



International Society of Organic Agriculture Research

CORE Organic supports organic research in Europe: New call launched

Since 2007, the European research program CORE Organic has been a highly useful tool to support the development and growth of organic food and farming in Europe.

Author: Anne-Kristin Løes, ISO FAR board member, Norway

This program is not a EU frame program, but a cooperation between funding bodies from 19 European countries, who come together to decide priorities and follow ongoing and completed projects. The program manager is located with ICROFS, Denmark (link:www.icrofs.org). After six years, Ulla Bertelsen changed her position with ICROFS, and handed over the coordination to Ivana Trkulja. She will have a tough start with a lot of work to conduct, since her offset coincides with the new call of **CORE Organic Cofund** where partners have committed 13 million Euros of national funds to study intensive plant production systems, local feed, robust livestock systems and organic processing concepts, with a two-step proposal procedure.

During the last call for CORE Organic Plus we had 49 applications and we are expecting to have similar amount of the project proposals for CORE Organic Cofund, Ivana Trkulja explains. It is important to note that we follow a two- step procedure, which allows applicants to submit initially their pre-proposals and then after evaluation procedure, selected applicants are invited to a second phase to develop the full proposals. This allows additional time to the applicants for project development and partnership building.



Ivana Trkulja has more than fifteen years of professional experience in project management and academic research. Her Ph.D. in Political Theory was completed in 2010 at the LUISS University 'Guido Carli' of Rome. After this, in the course of post-doctoral research Ivana has participated in different ERC/FP7 international projects.

Further, she has worked as an independent expert for the European Commission on the evaluation of research proposals, and prior to joining ICROFS as a project manager with the Italian Federation of Organic and Biodynamic Agriculture (FederBio). This is an excellent background for the important task of being the CORE Organic coordinator.

Asked whether the funding bodies seem to be satisfied with the CORE Organic program, compared with experiences from other ERA nets, Trkulja explains that the CORE Organic Cofund is a continuation of the ERA-Nets CORE Organic I, CO II and CO Plus. As one of the oldest ERA-Nets, CORE Organic has existed since 2003 and has launched 5 transnational calls. It is not easy to compare different ERA-Nets considering that they cover different thematic areas. In their case the funding bodies have created a strong partnership over the past years of joint work, and they plan to continue the collaboration with regular calls. This seems to demonstrate that the funding bodies are reasonably satisfied with the output of the funding efforts. Coming together to achieve a critical mass for conducting high quality research, while maintaining the high level of



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relevance for end users that traditionally has been a characteristic of organic research, were initial aims of CORE Organic.

We also asked Ivana Trkulja what are the major challenges for ICORFS as a coordinating body, to make so many different funding bodies participate, and whether they have some tricks to solve such problems. She agrees that the coordination of transnational cooperation has its challenges, but ICROFS together with all CORE Organic partners decided to join the forces towards the common goal of improving sustainable development in food production. Their logo resembles birds flying in formation, indicated that by coordinating their efforts, research programs can profit from transnational coordination, and it is worthy working in this direction.

ISOFAR aims at bringing the organic world forwards by activities that link researchers in organic food and farming together, such as the peer-reviewed journal *Organic Agriculture* (Springer), and the scientific track during the organic world congresses, which are arranged every 3rd year and will be next time in India in October 2017. Ivana appreciates the well-established cooperation between ICROFS and ISOFAR, which will be further supported in the following edition of CORE Organic Cofund. ISOFAR conferences are an important arena for dissemination of CORE Organic projects.

One of the first activities of Ivana Trkulja is now to conduct a [brokerage event during the upcoming Organic Days in Brussels](#), on December 7, 2016. She expects lots of researchers interested in organic food and farming to get together, possibly even the day before for presentation of organic innovations and a social dinner. Brokerage sessions will be organized giving potential applicants the opportunity to find partners. For those not attending all material will be available on-line and access granted to the matchmaking tool.

CORE Organic I and II projects have been completed until now, covering issues from honey bees to milk quality. Deliverables from all these projects are available at the open archive [Organic E-prints](#), which is a highly useful tool for the funding bodies, as well as for all people disseminating and searching new knowledge.



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Better farming practice by knowledge exchange

Author: Anne-Kristin Løes

An ongoing EU project, OK-NET Arable, aims at connecting farmers, advisors and scientists in finding practical solutions to increase the efficiency and productivity of arable organic farming systems.

The project is one of the first thematic networks funded by EIP-AGRI, the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability. Recently, [a web-based portal was launched](#), where easily understandable, but evidence-based advisory material can be found.

Farmers are encouraged to share their experiences and good solutions, facilitated by advisors and researchers, to facilitate farmer-to-farmer learning. Fourteen farmer innovation groups are active in the project, distributed over the 12 participating countries.

Data collection revealed that weed management, soil fertility and pest and disease control were the most serious challenges for high productivity across all sites and countries. Further issues mentioned were lack of knowledge and research, nitrogen management, nutrient cycling, and availability of organic seeds and other propagation material as well as such material being adapted to organic growing conditions. Climatic change also impacts organic production significantly.

