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KOOSTÖÖKOGU

# — AKIS THAT DELIVERS: ESTONIA'S ORGANIC LESSONS

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# — SECTOR OVERVIEW



# OVERVIEW OF ORGANIC FARMING IN ESTONIA



## Significant organic land share

22% of Estonia's agricultural land is dedicated to organic farming, showcasing a strong national commitment.

## Organic producers

About 1,900 **organic producers** - from small farms to larger grassland-based livestock and arable (grain) operations.

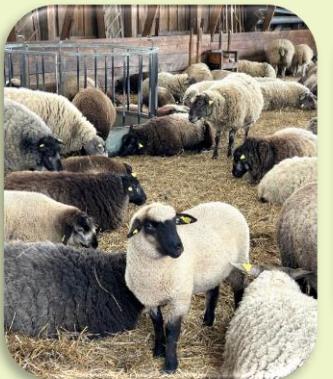
## Rising use of organic food in school & kindergarten catering

Estonia supports the use of organic food in schools and kindergartens. Nearly **30% of children receive meals prepared with at least 20% organic ingredients** – the threshold for the catering eco-label.

## EU Best organic region/bio-district 2025 – Võru County

Võru County is building a sustainable organic food supply chain and providing partly organic food in all schools and kindergartens. In 2025, it was highlighted at the EU level for its progress in regional organic development.

# ORGANIC PRODUCTION



## Oats dominate in field crops

Oats: ~50% of organic grains. High organic share for buckwheat, hemp, oats



## High share of grasslands

Linked to high share of organic grazed animals – 40% of organic land under permanent and natural grasslands



## Small but important - fruits & berries, herbs

Most of the production processed locally or sold fresh. Most common: apples, black currant, sea-buckthorn



## Limited production of vegetables, potatoes

Small areas, high production costs. Challenges to meet demand



## Strong organic beef and sheep sectors

Over half of beef and sheep in Estonia are raised organically, highlighting organic farming's suitability for these livestock



## Limited organic dairy farming

The share of organic dairy cows remains very small, reflecting challenges in converting large conventional dairy operations to organic



## Growth potential: organic eggs and poultry

Consumer preference for organic eggs and poultry meat is strengthening, indicating growth potential in both sectors



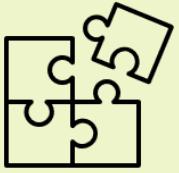
## Honeybees in natural areas

Mostly in forests & semi-natural meadows

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# EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

# CHALLENGES



## No organic curricula

Although organic farming is addressed in some courses, a comprehensive organic farming curriculum is still lacking at University as well as vocational schools. This gap in structured education hinders the development of specialized knowledge and skills among new and existing organic farmers.

## Limited organic research

There is limited interest among researchers in organic topics. Only some studies have been conducted by Estonian University of Life Sciences, Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge, farmer-led innovation clusters.

## Evolving organic advisory system

The organic advisory for farmers is in developing stage. Organic farming organisations have taken a lead to strengthen the development.

## Approach to address the challenges

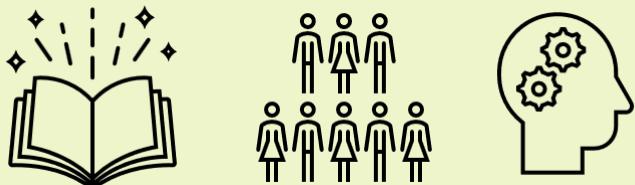
Based on this situation the primary channel for delivering knowledge and education to organic farmers has been the **implementation of structured knowledge transfer (KT) programmes**.

However, a truly effective system would adopt a **comprehensive model** – integrating formal education, advisory services, research, and practical expertise from both local and international specialists through KT programmes. This demands a strategic vision and investment.

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# AKIS. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

# KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROGRAMME



## Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System

Centre of Estonian Rural Research and Knowledge (METK) coordinates at present programming period all Estonian AKIS actions.

### Knowledge transfer programmes

Knowledge transfer programmes were launched in 2015, with the coordination transferred to METK in 2021. Organic farming has been a dedicated sub-programme from the start. Prior to 2016, training activities and publishing of materials — were carried out through various individual projects without a fully coordinated structure.

### Knowledge transfer in organic farming

Most organic knowledge transfer activities are coordinated by the Estonian Organic Farming Platform — the umbrella organisation of the sector — in close collaboration with its member organisations.

In the past year, the bureaucratic aspects of KT programme implementation have become more demanding due to changes in the procurement framework.

### Importance of KT programme

By fostering learning and innovation across the sector, the organic knowledge transfer programmes have been important contributors to the growth of organic farming in Estonia.

# TOPICS, LEARNING FORMATS AND DELIVERY

# HOW KT TOPICS ARE CHOSEN



## **Sector-wide coverage**

Organic farming spans a wide range of production areas, and the knowledge transfer programme seeks to address them all. Broad thematic and regional coverage enhances farmer engagement and helps meet the sector's diverse and location-specific needs.

## **Participatory approach drives topics**

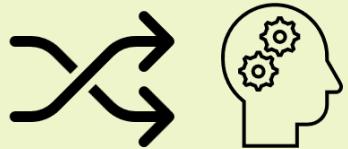
Feedback from events and farmer surveys, coordinated by the Estonian Organic Farming Platform, helps ensure that topics align with practical needs and challenges. Continuous communication between sector organisations and with individuals supports the relevance and effectiveness of the programme.

