FiBL

Transforming food systems

2023/2024 activity report

Contents

< Cover: Plant proteins play an important role in the transformation of food systems. That is why FiBL is working working together with practitioners on innovative local protein sources such as lupins, from breeding and cultivation to processing. In the photo (left to right): Django Hegglin and René Stefani (farmers); Christine Arncken and Ludivine Nicod (FiBL researchers).

> Cutting-edge research in the laboratory is also part of the transformation of food systems. FiBL researcher András Patyi freezes leaf samples of lupins in liquid nitrogen to analyse the plants' response to infection with the disease anthracnose. He wants to find out which genes are responsible for a plant being resistant or susceptible.

Lupins at FiBL
Information on cultivation, processing and research projects involving lupins: bioaktuell.ch (German only)

Scuffles over shopping baskets
Greater sustainability for food systems

A tug-of-war is taking place between the notion that "Geiz ist geil", German for "stinginess is cool", and sustainability. In this complex constellation, FiBL is taking a holistic view. The transformation of food systems calls for solutions that meet majority societal approval. FiBL's work benefits everyone involved, in both the conventional and organic sectors.

Current debates are characterised by wars, climate change and surging costs, which also impact the farming sector. The call for maximum yields and rock-bottom food prices is becoming acceptable again. The hidden environmental and health costs are being ignored.

There is however another path. FiBL research demonstrates how the current crises could be an opportunity to transform the agri-food system in a sustainable way. Organic farming and agroecological techniques enable good yields while preserving species diversity, protecting water resources and maintaining soil health. This creates long-term stability, boosts the local economy, and fills our plates

Every bite counts

Our shopping choices can contribute to change. The FiBL restaurant in Frick is a great example of this, serving local organic products, minimising food waste and using lots of plant-based ingredients. Here, guests can experience how delicious sustainable food can be.

In order for truly future-proof products to be successful, they must be recognised as such; for example, in the retail trade where fierce competition for shoppers' custom is rife. FiBL's numerous projects evaluate the sustainability of products, supply chains and trading companies, providing solid figu es for the transition to a diet that helps ensure a viable future for our grandchildren.

Animal welfare comes first

Moderate consumption of livestock products certainly has a role to play in viable, forward-looking food systems. This is why there is still much to be done in terms of animal welfare.

On this front, FiBL is researching ways to prevent animal stress en route to the abattoir, such as on-farm slaughter. This method is currently gaining popularity in Switzerland and Germany, where FiBL is providing scientific advice and assistance to pioneering farms that are adopting the approach.

Climate change: adaptation is survival

Many farmers, not just in the south, are currently asking themselves whether they should give up their farms or continue farming. This is due to increasingly severe summer droughts and other extreme weather events. Climate change is accelerating.

To help the farming sector prepare for this, FiBL is partnering with researchers and practitioners to breed resilient crop varieties that can withstand the changing climate. FiBL is also conducting intensive research into agroforestry systems, investigating various approaches around the globe, including in Bolivia, France, Austria and Switzerland. These systems combine the cultivation

Executive Committee
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Dóra Drexler

Managing Director
FiBL Europe
Bram Moeskops

of fruit, vegetables and arable crops or livestock husbandry with woody plants that provide shade and improve the water regime. Such diverse systems stabilise yields and withstand the extreme weather conditions caused by climate change.

Strong plants deliver strong yields

Our long-term DOK trial, for example, has demonstrated how stable and high yields can be achieved in organic systems. For more than 45 years now, it has provided researchers from numerous institutions with data on cropping system comparisons.

A new FiBL pilot set-up is currently investigating whether orchard yields can be increased by installing rain-covers that simultaneously deliver solar power.

The transformation of food systems takes many forms. FiBL and its staff are supporting practitioners on this challenging journey through research, advice and continuing education.

Knowledge exchange is the driving force

We firmly believe that personal dialogue is a much more effective way of encouraging a change in thinking than regulations. This is why FiBL's activities focus on the processing and sharing of knowledge.

FiBL promotes sustainability in the agri-food sector through personal discussions, active networking, large-scale field day meet-ups and a wide range of courses. In the digital space, we use websites, fact sheets, podcasts and videos to disseminate new findings

We hope you enjoy reading this report.

Managing Directors
of FiBL Germany since 2025
From left to right:
Rebecca Franz-Wippermann, FiBL Deutschland e.V., Vera Bruder and Frank Wörner, FiBL Projekte GmbH

FiBL in numbers

499

Staff in 2024
FiBL is growing. In 2024, FiBL employed a total of 499 people. This figure was 402 in 2022

466

Projects in 2024
In 2024, FiBL worked on 466 projects ranging in diversity from "Training on innovation platforms in Africa" to "Sweet Sorghum: a climate-smart beet sugar alternative for Switzerland".

86

Publications for practitioners
FiBL prepares specialised information for specific target groups. In 2024, 24 new publications and 55 revised editions were made available to download for free at shop.fibl.org.

49 000 000

FiBL's total budget for 2023 in euros
In 2023, the six FiBL centres had an annual budget of € 49 million at their disposal. This enabled numerous research and advisory projects to be implemented that further advance organic farming.

94

Scientific peer-reviewed studies in 2024
FiBL researchers published 94 peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals. These articles provide key insights, particularly in the field of basic research.

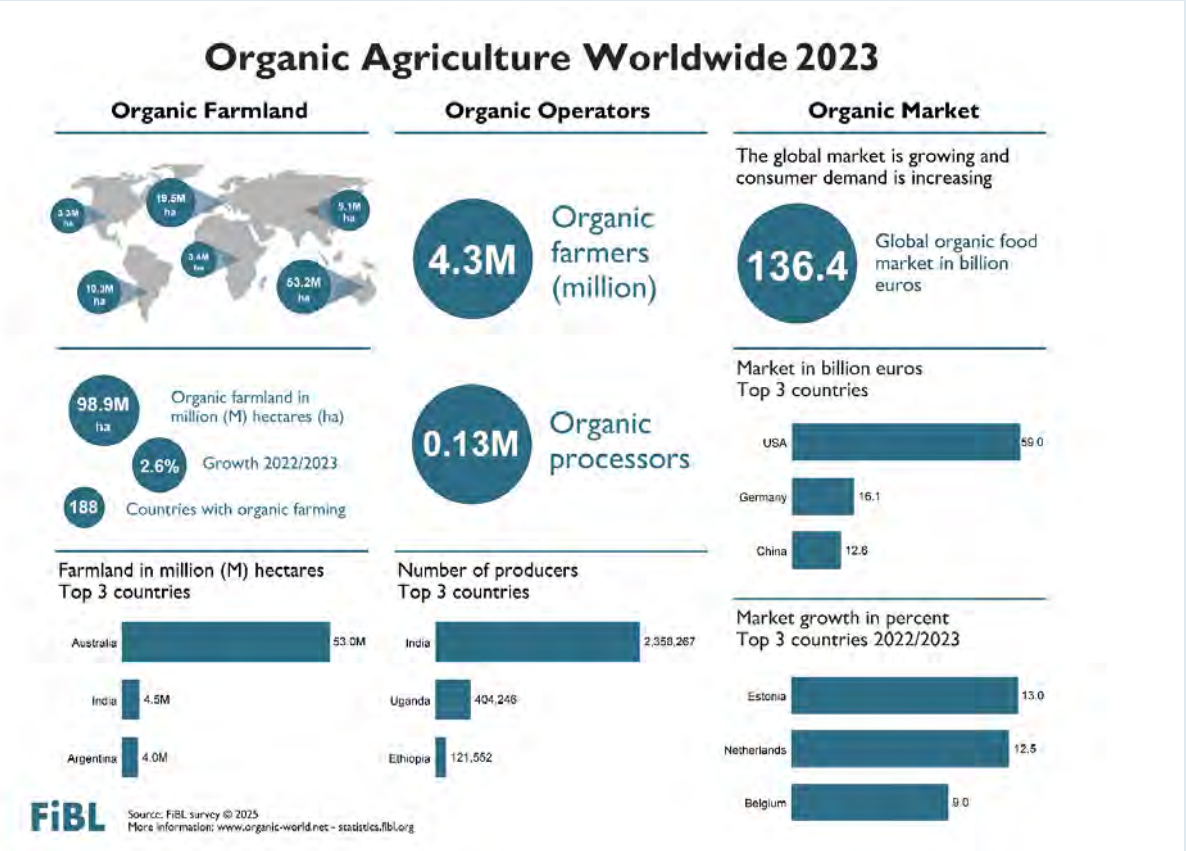
Organic stats from around the world

Every year, a FiBL publication sparks a global media response. This publication is the statistical yearbook entitled "The World of Organic Agriculture", which contains the latest figures on organic acreage, the number of organic farms, and much more.

In February 2025, FiBL published the world statistics on the organic farming sector for the 26th time! "The World of Organic Agriculture", which has been published by FiBL and IFOAM – Organics International since FiBL's inception, has long been a standard reference work and is FiBL's most frequently cited publication.

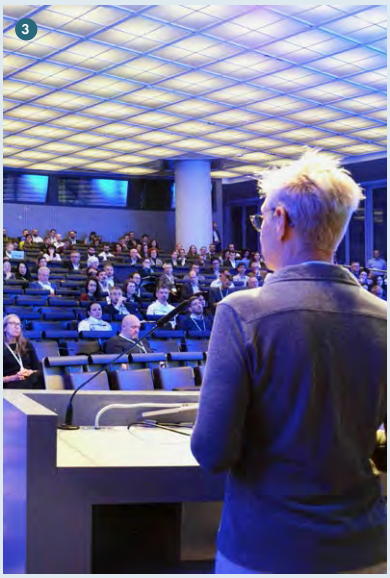
The 25th anniversary of the global statistics had been duly celebrated at the Biofach trade fair in Nuremberg the previous year, in February 2024. Numerous guests attended this event, including Helga Willer of FiBL Switzerland, who has been responsible for the publication since its fir t edition. The presentation of the new yearbook traditionally takes place at Biofach, the world's leading organic trade fair. The Swiss Confederation (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO), Bio Suisse and Coop have supported its publication.

The latest global figures, from 2023, are impressive: Organic agriculture is practised in some 190 countries, with almost 99 million hectares of agricultural land farmed organically by at least 4.3 million farmers. Global sales of organic food and beverages exceeded € 136 billion in 2023.



The World of Organic Agriculture
The latest facts and figures
on the organic sector worldwide at:
organic-world.net

2023 – The year in review



1 Organic Livestock Day
The Swiss organic livestock sector meets for the third time. FiBL co-organises the Organic Livestock Day (Bio-Viehtag). Topics covered include cattle, small ruminants, poultry, horses, bees, and a panel discussion on ruminant feeding.

Firsts for the Öko-Feldtage (Organic Field Days)
The Organic Field Days, organised by FiBL Germany, take place for the first time on a private farm and for the first time in Baden-Württemberg. The event attracts 12,000 visitors and 350 exhibitors.

New management at FiBL Europe
Bram Moeskops takes over as Managing Director of FiBL Europe.

Anniversary: 50 years of FiBL
FiBL, the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, was established in Switzerland fifty years ago. Today it is the world's leading centre of organic expertise, comprising six institutes throughout Europe with a global reach.

Cooperation in France
FiBL France and FiBL Switzerland sign a new cooperation agreement with ITAB, the French Institute of Organic Farming and Nutrition. The goal is to promote applied research in organic farming.

Coaching programme
FiBL Germany's QC_RegioBio project develops the first training and coaching programme for people who are seeking to establish regional organic value chains. 150 people apply for 20 training places.

2 Embassy in Paris honours FiBL
The Swiss Embassy in Paris organises an evening discussion on organic agriculture, featuring contributions from FiBL France and FiBL Switzerland. The meeting aims to explore the involvement of public and private stakeholders in research and innovation.

New chair at FiBL Switzerland
Jürn Sanders is elected Chairman of the Management Board and the FiBL Switzerland Board of Directors. As primus inter pares, he is part of a three-person team.

3 Innovative crop protection
The 18th Annual Biocontrol Industry Meeting (ABIM) welcomed around 1800 participants from 58 countries. The focus was on using organic methods to improve crop protection and food security. The event was organised by FiBL Switzerland and the International Biocontrol Manufacturers' Association (IBMA).

30 per cent organic
Germany's goal is to increase the proportion of organic agriculture to 30 per cent by 2030. To do so, the proportion of land under organic management must almost triple, and organic consumption must increase too. To support the Federal Minister of Agriculture, Cem Özdemir, in this endeavour, a team of experts from FiBL produced a report.

FiBL Open Day
1600 people took part in FiBL's online organic research knowledge transfer day. The programme included 36 sessions and some 100 presentations.

2024 – The year in review

FiBL podcast wins media award
Anke Beermann of the FiBL Focus team is honoured with the German Dairy Farmers' Federation Media Award for her podcast episode on the productive lifespan of cows.

25 years of World of Organic
For the past 25 years, FiBL has published annual figures on the global organic market in "The World of Organic Agriculture". This is FiBL's most frequently cited publication.

Green claims in the organic sector
A legal opinion produced by FiBL Germany in collaboration with project partners determines which claims about organic food should be allowed to continue.

Organic breakfast
FiBL Europe organises an organic breakfast for the second time, bringing together representatives of EU institutions, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and further interest groups.