Coordinated by Dr. Bram Moeskops from IFOAM-EU, the project now presents identified best practice examples, in a format that is easy to find and consume. Tools tested by the project correspond to the needs and challenges expressed by farmers. Linking the perspectives of farmers with the knowledge and recommendations of researchers, and strengthening the direct, web-based communication between farmers, are important targets for OK-NET Arable.

The portal is nice and includes a lot of relevant and interesting information, grouped under [Weed management](#), [Soil quality and fertility](#), [Nutrient management](#), [Pest and disease control](#) and [Crop specific](#). For each theme, the user can find a range of tools, and on the search page, the user can find tools in their own language – until now, most tools are in English, German or French, but some can also be found in Italian, Polish and Spanish. The current tools range from other platforms, over decision support tools to videos, leaflets and fact sheets. Visitors are encouraged to suggest tools for the platform.

Even if the internet represents an excellent tool for farmers to find information when they (finally one day, or night) have time to search for it, it remains a big challenge to make them familiar in using it more actively. In the discussions forum, farmers who have developed a good practical solution may upload photos or share links for web pages and videos directly on the platform. For the tools, evaluation has to be performed by the project team before they are uploaded.

Visit the knowledge platform of OK-Net Arable at: <https://organic-farmknowledge.org/>



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HIGHLIGHTS OF IRAN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RESEARCH & INNOVATION IN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

Author Prof. Dr. Victor Olowe (owebaba@yahoo.com)

An International Conference on Research & Innovation in Organic Agriculture successfully held on Nov. 1, 2016 at the Isfahan Branch of Islamic Azad University, Iran

Main topics discussed were

- The importance of research based programs for developing organic agriculture
- Introduction of ISOFAR and its roles in global organic movements
- Ethical issues in organic agriculture as a comprehensive agroecosystem
- Socioeconomic issues and market development of organic products
- Scientific based and practical issues for organic plant production and animal husbandry

The Conference which took place in Isfahan, was jointly organised by the Islamic Azad University as the largest attending university in the world with more than 1.500.000 students across the country of Iran and abroad, and International Society of Organic Agriculture Research (ISOFAR). The event was attended by over 600 participants and it attracted international speakers from Germany, Italy, Nigeria and India as well as Iran.

Isfahan is an ancient city in the center of Iran located about 340 km south of Tehran. The Persians call it "Nesf-e-Jahan", meaning "Half the World". On arrival at the Isfahan Branch on Nov. 1, 2016, the ISOFAR team was taken on facility tour of the state-of-the-art equipment in the Central Research Laboratory of the University and were later received at the Education Research and Development Centre.



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Presentation of MoU template to ISOFAR president by IAU representative

On arrival at the Conference venue, Prof. M. Reza Ardakani who is ISOFAR board member from Iran and stated as the Conference Scientific Manager, introduced Prof. Gerold Rahmann (ISOFAR President) and other ISOFAR board members to Prof. Seyed Mohammad Amiri (Head of the IAU, Isfahan Branch & Conference President) and he later took a group photograph with the invited speakers .

The Conference commenced with an opening speech by Prof. Seyed M. Amiri and thereafter Dr. Payam Najafi (Conference Executive Manager) appreciated all the participants, and M. Reza Ardakani gave a speech under title of Driving Innovation in Organic Agriculture by Research. The plenary session commenced with the presentation of Prof. Gerold Rahmann titled Organic Agriculture can and must contribute to solve future challenges in the global food chain: Organic 3.0.

Thereafter, six lead papers covering diverse aspects of organic agriculture were presented by Profs. Raffaele Zanoli and Simona Naspetti (Italy) under title of "Organic Food Market: Why Trust Matters", Prof. Peter Fragstein (Germany) titled "Organic Agriculture; Science and Ethics", Dr. Mahesh Chander (India) titled "Organic Livestock Production: Welfare, Standards & Requirements", Prof. Victor Olowe (Nigeria) titled "Societal Attitudes towards Organic Agriculture and Products", Dr. Hamid R. Ansari-Renani (Iran) titled "Potential of Organic



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Animal Productions by Nomads in Iran» and Dr. Stefano Canali (Italy) titled "Agro-ecological Service Crops and No-Till Strategies in Organic Mediterranean Vegetable Productions".

A panel of experienced scientists discussed each paper after presentation. During the general discussion session, many Iranian students wanted to know how to explore scholarships for further studies in organic agriculture in Germany and other European countries. Questions were also asked on high cost of organic production, need to ban importation of GMO products, need to have subsidy on organic inputs in order to reduce cost of production amongst others.



