Association

*“Organic systems recognise that our health is directly connected to the food we eat and, ultimately, the health of the soil.*

*Organic farmers aim to produce good food from a balanced living soil. Strict regulations, known as standards, define what they can and can't do. They place strong emphasis on protecting the environment.”*

### FAO

*“Organic agriculture is a holistic production management system which promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It emphasises the use of management practices in preference to the use of off-farm inputs, taking into account that regional conditions require locally adapted systems. This is accomplished by using, where possible, agronomic, biological, and mechanical methods, as opposed to using synthetic materials, to fulfil any specific function within the system.”*

*(FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, 1999).*

## How the Organic movement started

### **Some of the PEOPLE**

The organic movement is generally considered to derive from the ideas of **Rudolf Steiner**’s eight lectures on Biodynamic Farming in 1924 (Steiner, R. (1924): *Geisteswissenschaftliche Grundlagen zum Gedeihen der Landwirtschaft*. 1924; 5th edition, Steiner Verlag, Dornach, 1975)

**Sir Albert Howard's** *An Agricultural Testament* (OUP, 1940) set out the tenets of organic farming. In the preface to his book, Howard says somewhat prophetically, "the land is in revolt". He is remarkable as a colonial agricultural administrator in British India for his willingness to learn from Indian farmers, for adopting and refining their traditional composting systems, and is regarded as the father of modern composting.

**Lady Eve Balfour** and the 'Haughley Experiment' described in her classic *The Living Soil* (Faber, 1948)

(and available online at <http://www.soilandhealth.org/> ).

**J I Rodale** worked on the idea of regenerative agriculture in the US in 1930s and 40s. He is credited with popularising the term organic agriculture, and described the connection between "healthy soil and healthy people". He published his studies and advice on organic methods in his magazine *Organic Farming and Gardening Magazine* (Rodale 1942 - ). The organisation that bears his name continues his work today (see below).

**EF Schumacher** German-born international economist and philosopher put forward the ideas of appropriate technology and small-scale development, which have had a significant impact on the organic movement. He founded the Intermediate Technology Group (<http://practicalaction.org/> ), and his books *Small is Beautiful* (Blond & Briggs, 1973) and *A Guide for the Perplexed* (Jonathan Cape, 1977) outline his beliefs and philosophy.

### **Some ORGANISATIONS**

There is a plethora of organisations and groups across the world concerned with research, promotion and demonstration of organic techniques. Many of the reputable ones have websites that are listed in Intute. Here are just three of the most widely known:

**Rodale Institute** <http://www.rodaleinstitute.org/> founded by the American agriculturalist and publisher J I Rodale (above). Its philosophy and driving force stems from his central message "Healthy Soil = Healthy Food = Healthy People"®

**The Soil Association** <http://www.soilassociation.org/> founded in the UK in 1946 as a result of the publication of Eve Balfour's book (above).

**FAO** <http://www.fao.org/> The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was established as a UN agency in 1945. Its work includes promoting and enhancing sustainable agricultural production and environmental integrity.

## Organic farming – study, teaching and practical training

### **Resource guide for organic insect and disease management**

<http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/pp/resourceguide/>

An overview of organic crop management practices and an extensive list of fact sheets for vegetable crop groups, illustrating key pest and disease problems and their control.

### **Alternative Farming Systems Information Center**

[http://riley.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?tax\\_level=1&info\\_center=2](http://riley.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?tax_level=1&info_center=2)

AFSIC is US based, providing information on sustainable, organic, low-input, biodynamic, and regenerative agriculture, as well as information related to alternative agricultural enterprises and crops.

### **Bird flu advice for organic farmers**

[http://www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/psweb.nsf/B2/bird\\_flu.html](http://www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/psweb.nsf/B2/bird_flu.html)

Specific technical advice on avian influenza directed at organic poultry producers; regularly updated.

### **Climate change and agriculture**

<http://www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nsf/b0062cf005bc02c180256a6b003d987f/d2b3a314a06b799780256fc70039d5ac!OpenDocument>

Briefly discusses the role of organic farming in reducing global warming.

### **Compendium of animal health & welfare in organic farming**

<http://www.organic-vet.reading.ac.uk/>

An extensive training and information resource on the welfare aspects of organic livestock production.

### **Natural systems agriculture**

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/outreach/naturalagriculture/index.html>

Manitoba University website with practical information about organic and low-input agriculture. Includes QuickTime video presentations.

### **Organic AgInfo**

<http://www.organicaginfo.org/>

Large and highly informative website full of practical resources on organic farming, commodity production, transition issues, quality and standards.

### **Organic farming**

<http://www.organic.aber.ac.uk/library/orgfa4.pdf>

Short document presenting basic elements of organic farming in the UK, the conversion process, and grants and support available for farmers.

