

Opening address

IFOAM Organics Europe is delighted to welcome you to the 21th ECOFRUIT Conference. We are glad to be the patron of this important biennial event bringing together researchers, consultants and growers to exchange and discuss the latest developments, opportunities and challenges for organic fruit growing.

When we met at this Conference two years ago, I mentioned the Farm to Fork strategy of the European Commission, with its ambitious framework for developing a sustainable food system for the EU. Making the EU's food system greener was high on the agenda. Unfortunately, the Farm to Fork strategy seems to have run out of steam. The attempts to reduce pesticides use with the Sustainable Use regulation SUR have been scrapped. NGT crops are looming on the horizon. And the Sustainable Food Systems law has been shelved.

Within this context, we cannot emphasize enough how important organic agriculture is to continue to move towards these goals:

A more just system where farmers are adequately remunerated not only for the food they produce, but also for the ecosystem services they provide.

A farming system that works with nature and not against it.

A minimal use of external inputs, and consequently, a significant reduction in the use of pesticides.

And a system that excludes the use of GMOs.

IFOAM Organics Europe is tirelessly working on making the EU a place where organic agriculture can thrive.

We are actively lobbying for organic to be the gold standard of sustainability in the context of the upcoming Green Claims directive, and trying to avoid that all kinds of other scoring systems for food products might appear as equally sustainable or even better than organic food.

We are fighting for a ban of NGTs from organic agriculture, and for a transparent and complete traceability system for NGTs, that will effectively allow farmers and consumers a choice – a choice NOT to have NGTs in their crops, and on their plates.

We strive to make sure that organic farming is recognized as a solution to face the current climate and biodiversity crisis.

As for the proposed regulation on plant reproductive material, which you will hear more about later today, we advocate for promoting agrobiodiversity and for preserving a diverse gene pool for our crops, whether it is with conservation varieties or with heterogeneous material, to name only a few, and for testing conditions that are adequate for organic crop varieties.

These are some examples of what we are working on at the political front.

But at IFOAM Organics Europe, we also facilitate organic farming with our work on research, networking and communication. We believe that research on organic farming serves as a frontrunner for innovation and will have spillover effects for farming in general – successful practices developed for organic fruit production will readily be adopted by others as well, thus contributing to making Europe's farms overall more sustainable. To make the most of this, it is key to bring stakeholders together, as you are doing here today at the ECOFRUIT Conference, to share your experience and your visions for a more sustainable, and prosperous organic fruit growing sector.

I would like to end this note by wishing you fruitful conference. Let's Make Europe More Organic together!

Organically,

Eduardo Cuoco, on behalf of the whole IFOAM Organics Europe team