Involving farmers in topic selection boosts engagement and ownership in learning processes.

## **Adaptive and responsive system**

Even though the main topics are planned well in advance, it is essential to remain flexible and adapt to emerging challenges — ensuring that the content stays relevant and has a practical value.

# FLEXIBLE KT FORMATS (1)



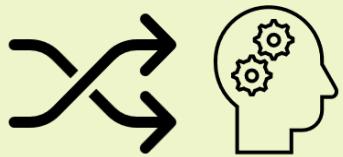
## Wide variety of formats

KT programme employs a **wide range of formats to reach farmers effectively**. These include various types of **events**—both in-person and online—as well as written and audiovisual **materials**. This diversity ensures that information is accessible and engaging to different audiences.

**The choice of format** depends on several factors, such as the topic being addressed, the urgency of the issue, availability of resources, and the preferred learning styles of participants. Practical considerations like geographic location and the seasonality of agricultural work also influence which format is most suitable at a given time.

Whenever possible, the programme aims to **provide the same target group with multiple format options**, allowing them to choose what suits them best. Combining on-farm experiences with digital delivery supports diverse learning needs and helps reinforce knowledge through different modes of engagement.

# FLEXIBLE KT FORMATS (2)



## The main formats:

- **On-Farm Learning**

Field days and other on-farm events foster peer-to-peer learning and provide hands-on experience with organic practices. Farmers are often involved as speakers or demonstrators. These events typically combine farm visits with indoor seminars or lectures.

- **Peer Learning Cross-Visits**

Cross-visits enable farmers to observe and learn from experienced farmers in different regions/countries, enhancing practical knowledge.

- **Online information days and trainings**

Since the start of COVID, online training has become an integral part of knowledge transfer and is widely accepted by most farmers. It has greatly expanded the reach and efficiency of information delivery.

- **Collaborative Networking Events**

Conferences and study circles facilitate networking, idea exchange, and collaborative learning among farmers.

- **Digital Educational Materials**

Videos, video presentations and other online resources enhance learning by providing accessible educational content beyond on-site events.

# WHAT HAS WORKED



## Strong farmer engagement

Involving farmers actively ensures learning activities are relevant and have real-world impact.

## Diverse learning formats

Use of various educational methods caters to different preferences and improves accessibility.

## Extensive coverage: national and sectoral

This approach ensures that diverse needs are addressed across different regions and production types, increasing both reach and relevance.

## Integration with AKIS framework

Coordinated knowledge dissemination through AKIS provides structure and enhances effectiveness. **Yearly working plan** for the KT for the whole organic farming sector has proved to work well, improved planning efficiency, and ensured better alignment of activities with sector needs.

In addition, the use of **standard unit costs** in earlier programmes for different types of activities across the programme has been quite effective, supporting transparency, simplifying administration, and helping to stay within the allocated budget.

— AKIS.  
ADVISORY

# EVOLVING ORGANIC ADVISORY

## OrganicAdviceNetwork project

The Horizon Europe project OrganicAdviceNetwork, in which the Estonian Organic Farming Foundation is a consortium member, plays an important role in strengthening Estonia's organic farming advisory system. Through networking, cross-border cooperation, knowledge exchange, and both basic and advanced training, the network enhances the capacity and competence of advisors.

👉 **Join the online Organic Basic Course starting November 13!**

<https://organicadvicenetwork.space/course/index.php?categoryid=4>

## AKIS advisory system

Since 2024, the coordination of agricultural and rural advisory services has been managed by METK, which maintains the national register of advisors and provides general training for them.

## Supported advice

Advisors listed in this register are eligible to deliver advisory services funded under the CAP Strategic Plan.

The pool of advisors has expanded, not only certified now also including researchers, lecturers, sectoral experts, and experienced producers under the new eligibility criteria.

## Organic advice

Given the previously limited number of advisors specialising in organic farming, expanding the eligibility to include experienced farmers and other domain experts is helping to significantly strengthen the advisory capacity in the sector.

While METK oversees the broader advisory framework, organic farming organisations have taken the lead to strengthen the organic advisors network and knowledge.

# SUCCESS FACTORS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

# CONCLUSION AND FUTURE OUTLOOK



- ❑ Estonia's organic farming benefits from a **well-integrated knowledge transfer (KT) system** that combines **farmer-led topic selection, diverse formats, and strong support networks**.
- ❑ **Broad national and sectoral coverage** ensures equity and relevance, though it requires continuous coordination.
- ❑ **Flexibility in topic and activity design** — tailored to emerging needs and local contexts — has been key to maintaining engagement and practical value. This should be continued.
- ❑ The **use of standard unit costs** previously improved efficiency and transparency. Although using standard unit costs has recently been discontinued, its reinstatement should be considered.
- ❑ **Further investment in formal organic education and research** is needed to build lasting expertise. **Strengthening the advisory system** — by involving researchers and experienced farmers — remains essential.
- ❑ **EU-level collaboration**, including OrganicAdviceNetwork, boosts capacity, facilitates knowledge exchange, and helps scale effective solutions. Digital tools should also be leveraged to expand outreach.
- ❑ **A comprehensive approach** — combining formal education, advisory services, research, and hands-on expertise through well-structured KT programmes — is key to helping organic farmers succeed in a changing agricultural landscape.

THANK YOU!