4 Organic epicurean networking
FiBL Austria and AMA-Marketing GmbH once again host the AMA-Bio-Netz (AMA organic network), the workshop for innovation and enjoyment of organic food.

5 Cereal variety trials
The results of the cereal variety trials in Hungary are published. More than twenty cultivars were tested for three years at seven locations in a national multi-stakeholder cooperation coordinated by ÖMKi.

New management at FiBL Germany
A decision is taken at the board meeting: FiBL Germany is to have a new management team in place from January 2025. Rebecca Franz-Wippermann will take over as manager of FiBL Germany. Meanwhile, Vera Bruder and Frank Wörner will jointly lead FiBL Projekte GmbH into the future.

6 Agroforestry system is operative
FiBL Switzerland's new agroforestry system opens as a place for learning, exchange and research.

Agroecology in the tropics
FiBL summarises the latest scientific findings for policymakers. The conclusion of the dossier: Organic agriculture and agroecology can provide sufficient yields and protect the natural resources on which our lives depend.

DOK trial dossier published
The results of 45 years of research in the long-term DOK trial are summarised in a dossier. The DOK trial compares biodynamic, organic and conventional cropping systems.

7 Impetus for crop plant breeding
Climate change and new diseases call for new, adapted cultivars. To bring these to market more quickly, FiBL Switzerland and its partners establish the Swiss Plant Breeding Centre (SPBC).

20 years of the trainee programme
FiBL Germany's Organic Agriculture and Food Trainee Programme celebrates 20 years of success. This is done in style at an anniversary party as part of the annual trainee alumni meeting.

Jürgen Heß honoured
Federal Minister Cem Özdemir presents Jürgen Heß, Chairman of the Board of FiBL Germany, with the Professor Niklas Medal. This prestigious award from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (BMLEH) recognises exceptional dedication to the food, farming and forestry sectors.

FiBL's embassy in Brussels

FiBL Europe – networking and gaining new leads

In the centre of Brussels: FiBL Europe's headquarters.

FiBL Europe has intensified its networking activities over the past two years, with great success. The organisation receives invitations to important events, its researchers are appointed to EU expert groups, and it leads large EU projects.

FiBL Europe is strengthening its presence in agricultural policy debates in Brussels by participating in high-profile events and projects or organising its own events.

In April 2024, for instance, FiBL Europe hosted an organic breakfast for the second time, also serving some slightly heavier fare: The presentation entitled "Food vs. nature: can organic agriculture help us?" by Adrian Müller of FiBL Switzerland provided food for thought.

In the lead for major EU projects

FiBL Europe plays a key role in project coordination for three Horizon Europe projects: Liveseeding promotes seeds adapted to organic agriculture, OrganicYieldsUP investigates sustainable yield increases, and OrganicClimateNET is developing a network for climate-friendly agriculture.

FiBL expertise in EU committees

This is another sign that FiBL Europe's expertise is being recognised more and more: FiBL researchers are being appointed to committees. For example, two scientists from FiBL Germany are now part of the EU Agri-Food Chain Observatory, a working group set up by the European Commission to analyse prices, costs, and the distribution of margins and added value in the food supply chain.

In addition, Bram Moeskops, Director of FiBL Europe, was invited to a European Parliament seminar on the role of digitalisation and artificial intelligence in sustainable farming.

Quo vadis, EU agricultural policy?

With the EU elections in May and the formation of the new EU Commission in November 2024 approaching, the future of agricultural policy has come into focus. Agriculture Commissioner Christos Stylianides' new vision for agriculture and food prioritises competitiveness and simplification. He intends to relax regulations for farms and avoid introducing new environmental requirements. However, the vision also recognises the organic farming sector as a valuable provider of ecosystem services.

Bram Moeskops, FiBL

FiBL Europe in Brussels

FiBL Europe acts as the "diplomatic representation" of FiBL in Brussels. The FiBL Europe team has a sound understanding of EU policy and bridges the gap between science and politics. The team organises events, participates in expert groups with EU institutions, and supports researchers from all FiBL locations in project acquisition and coordination. FiBL Europe is currently coordinating three Horizon Europe projects.

FiBL Europe organises events for decision-makers and non-governmental organisations in Brussels.

Robert Hermanowski hands over management

A change at FiBL Germany

Robert Hermanowski and a number of his compatriots established FiBL Germany in 2001. He served as its Managing Director for almost a quarter of a century. In 2025, he handed over the management of FiBL to three individuals.

During his time as Managing Director, Robert Hermanowski established FiBL Germany as a renowned institution within the German organic sector. The organisation has grown from a small Berlin office with three employees to a team of 75 part-time and full-time staff, who work mainly in Frankfurt, but also at a second location in Witzenhausen. Turnover has increased from € 100,000 in 2001 to more than € 6 million in 2023.

Pioneering projects

During Hermanowski's time, substantive milestones that established FiBL Germany's profile included the development of the oekolandbau.de internet portal, the establishment of the German Betriebsmittelkatalog (catalogue of agricultural inputs), and the organicXseeds.com availability database for organic seeds. FiBL Germany also organises the nationwide Öko-Feldtage (Organic Field Days).

Creative bridge-builder

Robert has not only shaped the stats and projects, but also the way FiBL is perceived in the industry: open, colourful, creative and always keeping an inspired eye on the bigger picture. Anyone who knows Robert is familiar with his colourful style in clothing and thinking, and his passion for bringing people together in unique ways. Whether cycling, attending concerts or having conversations, he likes to cultivate networks where genuine encounters are possible.

At the same time, he always wanted to surprise, be unpredictable, stimulate discussion and create new perspectives. His combination of analytical vision, creative drive, and a keen sense of humour made him a key figure for many at FiBL and across the organic sector as a whole. His door was always open – to ideas, debates and colleagues.

The FiBL team would like to thank Robert for his almost 25 years of tireless commitment, and wish him all the best for the future.

So what is Robert Hermanowski up to now?

The 66-year-old will remain associated with FiBL as a consultant, supporting the new management team in familiarising themselves with the organisation. It remains to be seen exactly when he will fully devote himself to his private passions – cycling, music, and new adventures. He already volunteers as a rickshaw driver for senior citizens with dementia and as a reading coach for children.

50 years of FiBL
Competent pioneering

Where it all began: the first FiBL location on the Bruderholz farm in Oberwil, Basel District in 1973.

Video still from "FiBL's origins – narrated by Hardy Vogtmann", a video available on the FiBLFilm channel on YouTube (with English subtitles).

FiBL is more than 50 years old! Who would have thought it back in 1973, when a small group of determined individuals laid the foundations? Today, FiBL is a company with 500 employees throughout Europe, boasting a reputation as one of the world's leading organic research institutions.

To mark the anniversary, FiBL employees did a bike trek across Switzerland wearing smart cycling outfits. When the founding generation met in 1973, the coarse, knitted woollen jumper was still the dominant item of clothing. But one thing never changed: FiBL was founded on practical experience and continues to support the farmers who engage in organic agriculture.

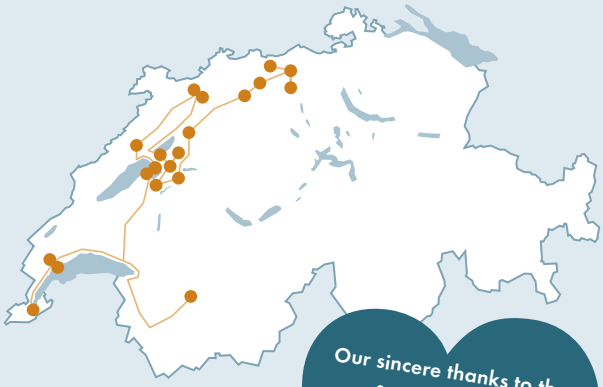
From parlour to campus

Following its beginnings at the Bruderholzhof in Oberwil near Basel, the centre relocated to a villa on the Bernhardsberg, also in Oberwil. In 1997, FiBL found its new home at the former agricultural college in Frick, Switzerland. This location has proved very favourable for the institute. Surrounded by experimental plots, the campus provides the perfect environment for research on organic agriculture and food. This has been especially true since conversion and extension work was completed in 2022. The new conference and laboratory rooms are just as popular as the bright, superbly catered organic restaurant.

Adrian Krebs, FiBL

FiBL Campus in Frick as it appears today.

From the field for the field
is worth its weight in gold



Our sincere thanks to the sponsors of the anniversary events: Coop, Rathgeb Bio, Mäder Kräuter, Ricola and Zweifel.

How does FiBL manage to remain young and agile despite now being middle aged, having been around for 50 years? The institute must constantly adapt and realign itself in response to the many challenges it faces. This also has to do with the young people who join FiBL and prevent possible rigidity by offering surprising ideas.

FiBL's accumulated experience of more than 50 years of applied research is invaluable. FiBL is recognised far and wide, not least by its sponsors and donors. The Swiss Confederation plays a key role in this, financing FiBL to the amount of around one third of its budget as part of a performance mandate.

Other important partners include the cantons, foundations, companies and other institutions, as well as the patrons who support FiBL's work through their generous contributions, large and small.

Staying bold and innovative

Experience is one thing; youthful curiosity is another. Younger locations, such as Romandie, Brussels and France, provide fresh impetus as much as the people who join us and amaze us with their ideas, inspiring us to be flexible in our thinking, just as the founding generation did in the 1970s.

Adrian Krebs, FiBL

A bicycle trek was part of the celebrations to mark FiBL's 50th anniversary.

Birthday inspiration: Young students present ideas for the future on Innovation Day.

A farm plaque was among gifts in the bike trekker's luggage.

Group photo with FiBL practitioner partners: the bike trek at the Braun family's Lehenhof farm in Rothrist.

50th anniversary voices

The exchange with FiBL and other participating farms has encouraged us to try new things, such as drying off without antibiotics.

Stefan Jegge, organic farmer

I see FiBL as a fellow campaigner, rather than as competition. The challenges facing the agrifood industries are so significant that it makes no sense to go it alone – neither nationally nor internationally.

Eva Reinhard, Head of Agroscope

Reading the voices
In the "anniversary voices" series at fibl.org people talk about their relationships to FiBL: from staff members over foundation board member to Coop CEO.

Hearing the voices
Hear the anniversary podcast episodes (German only): "Prince Charles and FiBL – with Urs Niggli and Hardy Vogtmann", "Two former FiBL Directors talk about the future of farming" and "47 years with FiBL – Otto Schmid recounts". Available from your usual podcast services and at: fibl.org/podcast

Former FiBL Director Hardy Vogtmann meets Prince Charles, who has since been crowned king, in 1997.

Although initially viewed with suspicion, FiBL has become a highly regarded research and extension institute, as well as a valuable meeting place with significant influence.

Gertrud Häseli, organic farmer, member of the Grand Council of the canton of Aargau

The world needs FiBL as a knowledge intermediary. However, FiBL could perhaps strengthen its internal cooperation by defining topics on which several departments could collaborate. This would allow the institute to provide clearer answers to complex questions.

Bernard Lehmann, President of the Foundation Council of FiBL Switzerland

FiBL is committed to bringing clarity and transparency to both the organic movement and conventional agriculture. FiBL's close relationship with farmers and diverse stakeholder groups makes it a unique research institute with first-hand experience of the sector's daily challenges and realities.

Julia Lernoud, IFOAM World Board Member


Frühlings-
zwiebeln
Gemüse
geschmort
Erbsen-
püree

Delicious, local and ecofriendly
Switzerland's first certified organic canteen

The proportion of organic products used in the catering industry is very low. In Switzerland it is around one per cent. However, the FiBL restaurant in Frick is quite different, as it uses an average of 97 per cent organic products in its dishes. In this interview, Martin Künzli, Head of Catering and Events, reveals his commitment to transforming our diet.

How did the FiBL restaurant get three stars?
Martin Künzli: In 2023, Bio Suisse, the umbrella organisation for Swiss organic farmers, introduced the "Bio Cuisine" label. FiBL decided to participate and aimed for the maximum rating. We were the first company restaurant in Switzerland to receive three-star certification. This entails using more than 90 per cent organic products.

What do you do to combat food waste?
We weighed the leftovers on the plates. In November 2024, this averaged at 12 grams per plate, or around 30 kilograms per month. As a result, we served smaller portions and communicated that seconds could be had at any time. By January 2025, waste had decreased to an average of five grams per plate.

In the kitchen almost nothing is thrown away. We utilise almost everything, from roots to leaves. We make our own bouillon from vegetable waste. Any unsold produce is professionally cooled and used later.

Food systems transformation towards greater sustainability is one of FiBL's work priorities. How is this implemented in the restaurant?

We follow the Planetary Health Diet. This diet is healthy for both people and planet. This means that we source local, seasonal produce wherever possible and offer a wide range of plant-based options. Our sales statistics show that 45 per cent of our menu options are vegan, 23 per cent are vegetarian, and 32 per cent include meat.

You have experience in high-end gastronomy, including Michelin-starred cuisine. What made you transition from luxury to sustainability?
Fine dining places great value on high-quality food, so fresh, unprocessed products are key. I have always wanted to develop this approach further by buying products that are as sustainable and ethologically sound as possible. I even wrote my dissertation on this topic during my training at hotel management school.

Interview: Franziska Hämmerli, FiBL

A warm welcome!
Come and visit us.