### **Organic lifestyles**

<http://organiclifestyles.tamu.edu/index.html>

Website from Texas A&M University with broad appeal, introducing basic principles of organic farming, horticulture, and soil biology.

### **Teaching organic farming and gardening: resources for instructors**

<http://casfs.ucsc.edu/education/instruction/tofg/index.html>

Extensive training manual from the University of California Santa Cruz, providing practical material for teaching organic farming and horticulture.

### **Teaching direct marketing and small farm viability: resources for instructors**

<http://casfs.ucsc.edu/education/instruction/tm/contents.html>

This manual presents practical knowledge, lecture notes, and resource lists on the teaching of marketing skills for small to medium organic farmers.

## **Organisations**

### **Biodynamic Agricultural Association of Great Britain (BDAA)**

<http://www.biodynamic.org.uk/>

Founded in 1929 and following the principles of Rudolf Steiner, the BDAA promotes biodynamic farming and gardening in the UK.

### **Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association (BDA)**

<http://www.biodynamics.com/>

Sister organisation to the BDAA, promoting the biodynamic system in the US.

### **Center for Global Food Issues**

<http://www.cgfi.org/>

Part of the Hudson Institute in Washington DC, supports high-yield farming, and is critical of organic agricultural methods.

### **Ecoagriculture Partners**

<http://www.ecoagriculturepartners.org/>

International non-profit organisation that works with farmers, conservationists, researchers to sustain and develop ecoagriculture.

### **International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements**

<http://www.ifoam.org/>

Umbrella organisation for the organic agriculture movement worldwide. Large amounts of documentation and information available at this site.

### **Soil association**

<http://www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nsf?Open>

The UK's leading certification body and campaigner for organic food and farming.

### **Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming**

<http://www.sustainweb.org/>

An alliance of UK national public interest organisations which promote the use of sustainable agriculture.

### **The New Farm**

<http://www.newfarm.org/>

A Rodale Institute website with news & informative articles on organic production.

## **Government bodies and policy issues**

### **Action plan to develop organic food and farming in England - two years on**

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/policy/actionplan/pdf/actionplan2year.pdf>

Progress report on the government action plan, examines developments in the organic food market, and certification issues. Outlines priorities for further action.

### **Agriculture: organic farming**

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/qual/organic/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/qual/organic/index_en.htm)

The European Commission's organic farming website, providing information on the EU agricultural sector.

### **EISfOM: European Information System for Organic Markets**

<http://www.eisfom.org/>

An EU project website with reports and recommendations on establishing a framework for organic market information. Also lists links to statistical material on organic farming in Europe.

### **European hearing on organic food and farming - towards a European action plan**

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/organic/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/organic/index_en.htm)

Presentations to the European Commission hearing on organic food and farming, from the farming and food industries, supermarkets, and consumers.

### **Farming: organic farming**

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/>

Current information from Defra for organic farmers and those wishing to convert; includes standards, research, conversion requirements, grants and organic farming statistics. Also provides information for consumers.

### **Impact of CAP measures on environmentally friendly farming systems: status quo, analysis and recommendations. The case of organic farming.**

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/agriculture/pdf/effscap\\_report.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/agriculture/pdf/effscap_report.pdf)

Presents evidence that organic farmers receive lower payments under CAP arrangements than conventional farming. Makes recommendations regarding payments which will not disadvantage the growth of organic farming.

### **OMIaRD: Organic Marketing Initiatives and Rural Development**

<http://www.irs.aber.ac.uk/omiard/index.html>

EU funded project looking at the impact of sustainable (organic) agriculture on rural development. Some reports available free.

### **Organic agriculture at FAO**

<http://www.fao.org/organicag/>

News, reports, projects and research on organic farming systems, eco-agriculture, and sustainability worldwide from the UN agency.

### **Organic Europe**

<http://www.organic-europe.net/>

Gives an overview of organic farming in 25 European countries; includes reports, background documents and a database of organisations associated with organic farming.

### **Organic farming: guide to community rules**

[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/qual/organic/brochure/abio\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/qual/organic/brochure/abio_en.pdf)

EU document providing basic information on the development, rules, and standards applied to organic farming in the EU.

### **Organic farming in Scotland**

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Agriculture/Agricultural-Policy/15869/3748>

Information on organic farming in Scotland, including stakeholder and marketing organisations.

### **Organic industry**

<http://www2.dpi.qld.gov.au/organics/>

This website from the Queensland state government presents a view of organic farming from one of the world's largest agricultural producers

## **Certification and standards**

### **Advisory Committee on Organic Standards - ACOS**

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/standards/acos/index.htm>

ACOS is an independent body providing advice standards for organic food production and processing in the UK.

### **Compendium of UK Organic Standards**

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/standards/pdf/compendium.pdf>

Defra document outlining standards for organic food production in the UK.

