

## Opening Adress

Dear Participants,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the 15<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Organic Fruit Growing "Ecofruit. The IFOAM EU Group is delighted to be the patron of this biennial event for the fourth consecutive period. Ecofruit is an important date in the calendar for the organic researchers, consultants and growers to address problems and exchange solutions for organic fruit production now and into the future

Your contribution to food and farming systems not only helps to develop more robust and resilient organic fruit farming in Europe, but ensures that the organic fruit sector continues to secure and expand its market share and in the process play a strategic part in realising more sustainable food production worldwide. While there has been a notable decline in organic fruit cultivation in some EU countries, Europe continues to record growth across key fruit groups, including grapes and temperate and citrus fruit. This is a testament to the results you and colleagues has delivered over the decades and the valuable contribution you make to the organic research as a whole.

The organic research community continues to demonstrate its ability and potential to respond proactively to the impending environmental and socio-economic challenges we face in terms of climate change, biodiversity loss and water scarcity. Over the last 20 years public policymakers have slowly begun to acknowledge the added value that the sector delivers in the area of research and innovation, with several research projects funded by the European Commission since the mid-1990s. Current figures show that research funding for organic farming has increased seven-fold from 5m between 1990 and 1994 under FP3 to 41m between 1990 and 2002 under FP6. Despite the sector's proven track record funding under FP6 only represented 0.23% of the overall budget.

The new EU framework programme for EU Research and Innovation Horizon 2020 provides a decisive opportunity for the organic research community to sustain and build upon its achievements to date. With its proven track record the time has come for our sector to be recognised in its entirety by the EU as a key actor within the Union's research programmes. This recognition must be backed up with the necessary financial support in order to realise the full potential of the sector.

Through the TP Organics technology platform the IFOAM EU Group in partnership with other members and supporters is strongly committed to strengthening the position of organic research and development now and into the future. Further, IFOAM EU will strengthen its efforts to improve knowledge transfer from research to practice, a challenge you are very much aware of.

Over the past four years we have worked consistently to promote the strategic importance of organic research in making Europe a world leader in ecologically sustainable food production. We have confronted many barriers in working to secure public financial support and I am sure we will face new challenges ahead, but I am confidence with your cooperation and support we can ensure that organic research has a bright and promising future.



Marco Schlüter  
Director IFOAM EU Group