Restaurant
Menu, prices and opening hours: fibl.org > Locations > Switzerland > Locations > Frick > FiBL Restaurant

Conference centre
Rooms, prices and packages: fibl.org > Locations > Switzerland > Locations > Frick > Conference Centre

Contact: martin.kuenzli@fibl.org

Martin Künzli in the dining room of the FiBL Restaurant in Frick.

< Sibylle Finsterwald (right), kitchen manager, and her deputy Lea Barth.

Tropical diversity meets organics and agroecology

Rethinking the sustainable farming sector

Food production in the tropics is reaching its limits. Two FiBL publications demonstrate that agroecology and organic farming are promising ways to secure yields, protect the environment and improve smallholder incomes.

Despite technological advances, current food systems are failing to meet the needs of both society and the environment. The hidden costs of "business as usual" are particularly evident in tropical regions. Food insecurity and political instability exacerbate the problem.

As publications by FiBL based on current studies show, organic farming and agroecology offer great opportunities in this respect. Not only do organic farming and agroecology achieve yields comparable to those of conventional methods, they also produce particularly diverse and nutritious food. Organic and agroecological systems improve household incomes, increase the resilience of farms and reduce social costs in the long term. At the same time, the climate, biodiversity, soil health and water quality benefit from these methods

Best practices and innovative projects

Successful examples show how biological and agroecological approaches can overcome practical challenges. For example, agrobiodiversity and preventive pest control methods not only secure yields, but also reduce the need for synthetic pesticides.

Organic citrus plantations in Mexico have seen an impressive 85 per cent reduction in Asian citrus pest infestation. Another innovative project involves seed breeding for organic cotton. As part of the Seeding the Green Future breeding project, India's first organically bred cotton varieties were created. These were approved

Farmer Patrick Maive from Kianjugu in Kenya checks the structure and fertility of his soil in the agroforestry system.

in 2022. This success supports smallholder farmers, preserves agrobiodiversity, and strengthens the local value chain in the organic sector.

Political prospects

Although the advantages of organic farming and agroecology are evident, they are not always implemented to their full potential. The political and institutional framework continues to favour the conventional farming sector.

However, there is considerable potential to overcome these barriers through targeted political measures, driving forward a viable, future-oriented transformation of food systems in the tropics.

Lauren Dietemann, FiBL

Policy dossier and factsheet

Link to dossier: "Cultivating change with agroecology and organic agriculture in the tropics – Bridging science and policy for sustainable production systems"
shop.fibl.org > Search > 2000

Link to the factsheet (English, German and French):
"The potential of agroecology and organics – Insights from scientific evidence in the tropics"
shop.fibl.org > Search > 1999

Contact: lauren.dietemann@fibl.org

Funding: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Liechtenstein Development Service (LED), Coop Sustainability Fund, Biovision – Foundation for Ecological Development

Project partners: Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa (KCOA), Farming Systems Comparison in the Tropics (SysCom)

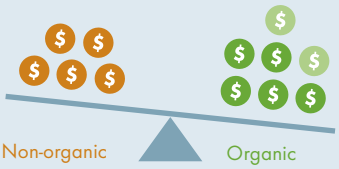
Benefits of organics and agroecology in the tropics

Lower health risk

Every year, 385 million people suffer from pesticide poisoning. 95 per cent of these cases occur in the Global South. Synthetic pesticides are banned in organic farming.

Higher income

At least the same or up to 35 per cent higher income in organic farming, as organic products can be marketed at higher prices.

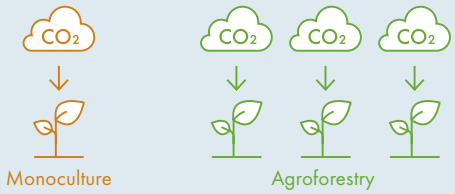


Greater biodiversity

30 per cent more species diversity in organic than in conventional systems.

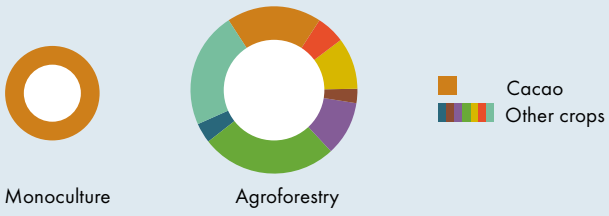
Favourable carbon footprint

Soil carbon stocks are up to three times higher in diversified systems. This improves fertility and enhances the capacity to absorb and retain water.



Higher overall yields and nutritional diversity

Yields in the tropics can be up to twice as high if diversified agroecological and organic farming systems are used.



A system for sustainability
The regional calculator shows what counts

The regional calculator is used to evaluate sustainability effects along entire food value chains at a regional level.

Regionality is often associated with sustainable and safe production conditions, yet it is usually a vague term. The regional calculator developed by FiBL provides clear criteria and allows for an assessment of regionality that goes far beyond the mere location of where the food was produced.

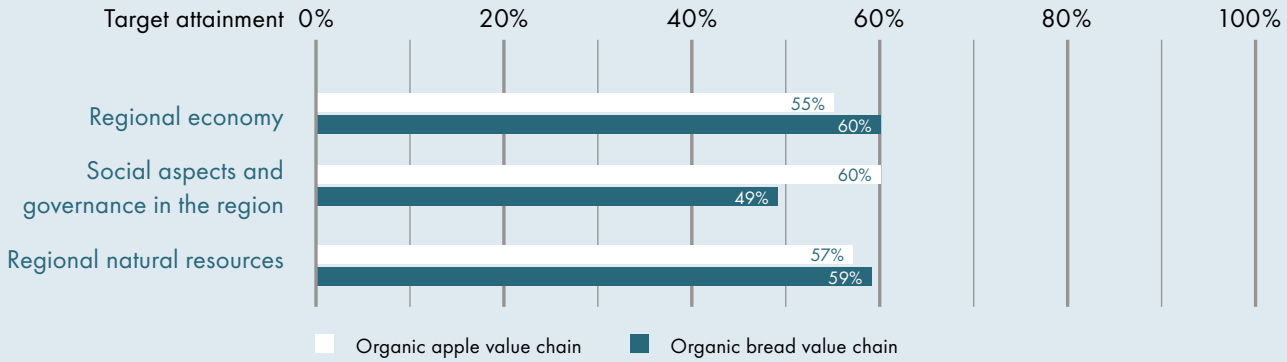
Back in 2014, FiBL already designed an assessment model for value chains, initially for the Austrian food discounter Hofer's organic brand "Zurück zum Ursprung" (ZZU). Since then, the regional calculator has undergone continuous development.

Tangible regional value added

In a current project titled "benefit 23+: Assessment of regional sustainability effects along food value chains in Austria", the calculator integrates sustainability and regionality. This allows for a holistic analysis of the entire supply chain, from agricultural production to the point of sale. This prevents the sustainability effects of a food product from being distorted by an isolated analysis of individual sub-indicators.

For a set of sustainability dimensions – "Regional economy", "Social aspects & governance in the region" and "Regional natural resources" – 41 indicators were

Results of the sustainability aspects



Results of the evaluation of the value chains of organic apples and organic bread in Austria. These values are displayed on product packaging and in detail online. These results are primarily intended for consumers, to enable them to make informed purchasing decisions.

However, they are also intended to demonstrate to those involved in the value chain how sustainably they are performing and where they could improve. To this end, farmers receive detailed reports setting out possible actions they can take to improve their sustainability performance.

Creating incisive transparency: FiBL analyses economic, social and ecological sustainability from primary farm sector production and processing through to the point of sale.

developed that capture regionality with quantifiable sustainability indicators. This makes tangible the regional added value created along the value chain. Target attainment per indicator is shown on a scale from zero to one hundred per cent, reflecting the results of all the operators along the value chain through which the product has passed. To benchmark the "added value for the region" calculated in this way, the results are compared with those of comparable value chains.

Results for 140 agricultural holdings

A target attainment of one hundred per cent classifies value chains whose sustainability measures go far beyond legal minimum standards and common practices in the respective sustainability dimension.

To highlight strengths and areas for improvement, all 140 participating agricultural holdings receive a detailed farm report containing their results. The report also contains recommended actions to encourage farmers to analyse their regional sustainability performance.

Results are publicly accessible

More than 600 ZUU products have now been analysed. The sustainability effects of the analysed value chains have been published, and the full results can be found on the company's website, while a simplified version is available on the products themselves. This makes sustainability transparent and traceable, providing true added value for farms, consumers and the region.

Elisabeth Klingbacher, FiBL

benefit 23+: Assessment of regional sustainability effects along food value chains in Austria

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > Regio23+

Contact: alexander.dietl@fibl.org

Funding: Hofer KG, Prüf Nach!

Link: zurueckzumursprung.at > Grundwerte & Nachhaltigkeit > Mehrwert für die Region (German only)

Isabella Gusenbauer and Alexander Dietl analyse and evaluate the sustainability effects of food value chains.

Organics in wartime

Ukraine remains an important export country

Since 2022, conditions for producers in Ukraine have become very difficult due to the war. Despite this – or precisely for that reason – FiBL continues to advise farms on agronomic issues and help them find new sales channels.

For around twenty years now, FiBL has been supporting Ukrainian producers in converting to organic farming and marketing their products. During this time, the area dedicated to organic agriculture has almost tripled, increasing from 164,000 to 470,000 hectares – a feat made possible in no small part thanks to the support of a FiBL project. The project also contributed to 383 Ukrainian organic farms having been certified by the end of 2023. Ukraine has thus been able to establish itself as a reliable international trading partner for organic products, even during challenging periods.

Organic Farming Act – in the midst of war

Let's start with the good news: Ukraine has implemented its national organic legislation. This means it is now compatible with EU and Swiss legislation. This will make it easier for Ukraine to negotiate with the European Union.

Further milestones in 2023 and 2024 included the introduction of a state register for organic certification bodies and farms, and a national logo for organically produced products. FiBL provided technical support for drafting the organic legislation and offered advice and assistance with the logo design competition.

Financial aid for greater resilience

As part of the SECO-funded project, FiBL was able to provide emergency loans totalling CHF 90,000 to around forty organic farms, half of which are run by women, at the end of 2024. The support is primarily aimed at improving product quality and packaging. This will help to improve the resilience and adaptability of organic farms. Furthermore, these measures promote healthy nutrition, even in times of war.

Fifth largest organic exporter despite the war

Despite the war, Ukraine was one of the five largest exporters of organic products to the EU in 2023, and it continues to produce and export at a high level. FiBL is currently strengthening its support for Ukrainian organic producers in the area of exports. This includes helping them to participate in international trade fairs such as Biofach in Nuremberg, Anuga in Cologne, Sial in Paris and Gulfood in Dubai. This gives Ukrainian organic farms the opportunity to showcase their products to an international audience, maintain contact with existing customers, and access new markets.

In 2024, the FiBL team supported organic producers in launching their products in the Ukrainian supermarket Silpo.

FiBL market expert Natalie Prokopchuk (third from right) advises Ukrainian exporters during the Gulfood 2025 international trade fair in Dubai.

This logo has been used to identify Ukrainian organic products since 2024.

Labour shortage

One of the biggest challenges facing Ukrainian organic agriculture is the shortage of labour in production and processing caused by the war. Damaged infrastructure (power outages, damaged or interrupted transport routes, etc.) and soaring costs are also creating enormous difficulties.

Declining purchasing power and sales

Shortly before the start of the Russian war of aggression at the end of 2021, sales of organic products on the Ukrainian domestic market totalled around USD 33 million. Sales have fallen sharply due to the situation caused by the war. The main reasons for this are the migration-induced population decline and the sharp drop in the purchasing power of the Ukrainian general public, which was 85 per cent below the EU average in 2024.

The export volume of organic products decreased by almost a quarter between 2021 (261,000 tonnes) and 2023 (198,000 tonnes). In monetary terms, the decline was around 37 per cent, falling from 222 million US dollars in 2021 to 141 million US dollars in 2023. Whether Ukraine will maintain its position among the EU's fi e largest importers of organic products in 2025 remains to be seen.

Tobias Eisenring, FiBL

Quality Food Trade Programme (QFTP)

Website: qftp.org

Contacct: tobias.eisenring@fibl.org

Funding: State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO))

Podcast: "After three years of war: A FiBL mission to Ukraine shows hopes and challenges". You can find the podcast at popular podcast providers or at fibl.org > Info Centre > Podcast > FiBL Collaboration > Research at FiBL Switzerland

Video: "Organic trade in times of war: Women at the forefront", on the FiBLFilm channel on YouTube.

Nina Smyrnova of "Nuts'N'Garden" produces organic hazelnuts for export in the Bila Zerkwa region, 80 kilometres south-west of Kiev.

Putting down roots for diversity

Biodiversity check on agroforestry

Agroforestry systems offer a promising response to climate change. At the same time, they promote biodiversity. However, these systems can vary greatly between farms. A FiBL project is examining the diversity of these systems and their impact on biodiversity in greater detail.

Agroforestry systems combine trees with arable farming, vegetable cultivation or livestock farming. These systems offer many benefits in terms of climate resilience: They mitigate temperature extremes, counteract soil erosion and sequester carbon.

Every set-up is uniquet

It is no surprise, then, that the area dedicated to agroforestry has grown significantly in recent years. However, their diversity has yet to be systematically surveyed. A FiBL project is currently examining the various types found in Austria at present and analysing their contribution to biodiversity.