Also visit:

<http://www.ifoam.bio/en/regional-bodies/ifoam-iran>

<http://www.organic-research.net/home/events/event/article/1929.html>



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ISO FAR BOARD MEETING IN TEHRAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN ON OCT. 29 & 30 , 2016

Seven ISO FAR Board members (Gerold Rahmann, Reza Ardakani, Mahesh Chander, Peter Von Fragstein, Victor Olowe, Stefano Canali and Raffaele Zanoli) met in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran on Oct. 29 & 30, 2016 to deliberate on the upcoming Organic World Congress to be hosted by India in 2017 and also appraise the operations of Organic Agriculture Journal to date.

Protocols

The Board members were hosted by Islamic Azad University (IAU), Iran (Pic. 1). IAU is the largest University in the world with over 1.7 m students in more than 400 branches all over the globe. The Board meeting was chaired by Prof. Dr. Gerold Rahmann (ISO FAR President). Dr. Reza Ardakani facilitated the Board meeting.





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The meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. OWC2017
 - Scientific track (papers, review process, proceedings, choice of keynote speakers, poster award etc)
 - General Assembly of ISO FAR
2. Organic Agriculture Journal
 - Overview of OA Journal
 - Role of editorial board members and reviewers
3. Other ISO FAR issues
 - Update on ISO FAR
 - Dates of upcoming events
 - Membership update

a. OWC2017

- Scientific track

The meeting discussed extensively the extent of preparation for the Scientific Track which is to be handled by ISO FAR, Technology Innovation Platform of IFOAM (TIPI) and India Research Institute. An eleven (11) man International Scientific Board had been constituted to organise the Scientific Track. The deadline for paper submission has been extended till Nov. 30, 2016 and to date about 70 papers have been received. All papers submitted shall be pre-screened before they are sent out to international reviewers. The Editorial Manager will be used to process the papers. ISO FAR will also explore the possibility of selecting very good papers for publication in a special issue of Organic Agriculture. The President also informed that about 3 to 4 scientists shall be sponsored to the OWC2017 by Green Innovation Centre. The Congress Proceedings shall be produced in India. The Poster award will be coordinated by Dr. Mahesh Chander.

- ISO FAR General Assembly

It was agreed that the GA of ISO FAR shall be organised before the OWC and the event shall be anchored by Raffaele Zanoli and Daniel Neuhoff. They will notify all ISO FAR members as the event draws near.

b. Organic Agriculture Journal

- Overview of OA Journal

The Editor-in-Chief, Prof. Gerold Rahmann gave a comprehensive overview of the performance of the Journal to date. He highlighted the number of articles received, rejected and accepted per year. Members discussed the need to review the aims and scope of the journal in order to make it



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more focused on organic food and farming not excluding other facets of the entire value chain. The categories of papers to be published by the journal were also discussed. The high rejection rate of papers from Africa was attributed to the low standard of methodology. Hence a position paper on minimum requirements for reporting experimental results from the tropics will be developed to guide authors.

- Role of editorial board members and reviewers

It was agreed that the journal should endeavour to cover all disciplines in agriculture and that the papers should reflect a balanced global spread. A workshop is to be planned for editors and reviewers as a Pre-Congress event in India with a view to expanding the Editorial Board. The GA of ISOFAR will eventually ratify most of these decisions.

c. Other ISOFAR issues

- Update on ISOFAR

The President gave an update on activities in ISOFAR indicating the need to have competent staff (especially a Secretary) to attend to day-to-day running of the Society. Nevertheless, he is still coordinating the activities of ISOFAR from his current assignment post in Ethiopia.

- Dates of upcoming events

It was agreed that the Board will hold an e-Board meeting in February, 2017 and vis-à-vis meeting in India.

- Membership update

Board members were encouraged to attract more members to ISOFAR. To date there are over 300 members of ISOFAR worldwide. The meeting was informed that a registration desk will be provided at Isfahan for new members to join the Society.

On October 30, 2016, the template of the draft Memorandum of understanding (MoU) between IAU and other international organisations was presented to the President of ISOFAR to study (Pic. 3).

Thereafter, the Board members paid a courtesy visit to the Science and Research Branch (S&B Branch) of IAU, Iran.



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During the visit, the team was conducted round the state-of-the-art facilities in the laboratories.





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The S&R Branch consists of 17 Departments. Thereafter, ISOFAR team interacted with the leadership of S&R Branch on possible areas of collaboration.

The ISOFAR Board members later held a joint meeting with the authorities of IAU, Iran headed by Dr. Vasheghari Farahani (Vice President, Research & Technology Affairs). Also present at the occasion were Dr. Ebrahimi (Director, Centre for International Affairs) and Ms. Hashemi Tabatabaie (Director General for Development of Science and Survey Centre). During the meeting, issues were raised on the relevance of organic agriculture to the development of Iran. IAU was admonished to join the organic agriculture movement by actively participating in research projects related to organic products. While responding to the submissions of the IAU representatives, Prof. G. Rahmann charged them to explore the big potential for organic agriculture to impact positively on the Iranian society and design the best solution for the future.

At the end of the interaction, the two teams took a group photograph:

