

OPTA Europe – Manifest for organic climate action:
Taking care for the future of our planet



November 2021

The climate and our future

This summer IPCC published their new update on the condition of the climate, based on the new scientific research in the past five years. The outcome is very alarming and all conclusions and forecasts for the near future have become worse. The global warming runs faster than ever before, is caused by human activities and will have a huge impact coming years on the living conditions of our planet, affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. “Global warming of 1,5 and 2 degrees will be exceeded in the 21st century unless deep reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades.” Even low-likelihood outcomes, “such as ice sheet collapse, abrupt ocean circulation changes, some compound extreme events and warming substantially larger than the assessed *very likely* range of future warming cannot be ruled out and are part of risk assessment.” (1)

The climate and the urgency

A growing series of scientific studies express that earth experiences the sixth mass extinction event. In 2017 the document *World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice* was published. The publication, led by eight authors and signed by 15.364 scientists from 184 countries, asserted “we have unleashed a mass extinction event, the sixth in roughly 540 million years, wherein many current life forms could be annihilated or at least committed to extinction by the end of this century.” (2)

The WWF publication *Living Planet Report 2020* says that the wildlife populations have declined with 68% in the last 50 years as a result of overconsumption, population growth and intensive farmer. Evidence that humans are causing a sixth mass extinction event. (3)

The UNDP’s Human Development Report 2020, *The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*, puts it like this: “The planet’s biodiversity is plunging, with a quarter of species facing extinction, many withing decades. Numerous experts believe we are living through, or on the cusp of a mass species extinction event, the sixth in the history of the planet and the first to be caused by a single organism – us.” (4)

Based on the overwhelming scientific evidence we can hardly overestimate the urgency of the climate crisis and are obliged to do everything in the coming decade to slow down the global warming to a maximum of 1,5 degrees.

The climate and our food supply

A recent study in Nature food, calculates the share of total agriculture and food chain in the GHG emissions on 34%, one third of all emissions. (5) In several economic sectors the transition to reduction of GHG emissions has started, especially in energy supply. The food and agricultural sector are laying behind and it is the ambition of the organic sector to speed up the transition to agroecological organic agriculture that saves GHG emissions and contributes to the climate goals.

Organic and climate; our benefits and our limitations

Production, distribution and consumption of food from organic agriculture is a feasible action that farmers, processors, traders, retail and consumers can take to lower pressure on climate change and secure healthy food supply in the near future, because organic food and agriculture is:

- a more **resilient system** based on **(bio)diversity** at all levels,
- a **good balance between animal and plant production**,
- a **natural circularity that works with the environment**
- and **legally certified and controlled** according to the EU regulation for organic food and farming

But we have to be honest and modest, organic agriculture is not a simple solution for the whole climate crisis:

- Yes, it **ends the huge pressure of the chemical fertilizers and the pesticides on climate**.
- Yes, it **improves biodiversity and soil fertility**, that has a **positive impact on CO2 uptake** out of the air into the soil.
- Yes, the **circular balance** between plant and animal production and the **legal requirements for animal production** leads to a **more balanced production output of vegetal and animal products and consumption habits**.

These are **important pro's** of organic food and agriculture, **but to reduce the climate crisis to zero, there is more to change**, like:

- food diets (more plant-based)
- transition to more regional and local food distribution,
- reduction of energy and water use in food processing and distribution,
- transition to green energy use (wind, solar),
- reduction of damaging packaging, especially plastics that threaten our sea-life.

What you can expect from the organic sector

Organic farmers, traders, processors and retail are every day contributing to reduce climate impact by the fact they are farming, trading, processing and retailing organic. It is indisputable that organic food and agriculture has

What you can expect from OPTA Europe

OPTA Europe is supporting and stimulating its members in their ambitions for the climate by:

- **communication of best practices** from our members on our OPTA Europe platform
- an easily accessible **library of scientific publications** on climate change
- **raising awareness** about the impact of food and agriculture on climate change and the benefits of organic for our climate
- advocate on EU-level the need to **impose an environmental, health and social accounting system for the food industry with extra focus on climate**
- **cooperation with organic stakeholders on international and national level**

Notes:

(1) IPCC-report AR6 Climate Change 2021: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>

(2) World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice, 2017:

https://scientistswarning.forestry.oregonstate.edu/sites/sw/files/Warning_article_with_supp_11-13-17.pdf

(3) WWF Living Planet Report 2020: <https://livingplanet.panda.org>

(4) UNDP Human Development Report 2020: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf>

(5) Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions, M. Crippa et al., Nature food 2021: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00225-9>

(6) Farm to Fork strategy – EU Commission: https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en

OPTA WG Climate / 06-10-21 / second draft

OPTA was founded in 2017 by a group of industry leaders in the organic processing and trade sector. OPTA works together with its members to share expertise, to encourage uniform interpretation of the organic legislation and to support EU policy making, with the aim of strengthening the organic sector.

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