To date, around 60 farms have been surveyed using questionnaires. Their agroforestry systems have been categorised, and their contribution to biodiversity has been analysed based on a comprehensive literature review and interviews with experts. The results demonstrate the significant diversity of these systems, which is reflected in the wide range of motivations that farm managers have for practising agroforestry.

Developing recommendations for practitioners

The ten-strong expert group identified the key factors for promoting biodiversity. These include arable farming practices, landscape context, and cover crop design incorporating seed mixtures, grazing, or late mowing with biomass removal.

These results are in line with those published in scientific journals and form the basis for practical recommendations. Furthermore, the surveyed farms are shown on a digital, publicly accessible "agroforestry map" on the project website.

Elisabeth Klingbacher, FiBL

< Participants in a workshop examine agroforestry systems in Switzerland and their impact on biodiversity and the local climate.

60 agroforestry systems explored

- Some 85 per cent of the enterprises surveyed manage their land according to organic standards
- Mainly mixed systems, some systems producing marketable timber or fruit
- Size of agroforestry plots: 0.5–40 hectares
- Tree distances within strips: 1–12 metres
- Tree distances between strips: 10–96 metres
- Breadth of tree strips: 0.5–9 metres
- Length of tree strips: 30–740 metres

Agroforestry systems: Inventory analysis and contribution to biodiversity promotion

Website: agroforst-oesterreich.at (German only)

Contact: theresia.markut@fibl.org

Funding: Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Climate and Environmental Protection, Regions and Water Management

Classic agroforestry system in its second year, professionally implemented on difficult soil.

Learning from wild vines
Strategies for hotter times

Climate change is having an impact on viticulture, with heat and drought reducing yields and impairing wine quality. FiBL is researching adaptation strategies in a joint project with partners from Germany, France and Switzerland. FiBL is contributing its expertise rooted in actual practice.

Climate change poses new challenges for viticulture. Heat and drought are putting increasing strain on vines, hampering their development.

Nowadays, new vineyards can increasingly only really be cultivated with artificial irrigation. Older vines are also suffering because during periods of drought it is getting more and more difficult for them to cool themselves by evaporating water through their leaves. This disrupts metabolic processes such as photosynthesis, resulting in damage such as sunburn.

Ultimately, climatic stress factors have a negative impact on wine yield and quality. For example, the alcohol content can be excessively high. The aim of the KliWiReSSE research network is to better equip viticulture in the Upper Rhine region against climate change.

Research aimed at wine quality in times of climate change

A consortium of partner organisations from Germany, France and Switzerland is developing solutions for viticulture. This includes breeding a new generation of climate-resilient grape cultivars. They are also developing a catalogue that visualises the heat and drought resilience traits of common cultivars.

In this multifaceted project, FiBL is providing an insight into practical work. Data is being collected in vineyards on six farms to provide important insights into the climate resilience of existing grapevine cultivars. The metabolic profile of both sensitive and robust cultivars are compared in an effort to identify metabolic adaptations that may help the vine to withstand stress.

Vines under drought stress with limp, yellowish foliage.

Well-hydrated vines with firm, uniformly green foliage.

How efficiently does this grape cultivar photosynthesise? To find out, Manasi Nabar, a PhD student at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, has been taking leaf samples from the FiBL vineyard.

FiBL is also investigating a new biostimulant based on calcium silicate. The aim is to strengthen plants and alleviate symptoms of climatic stress.

Tracking down resilient cultivars

As part of the project, the researchers are also examining the progenitor of our vines: the almost extinct European wild grape. They are comparing these and other grape cultivars at a cellular level using an automated microscopy system, in order to identify those with increased resistance to heat and drought stress.

This makes it possible to identify the genes and metabolites that indicate such resistance. The resilience factors of the wild grapevine can then be bred into the commercial cultivars.

Method for faster breeding

Like many living organisms, grapevines have two copies of each chromosome. However, there are often two different versions of each chromosome. This prolongs the breeding process, since certain traits only tend to appear in subsequent generations.

To speed up the breeding process in the future, the project is developing a double haploidisation method for grapevines. During this process, germ cells that contain only one copy of each chromosome are maintained in a tissue culture. These cells can then be stimulated to double the chromosome set. These can then be used to regenerate a plant with identical chromosome pairs.

Michael Riemann, Dominique Lévite and Hans-Jakob Schärer, FiBL

KliWiReSSE (Climate-resilient grape varieties to secure the yield)

Website: kliwiresse.wine-science.eu

Contact: hans-jakob.schaerer@fibl.org

Funding: Interreg Oberrhein, Cantons of Aargau, Basel-Country, Basel-City and Jura, Swiss Federation

Project partners: Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), Julius Kühn Institute (JKI), Institut de biologie moléculaire des plantes (IBMP), ScreenSYS GmbH

Defying weather extremes
How farms are arming themselves

Farmers are already being strongly affected by climate change. A project in the Swiss canton of Vaud is now helping farms adapt to climate change. FiBL is assisting with the identification of the most effective measures.

Increasingly frequent extreme weather events are causing stress for the farming sector. Farmers in the canton of Vaud in Switzerland are now receiving support from the RISC project to help them adapt their farms to climate risks.

Know, measure, adapt

As a scientific partner in the project, FiBL is assessing the effect of agricultural practices on soils and the environment. The aim is to identify cultivation methods that increase tolerance to climatic impacts.

To this end, the FiBL team measures the soil cultivation intensity, the number of passes, the soil cover and the available nitrogen. These indicators are calculated annually for all 42 participating farms on the basis of their electronic field calendars

Workshops for more climate-fit farms

As part of the project, farmers exchange ideas at workshops organised by the Proconseil advisory service. Together, they review the impact on climate indicators of the farm measures they have implemented.

Over the coming years, the analyses from this project will help identify innovative solutions to climate change. The project, which forms part of the canton of Vaud's climate plan, will address six key topics: the yield stability of arable crops, feed autonomy, erosion control, soil compaction management, diversity of agroecosystems, and farm management.

Alice Dind, FiBL

RISC – Réflexion, Innovation, Soutien, Climat

Website: www.fibl.org/projects > Search > 70051

Contact: raphael.charles@fibl.org

Funding: Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG) Switzerland

Project partners: Mandaterre Sàrl, Proconseil Sàrl, Directorate-General for Agriculture, Viticulture and Veterinary Affairs (DGAV) of the Canton of Vaud, Directorate-General for the Environment (DGE) of the Canton of Vaud, School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL), Agroscope, ETH Zurich

Sharing knowledge for healthy soils and stable yields – despite climate change.

The trials in FiBL's laboratories show that fertilisers made from recycled organic waste can be a substitute for conventional fertilisers.

Greener fertilisers

Climate-friendly nutrients from recycling

The production of mineral nitrogen fertiliser impacts the climate. Fertilisers made from recycled organic waste can be an environmentally friendly alternative. A FiBL project tested fertilisers made from fish processing residues, with promising results.

They are banned in organic agriculture, yet it is difficult to envisage conventional farming without mineral nitrogen fertilisers. Their production is energy-intensive and predominantly relies on fossil fuels. This has harmful climate impacts.

Attempts are increasingly being made to replace mineral fertilisers with recycled fertilisers produced from organic waste. But are these fertilisers suitable, and are they really better for the climate

Waste is refined into fertiliser

As part of the SEA2LAND project, FiBL and its partner organisations tested recycled fertilisers from six pilot sites across Europe. These fertilisers were produced from fish processing waste using a variety of mechanical and biotechnological processes.

In pot experiments, FiBL compared the nutrient uptake and yields of plants fertilised with recycled and mineral fertilisers. The results show that some recycled fertilisers could be an effecti e alternative to conventional fertilisers.

Optimising transport distances

The sustainability assessment of the recycled fertilisers, coordinated by FiBL, revealed areas for further optimisation. Crucial issues regarding the carbon footprint included the drying of waste and transporting raw materials to pilot plants. One possible solution would be to produce the fertilisers closer to the source of the raw materials in future.

The project findings were presented to key decision-makers and industry players at a final event organised by FiBL Europe in Brussels.

Jan Landert, FiBL

SEA2LAND

Website: sea2landproject.eu

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Funding: European Union

Project partners: 27 project partners from 11 countries (10 of them in Europe), coordinated by the Basque research institute NEIKER

Agroforestry with vegetable production

A pathway to income security

The harvesting team at Ferme Les Sapins in the BioDiVerger project.

Organic fruit production is often no more diverse than its conventional counterpart. Designed around a single species or even just a single variety, it contributes little to biodiversity. Since 2013, the BioDiVerger trial project, assisted by FiBL, has been testing a new model: orchards incorporating vegetable production within an agroforestry system that works with low input and high biodiversity.

The BioDiVerger trial area comprises 4,400 square metres of agroforestry and vegetable production, as well as 900 square metres dedicated to permaculture. The trial was established in 2013 by the organic farm Ferme Les Sapins in Morges, on land owned by the canton of Vaud. FiBL analyses the data.

Stable income through diversification

Until 2020, vegetable production in the agroforestry section generated the largest proportion of income, at an average of 77 per cent from 2015 to 2020. After that, fruit production took the lead from 2021 to 2023, accounting for an average of 60 per cent. Losses in fruit production due to alternation, frost or bird damage can be offset by vegetable production.

Profitable after four years

Agroforestry vegetable production has been profitable since 2017. Production and income rose steadily until 2019, after which they stabilised.

Analysis of the data from 2018 to 2023 shows that the agroforestry section met most of its targets, achieving an average of 83 per cent share of dessert quality fruit and a financial return 2.5 per cent higher than the Agridea and FiBL standard for organic dessert apples.

Cultivation in single-species strips facilitated the use of machinery and optimised management and harvesting work. However, working time was reduced by only 2 per cent, in contrast to the targeted 30 per cent reduction.

Less need for organic insecticides

The intra-species diversity of cultivars has also led to better risk distribution, as different plants are susceptible to different diseases and pests. Furthermore, the overall diversity and the significant proportion of land allocated to promoting biodiversity have enabled BioDiVerger to eliminate certain organic insecticides from 2019 onwards.

Flore Araldi, FiBL

BioDiVerger

Website: bioaktuell.ch > Pflanzenbau > Permakultur > Versuchsstandorte (in German, French and Italian)

Contact: flore.araldi@fibl.org

Funding: BioVaud (2023 to date), General Directorate for Agriculture, Viticulture and Veterinary Affairs (DGAV) of the Canton of Vaud (2013 to 2023)

Project partner: fermebiolessapins.ch

< Sown wildflower strips between the rows of fruit trees attract beneficial insects.

> Growing fruit and vegetables in the same plot.

In living labs, innovations are put through their paces in conditions that mirror real-life as closely as possible, with scientific guidance and support.

Converting to agroecology
Researchers coordinate in Europe

The farming sector is facing numerous challenges. Agroecology can help to overcome them. FiBL's Hungarian sister institute, ÖMKi, has established a network to facilitate the transition to agroecology across Europe.

Climate change, loss of biodiversity, and deterioration in soil and water quality – all these are among the numerous challenges faced by the farming sector today. Agroecology is widely recognised internationally as a viable solution to these issues.

However, agroecology is a broad term that can be interpreted in many different ways. It is therefore crucial that organic research takes the lead in the transition to agroecology. This will ensure that the experience, practices and values of organic agriculture form the backbone of a new, sustainable food system.

Europe-wide pilot network

The three-year ALL-Ready project was launched in 2019. It established a European pilot network of living labs and research infrastructures to support the transition to agroecology across Europe. The Hungarian Research Institute of Organic Agriculture ÖMKi is responsible for the establishment and operation of this European pilot network.

Crucial preparations

One of the pilot project's greatest achievements was proving the relevance, added value and feasibility of a European network by coordinating and experimenting with various agroecological living labs and research institutions. This created the foundation for the subsequent European Agroecology Partnership network.

As part of the pilot project, a plan of action was developed, along with regular knowledge exchange events and annual network meetings. Additionally, a multilingual brochure was published in order to raise the profile of the institutions in the network by presenting their key objectives, activities and achievements.

Over the next eight years, agroecology is set to flourish in the Europe-wide Agroecology Partnership.

Managing the network

The ALL-Ready project concluded in October 2023. Following this, ÖMKi was able to seamlessly continue its work in the Agroecology Partnership. This partnership is a major eight-year EU initiative that commenced in January 2024. It aims to address the challenges facing the European farming sector by making farming systems more resilient, productive, economical, location-sensitive, climate-friendly, environmentally sound, ecosystem-friendly and people-friendly by 2050.

This continuation of the role of coordinator not only recognises ÖMKi's achievements in the ALL-Ready project, but also emphasises the leading role of organic agriculture in the transition to a sustainable farming sector. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of organic research as a basis for the further development of agroecology in Europe. FiBL Europe and FiBL Switze - land are further participants in the Agroecology Partnership beside ÖMKi .

Petra Almási, ÖMKi

ALL-Ready – The European Agroecology Living Lab and Research Infrastructure Network: Preparation phase

Website: all-ready-project.eu

Contact: dora.drexler@biokutatas.hu

Funding: EU Programme Horizon 2020

Project partners: 13 partner institutions in 9 countries

The term agroecology is not legally protected. However, organic farming has a solid basis in its clearly defined and legally protected principles.