### **FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission: organically produced foods**

<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/a0369e/a0369e00.pdf>

Internationally approved guidelines providing an agreed approach to the production, processing, labelling, and marketing of organic foods.

### **National Organic Program (NOP)**

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/index.htm>

Provides information on regulations and standards of growing, processing and marketing of organic products in the USA.

### **Organic Food Federation**

<http://www.orgfoodfed.com/>

The OFF provides inspection, certification and registration services for organic producers. The site includes guidelines for complying with organic principles, and background information on organic farming.

### **Standards for organic food and farming in Ireland**

<http://www.iol.ie/~organic/downloads/stdsjan063.pdf>

Defines organic farming systems and lists all standards to be met in order for food products or agricultural inputs to be termed organic.

### **OrganicXseeds**

<http://www.organicxseeds.com/>

Comprehensive database providing buyers with up-to-date information on the availability of organic seeds and seedlings in Europe.

## **Organic food**

### **Improving sustainability in organic and low input food production systems**

<https://www.fibl.org/shop/pdf/hb-1455-organic-food-production.pdf>

Papers from a 2007 conference which examine consumer expectations and production methods in safe and low cost crop and livestock production.

### **Quality low input food**

<http://www qlif.org/>

QLIF studies the reduction or omission of agricultural inputs, such as pesticides, mineral fertilisers, and growth promoters, whilst ensuring safe food supplies.

### **Still no free lunch: nutrient levels in U.S. food supply eroded by pursuit of high yields**

[http://www.organic-center.org/reportfiles/Yield\\_Nutrient\\_Density\\_Final.pdf#](http://www.organic-center.org/reportfiles/Yield_Nutrient_Density_Final.pdf#)

Report from the Organic Center suggesting that nutrient density, the concentration of nutrients in a given volume of food, has declined in past decades as crop yields and animal production has increased.

### **Whyorganic**

<http://www.whyorganic.org/>

A Soil Association popular e-zine on nutrition and healthy eating for children, local food production and farming issues.

## **Research**

### **Discourse of organic food promotion: language, intentions and effects**

[http://creet.open.ac.uk/projects/language-of-food-politics/documents/4\\_organic\\_food\\_report.pdf](http://creet.open.ac.uk/projects/language-of-food-politics/documents/4_organic_food_report.pdf)

Research report examining the language used in marketing organic food in the UK.

### **Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming: DARCOF**

<http://www.darcof.dk/>

A major research resource on organic agriculture.

### **ecol-agric**

<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/ecol-agric.html>

Listserv intended for academics, researchers, and others working in the field of ecological (organic/biological) agriculture.

### **Ecological Agriculture Projects (EAP)**

<http://eap.mcgill.ca/general/Sitemap.htm>

International organisation working with farmers, conservationists, and researchers to develop eco-agriculture.

### **Ecological cereal breeding and genetic engineering**

<http://www.ifgene.org/karutz.htm>

Discusses the need for separate plant breeding for organic agriculture, where genetically engineered seeds are not considered suitable.

### **Elm Farm Research Centre (EFRC)**

<http://www.efrc.com/>

Research and promotion of organic agriculture as the most environmentally sound way of producing healthy food.

### **ERS/USDA briefing room - organic farming and marketing**

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/Organic/>

Research results, readings, and data on the organic farming sector from the US Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service.

### **FiBL**

<http://www.fibl.org/english/index.php>

One of the leading research and information centres on organic agriculture; based in Switzerland. Research reports available here on all aspects of organic production.

### **Garden organic**

<http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/index.php>

Website of The Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA), dedicated to researching and promoting organic gardening, farming and food.

### **Nafferton Ecological Farming Group**

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/tcoa/producers/index.html>

Research on comparisons between organic and conventional farming systems. The website gives information and reports on current and past research.

### **Organic Eprints**

<http://orgprints.org/>

An international open access archive of research reports and papers on organic agriculture and related topics.

**Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI)**

<http://www.omri.org/>

US-based OMRI conducts technical and scientific reviews, and lists materials allowed and prohibited for use in the production and processing, of organic food and fibre.

**Organic Monitor**

<http://www.organicmonitor.com/>

Provides marketing information, trade, research and production news for the organic food industry. Abstracts of technical and marketing reports available.

**Organic-research.com**

<http://www.organic-research.com/>

Online database from CAB International giving current information on all aspects of organic agriculture. Full access requires subscription.

**World of Organic Agriculture 2007**

<http://www.soel.de/oekolandbau/weltweit.html>

Annual report on the global development of organic farming and market trends. Pay-to-view, but free summary available.

**Agroecology**

<http://www.agroecology.org/>

The site provides a wide range of case studies demonstrating the principles of agro-ecology, a glossary, and extensive links.

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To find more evaluated resources on organic farming & agriculture, search Intute at <http://www.intute.ac.uk/healthandlifesciences/agriculture/>