Globally unique DOK trial

Long-term data show what organics can do

The DOK trial, conducted by FiBL and the state research organisation Agroscope, deserves an entry in the Guinness Book of Records. It is the world's longest-running trial to scientifically compare cultivation systems in the field. Recently, data from the last 45 years have been analysed and published. The results show that organic farming promotes soil fertility and helps conserve biodiversity.

Since 1978, the DOK trial has been comparing biodynamic (D), organic (O) and conventional (K) cropping systems, with a group of conventional and organic farmers providing guidance and assistance. Data from the trial show that organic agriculture provides a solid foundation for advancing sustainable farming systems that give equal consideration to food production and environmental impact.

Beneficial for soil fertility

In the organic plots of the DOK trial, the humus content was 16 per cent higher, while the activity of soil organisms was up to 83 per cent higher. These factors have a positive effect on soil structure, helping to store water and reduce losses that would otherwise be caused by erosion.

Livestock manure is crucial for good soil fertility. When applied to the field in appropriate quantities, it stabilises or increases the humus content. The biodynamic system, characterised by composted manure and special preparations, produced the best results in terms of soil fertility, the formation of humus and climate performance.

Efficiently produced yields

The data clearly demonstrate the importance of robust cultivars for increasing yields. They also demonstrate the efficiency of organic systems. On average, such systems produce 85 per cent of conventional yields without any use of chemically synthesised pesticides or artificial fertilisers.

Nitrogen is one of the most important plant nutrients, but it is also one of the environmentally most critical substances, as surpluses can end up in groundwater or be released into the atmosphere as greenhouse gases.

Franziska Hämmerli, FiBL

DOK trial

Website: fibl.org/dok (German & French only)

Contact: hans-martin.krause@fibl.org

Funding: Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG)

Project partners: Agroscope, University of Basel, ETH Zurich

Information material

Dossier: "The DOK Trial: A 45-year comparative study of organic and conventional cropping systems ", available at shop.fibl.org > Search > 1741

Fact sheet: "Organic farming in comparison – Results from 45 years of the DOK trial", available at shop.fibl.org > Search > 1787

Powerpoint presentation: "The DOK Trial – 42 years of organic and conventional cropping systems", available at shop.fibl.org > Search > 1783

< The DOK trial in Therwil, Switzerland, serves as a model for similar comparative trials worldwide.

Paul Mäder and the DOK trial

Paul Mäder led the DOK trial from 1987 to 2023, guiding it to success. According to ScholarGPS, the FiBL researcher was in the top 0.05 per cent of scientists in 2024. A particular highlight of his career was the publication of a DOK study in the high-ranking research journal Science in 2002. This study has since been cited more than 4,000 times, marking a milestone that elevated the credibility of organic agriculture beyond its research niche. Having retired in 2024, Paul Mäder handed over management of the DOK trial to a new generation: FiBL scientist Hans-Martin Krause is now in charge.

Boosting organic arable yields
On-farm research with spelt varieties

Progress in the farming sector is made when theory meets practice. For instance, FiBL is running field trials with new spelt varieties together with breeders and farmers. New cultivars are tested over several years. How do they perform in the field under changing climatic conditions? Increased yields are just one of many criteria.

Close cooperation between scientists and farming practitioners is nothing new at FiBL Switzerland. Around 200 trials are carried out on commercial farms every year in collaboration with farmers to test innovative approaches under real-life conditions.

Searching for robust spelt varieties

A current example of this type of on-farm research involves testing new spelt varieties. While traditional cultivars such as Oberkulmer and Ostro have been proven suitable for organic cultivation, they are susceptible to diseases and have low yields. Higher-performing, disease-resistant new varieties are therefore in demand.

In 2022, FiBL and the cereal breeder Getreidezüchtung Peter Kunz (GZPK) launched a project to cultivate and market new spelt varieties in collaboration with the Richemont Centre of Excellence. In addition to the existing Ostro and Oberkulmer varieties, five new spelt varieties bred by GZPK and one cultivar from Agroscope were tested on five commercial farms. The spelt cultivars were grown in large strips using standard cultivation methods, and their characteristics were evaluated.

Testing all the way to the bakery

The new spelt varieties proved their resilience under very different weather conditions and impressed with their agronomic and qualitative characteristics.

While the highest yields were produced in 2022 at 4.5 tonnes per hectare, yields in 2024 – the weakest trial year – were significantly lower at 3.2 tonnes per hectare. Over three years, the Gletscher, Polkura and Edelweisser cultivars performed best.

New cultivars such as Copper, Gletscher and Edelweisser have also proven their lodging resistance. Their stems lodged less frequently than those of conventional cultivars. Furthermore, Gletscher, Polkura and Edelweisser have demonstrated exceptional resistance to wheat yellow rust and wheat leaf rust.

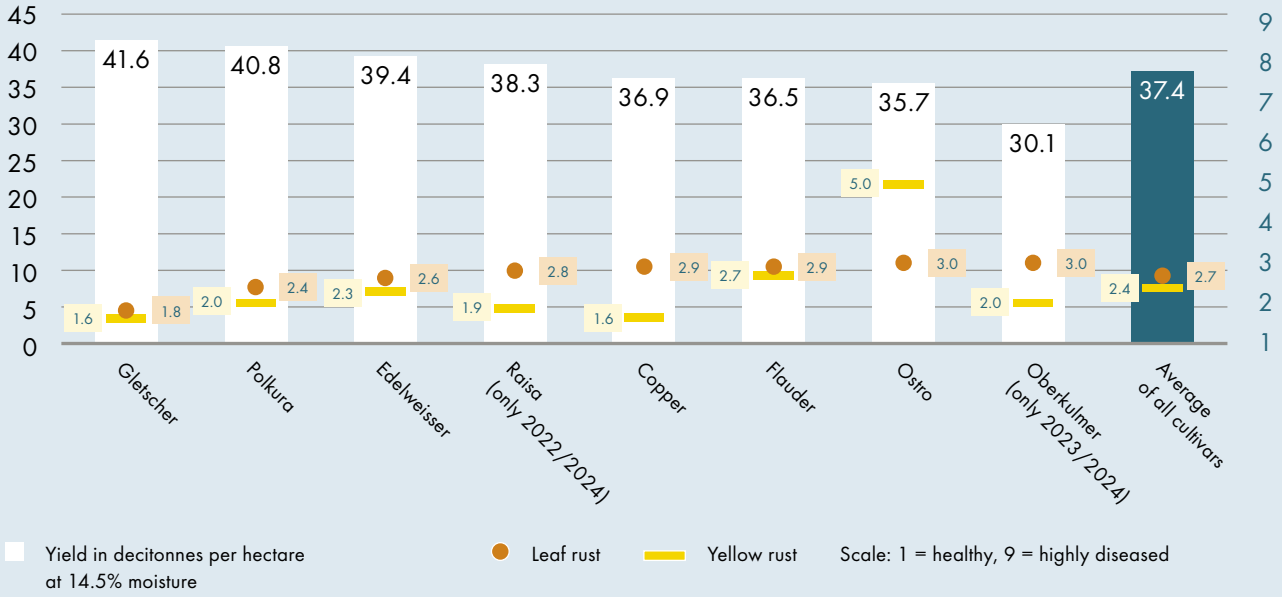
The initial results of the baking tests are as follows: Copper, Polkura and Gletscher achieved a high flour yield. Edelweisser and Copper produced above-average dough yields, whereas Polkura produced a lower dough volume and yield than Ostro.

The project provided valuable experience for the cultivation of the new spelt varieties. From an agronomic

Trial site with different spelt variety strips on a commercial farm that is a partner in FiBL on-farm research.

Spelt varieties: yield and disease infestation

FiBL field trials, average values for the years 2022, 2023 and 2024



point of view, the Gletscher, Edelweisser, Copper and Polkura varieties are particularly recommended for cultivation, depending on the location.

Tobias Gelencsér and Katrin Carrel, FiBL

Cultivation and promotion of new spelt varieties

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > 10153 (German only)

Contact: katrin.carrel@fibl.org

Funding: Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG), cantons of Aargau, Thurgau and Zurich, IG Dinkel

Project partners: Getreidezüchtung Peter Kunz (gzpk), Richemont Centre of Excellence for Bakery and Confectionery, commercial farms, cantons of Aargau, Thurgau and Zurich, IG Dinkel

The spelt variety Copper shortly before harvest in the trial plot.

Wheat yellow rust and wheat leaf rust on spelt plants.

More domestically produced broccoli
Coping with pathogens and climate

On average, every person in Switzerland eats around two kilos of broccoli per year, and this figure is increasing. Two thirds of this demand is met from abroad. Broccoli could be cultivated in this country too, but pathogens and the climate present challenges. Two research projects led by FiBL are providing initial findings to help ensure more secure yields.

Summer heat, humid autumn days, bacterial soft rot and new pests are causing major problems for broccoli crops in Switzerland. In organic farming in particular, the means of control are limited and often present new disadvantages. For instance, while nets can deter flea beetles, they can also promote rotting in damp conditions. Consequently, despite growing demand, organic broccoli has become a high-risk crop.

Two projects for greater yield security

Two projects are underway at FiBL to improve yield security. The first involves testing various cultivars for their tolerance to soft rot on commercial farms, such as Gerber Bio Greens in Fehraltorf, Canton Zurich. The second project builds on this by testing cultivars with higher tolerance to heat in summer and bacterial soft rot in autumn. The Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG) is funding one project in full and sharing in the costs of the other.

Fungal diseases and climate change pose risks to nutrient-rich broccoli.

It is essential that the tests are repeated over several years. What works one year may fail the next. The fungal and bacterial diseases that result in soft rot vary greatly, as do weather conditions. Initial observations show that classic, cell fusion-free cultivars such as Lucky and Batavia produce comparatively stable results. However, the low head weight of these cultivars can make sales more challenging. Following the trials, a bentonite-based product has been approved for controlling fle beetles in broccoli and other cabbage varieties, and is now available for practical use.

Breeding for the future

A number of seed companies, such as Sativa Rheinau, are currently breeding new tolerant cultivars and testing them in FiBL trials. While there are initial glimmers of hope, the results are not yet market-ready. In collaboration with the Swiss Plant Breeding Centre (SPBC), the goal is to develop cultivars that will consistently produce stable yields in the long term. In the meantime, FiBL projects are providing producers with practical recommendations to help increase the amount of domestic broccoli consumed in Switzerland.

Jeremias Lütold, FiBL

Ensuring domestic broccoli production with new and climate-resilient varieties to reduce the use of pesticides

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > 25157

Contact: pascal.herren@fibl.org

Funding: Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG)

Project partners: Commercial farms

Optimising supply of organic broccoli

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > 25097 and 35270

Contact: pascal.herren@fibl.org

Funding: Coop Sustainability Fund, Bio Suisse, Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG)

Project partners: Commercial farms

Researchers Roxane Muller and Fabian Baumgartner are investigating how beneficial insects and pests develop on the site.

Doubling the yield with solar modules

Protecting crops and generating electricity

Although solar panels in the farming sector are controversial, they combine two elements essential to our future: food production and renewable energy. FiBL is testing the concept in three pilot facilities. The first was opened in 2024. As part of the AgriSolar Research project, FiBL is investigating whether it is possible to generate electricity with the same or higher harvest volumes, among many other questions.

In October 2024, FiBL put the first of three pilot systems into operation at its orchard in Frick. The approximately 600 square metres of solar panels offer a patent solution to the energy shortage. They are expected to produce around 50 megawatt-hours of electricity per year. For comparison, an agricultural holding typically needs roughly 20 megawatt-hours per year.

Yield, aesthetics, species diversity – all things considered

The AgriSolar research project aims to answer questions within a holistic framework: How do the panels affect the crops? Which crops are best suited to this type of use? What about the financial return, system acceptance, and the impact on landscape scenic qualities and biodiversity?

The solar system supplies electricity and provides shade, as well as offering the opportunity to collect rainwater. A water retention basin is planned that can be used for irrigation during heatwaves. Given climate change, research into such additional uses is of particular interest.

How much partial shade can apples tolerate?

The semi-transparent panels ensure that the apple trees always receive sufficient light. During the 25-year project period, FiBL will investigate whether the panels nevertheless affect the quantity and quality of the harvest.

The research will ultimately focus on the question of what added value the technology brings to the farming sector. Such systems can only be authorised in Switze - land if they offer agronomic ad antages.

Beat Grossrieder, FiBL

AgriSolar research

Website: agrisolarforschung.ch (German only)

Contact: stefan.baumann@fibl.org

Funding: Canton of Aargau, Leopold Bachmann Foundation

Project partners: Canton of Aargau, Liebegg Agricultural Centre

Podcast: "Mehrfach ernten – Solaranlagen in der Landwirtschaft" (German only). You can find it at popular podcast providers or at fibl.org/podcast > FiBL Focus > Suche > Mehrfach ernten


WORKER

Living as in the wild
Research into the behaviour of pigs

What is life like for pigs when they are allowed to simply be pigs? FiBL observed a herd of domestic pigs in a spacious enclosure containing woodland and pasture land for three years. The aim was to learn more about the animals' natural behaviour, with the intention of using this knowledge to further develop species-appropriate organic pig farming.

A mixed group of domestic pigs, including sows, a boar and at times piglets and fatt ners, lives in the outdoor enclosure under semi-natural conditions. FiBL is investigating the natural behaviour of pigs to gain insights for species-appropriate husbandry systems. Direct observations and video recordings are being evaluated. The aim is to better understand the species-specific needs of pigs – only by knowing what pigs need can one design ethologically sound husbandry systems.

Pigs need enrichment

The observations have already yielded some exciting results. For example, the pigs' foraging behaviour remains constant, even when they are already full. They continue to root in the ground, graze and chew on branches, regardless of how much feed they have received. In farming practice, this means that roughage and enrichment materials should always be available. The use of wallows, mother-child relationships, and the social behaviour of uncastrated boars were also investigated.

When given the opportunity, piglets suckle their mother until they are fifteen weeks old.

< FiBL researcher Maxime Garcia explains how pigs are observed in the woodland and on pasture.

Rooting is a fundamental need for pigs. Researchers have found that they engage in this behaviour regardless of whether they are satiated or not.

Observing pigs – sharing knowledge

To raise public awareness of pigs and their needs, videos recorded in the enclosure were assessed using a citizen science approach. This allowed interested individuals to study the pigs' behaviour based on short video clips. Furthermore, an educational film is being produced to show and explain pig behaviour.

The Lucerne Museum has also developed teaching materials and a pig-experience quiz for school groups, giving children the opportunity to learn more about this lesser-known farm animal during a visit to the outdoor enclosure.

Mirjam Holinger, FiBL

SchweinErleben (pig experience)

Website: schweinerleben.ch (German only)

Contact: barbara.frueh@fibl.org

Funding: Albert Koechlin Foundation, Edith Maryon Foundation, Four Paws

Project partners: Panoramahof Meggen, Lucerne Museum

Prodcast: "SchweinErleben – Vom Ferkel bis zum letzten Grunzen" (German only). You can find it at popular podcast providers or at fibl.org/podcast > FiBL Focus > Suche > SchweinErleben

A turnaround in goat farming?
Producing milk without offspring

What should be done with all the kids produced on goat dairy farms? The market for goat meat is small and certified organic fattening farms are rare. Therefore, many dairy goat farmers are looking for alternatives. FiBL is testing an innovative solution: dairy farming without pregnancy.

There is high demand for goat milk, but there are few sales channels for goat meat. This situation calls for ways to produce fewer goat kids while maintaining the same milk yield. One option is extended lactation, whereby goats are milked continuously without a pregnancy break. This reduces the stress caused by successive pregnancies and prevents infertile goats from being culled prematurely. However, it eliminates the dry period during which udder tissue can regenerate.

An unexpected discovery is now opening up new possibilities. It combines rest periods with milk production – without pregnancies.

Stimulation of the teats can stimulate lactation even if the goat is not pregnant.

The phenomenon of spontaneous lactation

Some farmers observed that certain dry, non-pregnant goats had spontaneously started producing milk, seemingly in response to the lactation of their fellow females. This phenomenon, known as induced lactation, is the focus of a research project by FiBL France. As part of the Gentle Dairy project, FiBL researchers are investigating the factors that influence milk pro-

A thermal camera provides information about the start of lactation.

When working with curious animals, sometimes there is a role reversal: here, a goat examines the research equipment used by FiBL scientist Rosalie Planteau du Maroussem.

duction. Goat farmers involved in the project stimulated the teats of non-lactating goats using milking movements, but no hormonal treatment. After three weeks, induced lactation was observed in 43 out of 85 goats. The temperature of the teats and the first obtained milk appear to indicate the onset of lactation.

Lactation started slowly, with yields of less than 100 millilitres per day. However, some goats increased their yield to more than four litres per day, which is a promising result. Factors such as breed, productivity and number of previous pregnancies appeared to have no influence. There was also no direct correlation with prolactin levels, despite prolactin being a key hormone in milk production. Good physical condition and outdoor access seem to be more important. The observations also showed that the stimulation method did not negatively affect the animals' ell-being.

FiBL project manager Ruggero Menci also gets closely inspected.

Continuing research and sharing knowledge

Further data will be analysed in the coming months to identify goats susceptible to induced lactation at an early stage. An exchange involving farmers from France, Switzerland and Austria is also planned.

The Gentle Dairy project could pave the way for more ethologically sound and efficien production of goat milk.

Ruggero Menci, Rosalie Planteau du Maroussem, Florence Arsonneau and Caroline Constancis, FiBL

Gentle Dairy

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > 23005

Contact: ruggero.menci@fibl.org

Funding: Four Paws

Project partners: Ferme expérimentale du Pradel, Institut de l' Élevage, Institut Agro Rennes-Angers, UMR SELMET (CIRAD, INRAE, Institut Agro Montpellier)

The final journey
How animals can die with less stress

With on-farm slaughter, animals have significantly lower levels of stress hormones in their blood. The photo shows the use of a captive bolt.

On-farm slaughter saves livestock from being transported to the abattoir. A FiBL project is investigating the impact of on-farm slaughter on animal welfare, meat quality and stress levels.

Our farm animals' final journey is often associated with considerable stress, including loading, transport and unfamiliar surroundings, such as the narrow corridors of the abattoir. A more animal-friendly alternative is on-farm and field slaughter, which has been permitted in Switzerland since 2020.

FiBL and Agroscope are investigating how on-farm slaughter of cattle affects behaviour, stress markers in the blood and meat quality.

Significantly lower levels of stress hormones

In this project, half of the cattle from five farms are slaughtered on the farm, while the other half is slaughtered in an abattoir. An earlier pilot study showed that stress levels were significantly higher during abattoir slaughter, as measured by stress hormones in the blood and the animals' behaviour. The ongoing study covers around 40 animals and also provides data on meat quality. Projects are also underway focusing on the on-farm slaughter of pigs and small ruminants, as well as mobile poultry slaughter.

The FiBL on-farm slaughter network (Netzwerk Hoftötung) also offers Swiss farmers a platform for sharing experience and seeking advice on on-farm and field slaughter. As part of the initiative, training videos have been produced, featuring farm managers demonstrating how they carry out on-farm slaughter.

Milena Burri and Anet Spengler Neff, FiBL

Low stress slaughter

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > 50013

Contact: milena.burri@fibl.org, anet.spengler@fibl.org

Funding: Edith Maryon Foundation, Vontobel Foundation, Eva Husi Foundation for Animal Welfare

Project partners: Acroscope, Dietisberg Wohnen & Werken, Ferme Farm Fresh, Hof uf dr Höh/Bucheggberger Hereford, Hof ufem Port, Gut Rheinau estate

Technical guide: "Hof- und Weidetötung zur Fleischgewinnung", available at shop.fibl.org > Suche > 1094 (German and French only)

Networking and advice on on-farm slaughter

Website: bioaktuell.ch > Tierhaltung > Schlachtung > Netzwerk Hoftötung (German and French only)

Contact: verena.buehl@fibl.org, milena.burri@fibl.org

Funding: Haldimann Foundation

Podcast: "Hoftötung – Eine Landwirtin erzählt" (German only). You can find the podcast at popular podcast providers or at fibl.org/podcast > FiBL Focus > Suche > Hoftötung

Videos: bioaktuell.ch > Tierhaltung > Schlachtung > Filme zur Hof- und Weidetötung (English subtitles available)

Practitioners exchange experience in the on-farm slaughter network.

Letting male chicks live
Ethical changes in poultry farming

Male chicks from layer breeds are often killed immediately after hatching. From 2026, this practice will be prohibited in Swiss organic production. A FiBL project demonstrates that this ethically driven change can be reconciled with economic efficiency and resource conservation.

Male chicks from layer breeds hardly put on any meat, so they are killed immediately after hatching. However, this practice will soon come to an end. From 2026 onwards, Bio Suisse will prohibit both the killing of male chicks and in-ovo sex determination. In future, all male chicks from laying hens will be raised.

There are two approaches to this issue: either the male chicks from layer lines are reared as "brother roosters", or production is switched to dual-purpose lines that lay eggs and are also suitable for meat production. A FiBL project is investigating both options.

Animal welfare under scrutiny

In the first stage of the project, the FiBL team analysed the rearing of brother roosters and dual-purpose roosters on 28 organic farms. The survey revealed a wide variety of feeding and housing systems. Regardless of the system used, the animals were in excellent health. As expected, the fastest growth was seen in animals from conventional broiler lines, followed by dual-purpose roosters and then the slower-growing brother roosters. The latter developed more efficiently when fed energy- and protein-rich feed. The picture was also clear for laying hens: animal welfare was high across all genotypes. However, specialised laying hens achieved significantly higher laying performance than dual-purpose hens.

Economic efficiency and resource conservation

The data obtained is now being used in model calculations to assess the economic and ecological efficiency of various scenarios. A key consideration here is the extension of the laying hens' productive lifespan.

Veronika Maurer, FiBL

Abandoning male chick-killing in Swiss organic egg production

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > 50153

Contact: veronika.maurer@fibl.org, claire.bonnefous@fibl.org, zivile.amsler@fibl.org

Funding: Migros, Coop, Bio Suisse

Podcast: "Der Ausstieg aus dem Kükentöten – kein Sonntagsspaziergang" (German only). You can find it at popular podcast providers or at fibl.org/podcast > FiBL Focus > Suche > Kükentöten

Brother roosters grow slowly and require feeds rich in energy and protein.

Sustainable livestock farming
Radical ideas as conceptual models

No form of livestock farming can be carried out without conflicting objectives. Sustainability in the food system calls for a balance of societally acceptable compromises. As part of the Horizon Europe Pathways project, FiBL is investigating a variety of options by analysing extreme scenarios and highlighting conflicting objectives.

The analysis is based on the SOLm modelling tool, which was developed and optimised specifically for this project. The model allows for conclusions to be drawn about nutrient flows and the productivity of various systems under different production conditions, including regional factors such as feeding regimes and sales.

The scenarios were developed by a broad-based consortium of project partners reflecting relevant areas of interest.

How livestock husbandry could develop

As a result of this process, four scenarios were drafted and defined:

- "Feed no Food": Livestock are only fed with feed that does not compete with human nutrition, such as grass or by-products of food processing.
- "Efficiency First": Maximum efficiency through highly productive stable housing management with minimal use of resources.
- "Rural Renaissance": Strengthening regional value creation with more freedom of choice for farmers.
- "High Animal Welfare": Implementation of the highest animal welfare standards, for example with calves being reared by their dams.

Keeping only as many ruminants as can be fed on your own grassland – a possible pathway to greater sustainability in livestock husbandry

Initial findings, further discussions required

Complete results are currently only available for the "Feed no Food" scenario. One important finding is that fewer cattle would need to be kept overall, based on the available grass resources.

However, this does not necessarily mean a reduction in the amount of animal protein available for human consumption. In France, for example, increased milk production could offset a reduction in meat production, thereby ensuring a stable protein supply.

The modelling findings will provide a factual basis for discussion among interest groups. Solutions lying between the extremes are being sought.

Catherine Pfeifer, FiBL

Pathways for transitions to sustainability in livestock husbandry and food systems

Website: pathways-project.com

Contact: catherine.pfeifer@fibl.org

Funding: EU Horizon 2020 programme

Project partners: 28 partners from different European countries

The Rumiwatch halter provides data on feeding, rumination, and resting times.

Male calves out to pasture

Fattening on pasture as an innovative approach

The challenge of appropriately raising male calves from organic dairy herds and successfully marketing them remains unresolved on most farms. As part of the Re-Livestock project funded by the Horizon Europe programme, FiBL is investigating the potential of pasture-based veal production.

What should be done with male calves from dairy breeds? Fattening them on pasture and using them for veal production would be an interesting option that promises high animal welfare. But how sustainable and economical is this option? A current FiBL project is investigating this question.

The project compared three genotypes (Brown Swiss, Swiss Fleckvieh and a Limousin × Brown Swiss cross) at four locations: one fully housed system and three primarily pasture-based systems at different altitudes with varying degrees of pasture use.

Slow growth, but good immunity

A key finding was that Swiss Fleckvieh calves performed best in terms of both growth and meat tenderness. As expected, pasture-based fattening resulted in lower daily weight gains than fully housed feeding. Conversely, pasture-fed calves of all three genotypes exhibited stronger immune systems and, at higher altitudes, better overall blood panels.

Potential for optimisation

The genotype had no influence on the potential for methane formation and, consequently, on the climate impact. However, location did have an influence. In this respect, housed feeding and intensive forage production proved advantageous. At the same time, however, the utilisation of extensively managed grassland competes less with arable farming.

Conflicting objectives remain between production, sustainability and animal welfare. However, the right combination of location and genotype can mitigate these conflicts

Florian Leiber, FiBL

Re-Livestock – Facilitating Innovations for Resilient Livestock Farming Systems

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > 35228

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Funding: EU Horizon 2020 programme, Fondation Sur-la-Croix

Project partner: AgroVet-Strickhof

Pesticide use in the EU
Better risk appraisal

Synthetic plant protectants are employed worldwide. Yet their ingredients have potentially harmful effects upon human health and environmental quality. FiBL researchers working on the EU-funded SPRINT project have explored strategies for reducing pesticide applications in farming.

The SPRINT project generated factsheets on ways to reduce pesticide use – for apples among other crops.

To identify alternative ways to combat pests and diseases, farm-level information on pesticide applications and agronomic management practices is vital. To meet this information need, data on cultivation methods, management practices and plant protection across a range of crops were collected in 2021 from ten European countries and Argentina.

The data cover over 1,700 applications of plant protectants that contain more than 170 active ingredients in organic, integrated and conventional systems.

Major fluctuations in applications

The study reveals substantial differences in patterns of application (herbicide, fungicide and pesticide timing and types) and in dosages. In some cases the recommended dosages are exceeded up to twenty-fold.

Pesticide use varies greatly among farms, whether or not within one and the same region – with harvest quantities remaining equal. This shows clearly that there is potential for reduction.

< Pesticides, also termed plant protectants, are applied by hand or by tractor, and also by helicopters and aircraft.

Foundations for solutions

The data also show that preventive practices such as crop rotation, tolerant varieties and digital tools reduced plant protectant use.

The findings have been processed for practitioners in factsheet form. The factsheets are available online in English and in the respective national language. The project has resulted in a detailled and robust overview of the current state of the art in regard to pesticide uses and applications. This provides a basis for consultancy work, policy-making the transition to more sustainable plant protection strategies in Europe.

Jennifer Mark, FiBL

Sustainable Plant Protection Transition (SPRINT)

Website: sprint-h2020.eu

Contact: jennifer.mark@fibl.org

Funding: EU Horizon 2020

Project partners: 28 partners from different European countries

Large amounts of fungicide are commonly used to control downy mildew in grape cultivation.

Tracking mobility

Tyre wear particles in soil jeopardise crops

Samples taken along roads ...

Tyre abrasion is deposited not only on the road, but also in adjoining soils. A new study by FiBL shows: Even along rural roads with relatively little traffic microplastics accumulate in worrying quantities – with consequences for plants and soils.

About one kilogram of microplastics is generated per person and year in Switzerland due to tyre abrasion. This material enters the soil via rain, wind, splash and spray.

Very few studies up to now have quantified microplastics in soil samples. A team of researchers at FiBL and Bern University decided to fill the gap, and took systematic soil samples along fifteen roads in the canton of Solothurn for a study. Analysis of the samples revealed levels of up to 11,000 particles per kilogram soil directly at the road verge. Ten metres away, 30,000 particles were still present.

Definite impact on plants

Beside particle numbers as such, it is the levels of pollutants such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and heavy metals such as zinc that give particular cause for concern. Laboratory tests prove that high concentrations of tyre wear particles impair the growth of plants such as salad and leek and also reduce microbial activity in the soil, with potential impacts on fertility.

A surprising fin ing is that small quantities of microplastics can promote plant growth – possibly due to a fertilisation effect by trace elements such as zinc

Remedies are available

This research leaves no doubt that tyre abrasion is an underestimated environmental hazard and remedial action is needed. Approaches such as improved road surfacings, novel material compositions, optimised tyre production processes and high-performance drainage systems – such as are already used along some motorways – have the potential to reduce impacts substantially.

Franziska Hämmerli, FiBL

Microplastics from road traffic in soil

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > 10182

Contact: dominika.kundel@fibl.org

Funding: Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG), EU Horizon 2020 programme

Project partner: Institute of Geography, Bern University

Podcast: "Abgefahren – Mikroplastik vom Autoreifen auf dem Acker" (German only). You can find it at popular podcast providers or at fibl.org/podcast > FiBL Focus > Suche > Abgefahren

Video: "Microplastics in agriculture: Effects of tyre abrasion on soil and plants ", available at FiBLFilm on YouTube (with English subtitles).

... reveal the quantities of microplastics in the soil.

Diets count

Social and ecological impacts of dietary habits

Our dietary patterns have a multitude of impacts on the environment, our societies, our farm animals and, not least, our personal health. FiBL is exploring the ramifications in the FEAST project.

It is well known that a transformation of food systems will not be possible without substantial changes in our dietary habits. However, there has been little research up to now on the question of how dietary patterns can be optimised in such a way that social aspects and animal welfare are taken into account in addition to environmental and health aspects.

Small steps, large effects

Which small – and thus realistic – changes in consumer behaviour can generate large societal benefits? How can goal conflicts among the aspects be minimised? Which roles do food processing and animal welfare play in the target system? And how can the costs of sustainable and healthy nutrition be kept as low as possible?

In the FEAST project, the FiBL team is developing a new model for the comprehensive assessment of foods and dietary patterns with regard to the above factors. Building upon the latest life-cycle inventory data, environmental impacts are captured fully. In addition, the team is analysing questions of nutrient supply and health risks to consumers. In the same vein, social impacts and the costs of food consumptions are studied and integrated into the comprehensive asssessment.

Focus on animal welfare and processing

Two doctoral theses are spotlighting specific issues. They are creating novel assessment options for animal welfare and for the health impacts of food processing procedures. These two factors are captured insufficiently in the commonly applied nutrition models and represent an important extension of the system boundaries of every assessment.

Christian Schader, Anita Frehner, Zaray Rojas and Sebastian Richter, FiBL

Food systems that support transitions to healthy and sustainable diets (FEAST)

Website: feast2030.eu

Contact: christian.schader@fibl.org

Funding: Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), EU Horizon 2020 programme

Project partners: Institut national de recherche pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et l'environnement (INRAE), Heidelberg University, Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD) and others

Scientists drawn from diverse disciplines are joining forces in the FEAST project to study the parameters governing dietary patterns that are healthy, ensure high levels of animal welfare and are socially responsible.

Focus on Africa

Healthy local nutrition is organic

FiBL contributes its expertise worldwide, particularly in Africa. Acting in tandem with local partner organisations, FiBL devotes its down-to-earth research and development work to combatting poverty, boosting the resilience of food systems and fostering sustainability in rural areas.

In 2023 and 2024, 29 research and consultancy projects in Africa were either headed by or involved FiBL Switzerland's Department of International Cooperation. We present four examples.

Nearing 20 years of data from the tropics

Within the **SysCom** project FiBL has been operating long-term field trials – similar to the DOK trial in Switzerland (see pages 32 and 33) – in three tropical countries since 2007. In Kenya, Bolivia and India FiBL is comparing traditional, conventional and organic cropping systems.

The results show that under organic management yields can equal those of conventional cropping systems. They vary depending on crop type and site conditions. The key factors for maintaining stable yields at levels comparable to those of conventional methods include systematic approaches with site-appropriate varieties, crop rotations, push-pull methods and functional biodiversity.

The long-term trials show that organic farming – if optimised and systemically well adjusted – is also economically beneficial. The findings of the SysCom trials can prove three major propositions: Agroecology and organic farming in the tropics

- can feed a growing population;
- are profitable and affordable;
- can be expanded and disseminated.

In order that smallholders can position themselves on local markets with organic produce, FiBL is assisting the development of a participatory approach for organic certification.

For resilient smallholder farming: Through the SustainSahel project, a tree nursery is being established in Mali.

Healthy diets thanks to traditional varieties

The **CROPS4HD** project in Tanzania, Niger, Chad and India combines biodiversity with food security. The rediscovery of traditional crop seeds promotes sustainable, diversified cropping while also boosting demand for these long-neglected crops.

Working together with Swissaid and local partners, FiBL's researchers are assisting the cultivation of Bambara groundnut, African eggplant, various African cabbage varieties and amaranth. All of these are rich in nturients and promise good yields.

Robust shrubs for animal fodder

The **SustainSahel** project combines arable farming, livestock husbandry and shrub integration. The goal is to make smallholder farming more productive and resilient. Agroecological methods such as mulching or reduced tillage enhance soil quality and boost yields. A particular focus is placed on identifying drought-resistant shrubs that can serve as livestock fodder in order to increase resilience to climate change.

FiBL and seventen partner institutions collaborate closely in the project with local researchers and farmer communities in Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal. SustainSahel advances the participation of women in management roles and utilises innovation platforms to disseminate sustainable practices.

Credible labels for local markets

In the **AOMD** (Acceleration of Organic Market Development) project, FiBL advises the national organic associations and helps to tap the great wealth of experience that has been gathered in European markets by transferring it in appropriate form to Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda.

The organic and agroecology labels of Kilimohai in East Africa create confidence in local value chains, both on the producer and consumer side. Participatory guarantee systems are a special feature. They make it possible for smallholders to organise in groups together with consumers and to participate in the organic market.

Markus Arbenz, FiBL

SysCom – Farming Systems Comparison in the Tropics

Website: systems-comparison.fibl.org

Contact: marc.cotter@fibl.org, seraina.schudel@fibl.org

Funding: Biovision, Coop Sustainability Fund, Liechtenstein Development Service (LED), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

CROPS4HD – Promoting resilient and underutilised crop species

Website: crops4hd.org

Contact: amritbir.riar@fibl.org

Funding: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Liechtenstein Development Service (LED)

SustainSahel – Promoting smallholder farming

Website: sustainsahel.net

Contact: harun.cicek@fibl.org

Funding: EU Horizon 2020 programme

AOMD – Acceleration of Organic Market Development

Website: fibl.org/projects > Search > 65239

Contact: markus.arbenz@fibl.org

Funding: Leopold Bachmann Foundation (LBS)


Wie werden Netzwerke aufgebaut und am Leben gehalten?
Welche Themen werden in Netzwerken behandelt?
Planung
Koordination
Nutzen / Rolle für Landwirte
Netzwerken darf Spaß machen
Klare Info am Anfang, was erwartet wird
Begeglung auf Augenhöhe
fach! Angebot
Kurze, einfache Kommunikationswege
Förderung von Wissen
Jedes Thema mit richtiger Gruppe
Pflanzenbau
Austausch

Science conference in FiBL's hands

Platform for organic research

The Wissenschaftstagung Ökologischer Landbau (WiTa, scientific conference on organic farming) has become one of the most important platforms for knowledge exchange between researchers, advisers and research-oriented practitioners. In 2023 and 2024, FiBL was responsible for planning the conference content, significantly furthering the event in the process.

The WiTa scientific conference on organic farming is an integral part of organic farming research. It took place for the first time in 1991. FiBL organised it in 2023 and 2024.

More than 500 participants

"We are delighted to be able to play an active role in shaping this important research platform", says Rebecca Franz-Wippermann, Managing Director of FiBL Germany. "WiTa promotes exchange between classical scientific research and practical research, and establishes connectivity between organic sector stakeholders. It also offers young people an entry point into the world of scientific networking and thrives on intergenerational exchange."

WiTa 2023, hosted by FiBL Switzerlan , and WiTa 2024, organised by FiBL Germany, were both very well received. With the slogan "Agriculture and food – transformation only makes sense together", the 17th WiTa at Justus Liebig University Giessen in 2024 was fully booked within days of registration opening.

A total of 520 participants from research and scientific institutions, consultancies, government agencies and other specialist areas seized this opportunity for further education and networking.

Linking up research and practice

Various universities and research institutions are involved as co-organisers. FiBL has made a significant contribution in recent years by gathering experience and creating structures that will further improve the quality of the event.

Platform meets a need

The University of Bonn will host WiTa 2026. While discussions are ongoing as to the conference's long-term development, one thing is certain: the demand for a robust platform for scientific exchange in organic farming remains as strong as ever.

Ursula Röder-Dreher and Hella Hansen, FiBL

< Building and developing networks: Rebecca Franz-Wippermann reports on experience from the Fokus Tierwohl (focus on animal welfare) network.

Lively exchanges during the breaks.

Two worlds, one goal

Organic and conventional: growing in tandem

FiBL has many contacts and a wealth of experience in creating, maintaining and developing networks. This is also evident in its three projects involving cooperation between conventional and organic farms.

"I've met lots of interesting, innovation-minded people" says Rico Platzdasch, an organic farmer from Hesse. Anna Kohne, who farms 800 hectares of arable land conventionally and keeps a herd of organic suckler cows in Thuringia, also benefits. "The network helps me to stay open-minded."

Creating spaces for exchange

They are both examples of the hundred farms in Germany that are bringing resource-conserving cultivation to life in the **Netz erk Leitbetriebe Pflanzenbau** (network of pilot farms engaged in crop production). It does not matter whether the farm is organic or conventional; the aim is to combine the best of both worlds.

FiBL, together with the German Agricultural Society (DLG) and the m&p Public Relations agency, guides and assists the network.

The online format "Praxis-Talks", in which farms share their experiences on topics such as intercropping, has been very successful. "We provide a platform for positive stories about viable, forward-looking agriculture" says FiBL Germany project manager Johannes Augustin.

Focus on animal welfare

The **Netzwerk Fokus Tierwohl** (focus on animal welfare network) also promotes exchange. "The days when conventional and organic farmers viewed each other with suspicion are over" says Rebecca Franz-Wippermann, head of the FiBL Netzwerk Fokus Tierwohl.

Since 2020, 35 farms specialising in cattle, pig and poultry farming have been exchanging ideas. FiBL coordinates the network. Topics include pig farming without tail docking, and the raising of "brother roosters".

Jochen Meier, a conventional farmer in the network, converted his pig housing at a cost of € 500 per fatte - ing space, incorporating straw-bedded outdoor runs, large groups and non-tail-docked animals. "I enjoy my work more now", he says. Meier is convinced that animal welfare standards will continue to rise. He shares his experiences at major events such as EuroTier and the Öko-Feldtage (Organic Field Days) in "Impulse Lounges".

Network for more domestically produced legumes

Practical knowledge lies at the heart of the **Leguminosen-Netzwerk** (legume network), too. "Our goal is to promote the cultivation, processing and utilisation of legumes", explains Kerstin Spory, FiBL project manager. "With its numerous activities, LeguNet acts as a catalyst in the value chain." Fifty demonstration farms collaborate in this network. LeguNet contributes to increasing the consumption of domestically produced legumes, as both food and feed, through technical publications, events and digital formats.

Hella Hansen, FiBL

The network farmers tailor livestock husbandry to animals' needs.

A blog on soyabeans in the Legumes Network shows the journey from cultivation to processing to tempeh and tofu as the final products.

The then German Agriculture Minister Cem Özdemir (right) in conversation with network farmer Tino Ryll at the kick-off event for the Community Action for Soil project organised by pilot farms in 2023.

Netzwerk Leitbetriebe Pflanzenbau (network of pilot farms engaged in crop production)

Website: praxis-agrar.de > Pflanzenbau > Ackerbau > Ackerbaustrategie > Netzwerk Leitbetriebe Pflanzenbau (German only)

Contact: johannes.augustin@fibl.org

Funding: German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (BMLEH), flagship project as part of BMLEH's 2035 arable farming strategy

Project partners: DLG e.V., m&p Public Relations GmbH

Netzwerk Fokus Tierwohl (animal welfare network)

Website: fokus-tierwohl.de (German only)

Contact: rebecca.franz-wippermann@fibl.org

Funding: German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (BMLEH), based on a resolution by the German Bundestag

Project partners: Verband der Landwirtschaftskammern e.V. (association of chambers of agriculture), DLR e.V.

Leguminosen-Netzwerk (legumes network)

Website: www.legunet.de/english

Contact: kerstin.spory@fibl.org

Funding: German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (BMLEH), as part of BMLEH's protein crop strategy

Project partners: 16 institutions

Farm managers involved in the crop production network exchange ideas on raised bed cultivation at a regional meeting.

Farmer Science: Farm-based research

Farmers want to know

Another Farmer Science project: farmer Pascal Nägele (right) is investigating how much roughage turkeys can convert as part of their feed. He is supported by FiBL scientist Milena Burri (left).

It is only natural for practitioners to have a keen interest in further developing and optimising their production. The Farmer Science project addresses this need. Research approaches and field trials are initiated by farmers and carried out on their own farms. FiBL provides guidance and assistance with these trials.

Farmers are innovative when it comes to solving everyday problems on their farms and they like to experiment. In the Farmer Science project, they can put their research ideas into practice while at the same time receiving scientific guidance and assistance. Together with FiBL, they establish the conditions necessary to achieve meaningful results. Key factors here include, for example, designing an experiment and setting up a control group. FiBL also provides practical help with results evaluation. FiBL's expert input is usually greatly appreciated.

Animal helpers

An example of a farm-based innovation is the project to control bracken on an alpine pasture. This poisonous plant spreads rapidly and is extremely resilient. However, the Black Alpine Pig seems to enjoy eating it. The project investigated whether the poisonous plant has any harmful effects on the pigs' health and how the bracken population changes over time.

The results from the third year of the trial in 2024 were promising. The bracken was suppressed when plants suitable for the location were sown, the pigs remained healthy throughout, and no toxin residues were found in their meat.

Solutions straight from the farm

Another farmer-led trial was conducted on potato cultivation. A farmer in Aargau tested two alternative treatments for late blight (Phytophthora infestans) on his farm with the aim of reducing copper use in organic potato cultivation.

The results of this fiel trial were promising and provide a solid foundation for future research in other locations.

FiBL welcomes new farm trial ideas

Farmers wishing to discuss ideas and plan trials can contact FiBL. While Farmer Science may not be exact science, and results cannot be applied across the board to other farms, farmers' innovative strength holds great potential to benefit other farms and enrich FiBL's research and extension work.

Stephanie Hoch, FiBL

Farmer Science

Website: bioaktuell.ch > Beratung > Unterstützung > Farmer Science (German and French only)

Contact: barbara.frueh@fibl.org

Funding: Leopold Bachmann Foundation (LBS), Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG)

Podcast: "Farmer Science – Forschung auf dem Bauernhof" (German only). You can find the podcast at popular podcast providers or at fibl.org/podcast > FiBL Focus > Suche > Farmer Science

Growing knowledge
Disseminating new insights

Innovations only bring benefits if they are shared. FiBL therefore regularly publishes the latest findings of resourceful farmers and dedicated researchers. Below is an overview of the knowledge products published by FiBL in 2023 and 2024.

FiBL works with practitioners to promote organic farming and develop innovative solutions and methods. The knowledge gained in this manner is made available to practitioners, educators and the general public in accessible and engaging formats.

To this end, FiBL uses various means: consulting, field trials, courses, conferences, teaching activities and field visits. In addition to face-to-face interaction, we also provide information in digital formats. Three such areas are presented here.

170 publications

Over the past two years, the FiBL team has produced roughly 170 publications, including information leaflets, dossiers, PowerPoint presentations and guidance documents. All of these are available to download for free from the shop.

shop.fibl.org

Practical knowledge presented in a concise and easy-to-understand way.

130 videos

The film team shot approximately 130 videos over a period of two years, focusing on practical innovations, research results and events in national and international projects.

youtube.com > enter "FiBLFilm" in the search field

And ... action! A new video about on-farm slaughter being filmed for the FiBLFilm YouTube channel.

100 podcasts

Interested in agriculture, animal welfare and environmental performance? Then be sure to tune in to the FiBL Focus podcast channel. A new German-language episode is released every two weeks. The 100th episode will be published in August 2025.

The multilingual podcast channel FiBL Collaboration was launched in 2023. It focuses mainly on the results of international research projects. Fourteen episodes have been aired so far.

Available at fibl.org/podcast or at popular podcast providers.

The team behind the FiBL Focus and FiBL Collaboration podcast channels.

FiBL Switzerland

FiBL Switzerland has locations in Frick and Lausanne. It promotes sustainable agriculture through research, extension and practice, including via international projects. In addition to offices and laboratories, the Frick site has a research greenhouse and climate chambers. Moreover, it is not only a place of research, but also of organic farming, processing and consumption, with an active farm, an orchard, a vineyard including a winery, and a restaurant.

Foundation Council, from left: Sofia de Meyer, Bernard Lehmann (President), Peter Felser, Anne Challandes, Urs Brändli, Marc Muntwyler, Rolf Bernhard, Colette Basler, Markus Hausammann and Claudia Friedl (Vice President).

Team in 2024

319 staff

85 students, doctoral candidates, interns, visiting scholars, guest students, and persons on civilian service

Profit and loss account

	2022 in CHF	2023 in CHF
Income		
Research	11 377 960	15 030 563
Contribution from Swiss Federation	14 850 700	14 850 700
Consulting, education and communication	1 983 516	1 686 338
International cooperation	7 129 147	6 804 961
Trial farms	300 578	331 036
Restaurant, internal services	579 170	715 981
Donations, miscellaneous income	904 934	615 653
Total income	**37 126 006**	**40 035 231**
Expenditure		
Personnel cost	22 910 971	25 332 898
Non-personnel expenses		
– Test materials, laboratory supplies, analytics, project costs	8 251 913	9 397 582
– Space, office materials, other administrative, IT and advertising expenditure	3 830 314	3 160 307
Financial result	342 896	419 694
Depreciation	1 509 697	1 648 441
Total expenditure	**36 845 792**	**39 958 922**
Extraordinary revenue	**–188 713**	**–235 297**
Annual profit	**468 927**	**311 606**

FiBL Europe

FiBL Europe, established in Brussels in 2017, is the European office of FiBL and the Hungarian organic research institute ÖMKi. It disseminates FiBL's research findings to policymakers and other stakeholders, promotes scientific debate on sustainable agriculture and food, and assists FiBL researchers with project acquisition and coordination. Furthermore, it fosters collaboration between the national FiBL locations.

Board, from top-left: Dora Drexler, Florence Arsonneau, Beate Huber, Andreas Kranzler, Robert Hermanowski, Jürn Sanders (President).

Team in 2024

7 staff

Profit and loss account

	2022 in Euro	2023 in Euro
Income		
Internal company income	347 928	352 736
External project income	304 799	310 800
Total income	**652 727**	**663 536**
Expenditure		
Personnel cost	458 011	430 460
Operating expenses	84 258	106 368
Project expenses	52 418	84 725
Banking fees	1 191	1 816
Total expenditure	**595 879**	**623 369**
Financial result	**56 848**	**40 167**

FiBL Germany

FiBL Germany provides scientific and practical expertise on cutting-edge issues in organic farming and food production from its sites in Frankfurt am Main and Witzenhausen. Its current priority areas are the inputs list, sustainable agricultural systems, circular livestock husbandry, the FiBL Academy, the Öko-Feldtage (Organic Field Days), and out-of-home catering and value chains.

Executive Board (E) and Directors (D) (from left): Andreas Gattinger (E), Robert Hermanowski (D until end of 2024), Uli Zerger (E until end of 2024), Peter Röhrig (E), Gerold Rahmann (E), Miriam Athmann (E), Vera Bruder (D), Felix Prinz zu Löwenstein (E), Beate Huber (E), Frank Wörner (D), Bernhard Wagner (E), Alexander Gerber (E), Rebecca Franz-Wippermann (D), Steffen Reese (E), Jan Plagge (E).
Not present: Jürgen Heß (E), Jörg Große-Lochtmann (E), Niels Kohlschütter (E), Rachel Fischer (E).

Team in 2024

75 staff

5 students, doctoral candidates, interns

Profit and loss account

	e.V. 2022 in Euro	e.V. 2023 in Euro	GmbH 2022 in Euro	GmbH 2023 in Euro
Income				
Research and development	1 415 816	1 678 548	0	0
Other	191 197	236 439	4 466 708	4 439 759
Total income	**1 607 013**	**1 914 987**	**4 466 708**	**4 439 759**
Expenditure				
Personnel expenses	831 644	1 110 891	1 996 998	2 033 111
Material expenditure	697 773	701 985	1 388 991	1 492 388
Project costs and space and administrative costs	43 311	64 458	568 541	504 048
Depreciation	445	673	29 025	50 174
Total expenditure	**1 573 172**	**1 878 007**	**3 983 556**	**4 079 721**
Financial result	**33 841**	**36 980**	**483 152**	**360 038**

FiBL Austria

FiBL Austria combines practical experience, advice and research, sharing valuable knowledge about agriculture and food production with consumers. The institute guides and assists all stakeholders along the value chain on their journey towards sustainable solutions. The team also focuses on key issues such as climate change, nature conservation, and the promotion of biodiversity in the context of agriculture and food production.

Executive Board (from left): Michael Blass, Gerhard Zoubek, Martin Preineder, Eva Hieret, Werner Zollitsch (Deputy Chairman), Urs Niggli (Chairman), Franz Waldenberger, Andreas Kranzler. Not present: Alexandra Pohl.

Team in 2024

39 staff

Profit and loss account

	2022 in Euro	2023 in Euro
Income		
Research and innovation	631 000	517 000
Education	440 000	540 000
Other	200 000	260 000
Total income	**1 271 000**	**1 317 000**
Expenditure		
Personnel expenditure	974 000	1 010 000
Misc. expenditure	47 000	49 000
Project-related costs	189 000	192 000
Office expenses	59 000	63 000
Total expenditure	**1 269 000**	**1 314 000**
Financial result	**2 000**	**3 000**

FiBL France

FiBL France is based in the south-east of the country and conducts laboratory and applied field trials in collaboration with a network of farmers and partners. Its research topics are needs-based and currently focus on agroforestry, small ruminant health, and soil and plant health.

Executive Board, from top left: Felix Heckendorn (President), Raphaël Charles, Veronika Maurer, Frédéric Rey, Stéphane Bellon.

Team in 2024

13 staff

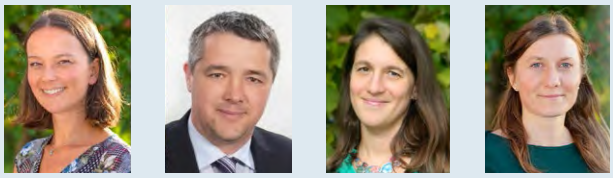
3 students

Profit and loss account

	2022 in Euro	2023 in Euro
Income		
Research	380 648	394 844
Services, training	16 303	32 536
Extraordinary income	14 958	11 972
Total income	**411 909**	**439 352**
Expenditure		
Personnel expenditure	263 304	258 317
Project costs	48 415	89 262
Operating expenses	43 934	42 856
Depreciation	18 131	16 152
Total expenditure	**373 784**	**406 587**
Financial result	**38 125**	**32 765**

ÖMKi

The Hungarian Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (ÖMKi) conducts research and innovation projects that deliver practical results, promoting the sustainable development of agriculture and food production in Hungary. To this end, it is developing professional networks covering horticulture, arable farming, viticulture, livestock husbandry and precision farming techniques in collaboration with farmers as well as Hungarian and international research institutes.



Executive Board (from left): Dóra Drexler, Árpád Nagy, Zsófia Hock, Judit Fehér.

Team in 2024

46 staff

Profit and loss account

	2022 in Euro	2023 in Euro
Income		
Research	645 121	1 013 744
Other	440 658	828 870
Total income	**1 085 778**	**1 842 614**
Expenditure		
Personnel expenditure	608 497	1 111 386
Misc. expenditure	254 871	502 684
Project-related costs	55 126	55 220
Office expenses	70 182	54 584
Total expenditure	**988 676**	**1 723 875**
Financial result	**97 103**	**118 739**

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2023/2024

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