

22nd International Conference on Organic Fruit-Growing - February, 23 to 25, 2026

Speech by Eric Gall, deputy director, IFOAM ORGANICS EUROPE

It is an honor for me to open this 22nd edition of the eco-fruit conference on behalf of IFOAM Organics Europe, alongside the distinguished Minister of Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection of Baden Wuerttemberg, and the Dean of the University of Hohenheim.

I note with interest that a considerable part of the conference will be dedicated to breeding, cultivars and biodiversity. This is a clear indication that organic fruit growing always moves towards more sustainability. Indeed for organic farmers, **biodiversity** is not only something to value and protect, it is a factor of production and a condition for resilience. Trying to understand the complex relationships that exist in a given agroecosystem and making the most of these interconnections to produce healthy quality food, is the key to true **long term sustainability**. It is not an easy endeavour, it demands patience, sense of observation and courage to experiment, but it leads to innovation that irrigates and benefits **the whole farming community**, organic and non organic. It also benefits the whole **society** as organic production methods seek to protect ecosystems services and the natural resources (healthy soils, clean water, thriving biodiversity) on which we depend to ensure our **food security** and **strategic autonomy**.

In a world of growing uncertainty, with increasingly polarized debates, and a tendency to nationalisation of agriculture policies, organic agriculture plays an even more central role in improving the **sustainability of our food system**. Organic agriculture is a **European project**, clearly regulated and defined, and it provides a common baseline and a level-playing field. And we hope that this will be reflected in the negotiations on the **CAP and the MFF**. Indeed organic agriculture provides benefits beyond environmental sustainability. It is **competitive**, and it is a large part of the solution for **generation renewal** and the **attractivity of our rural areas**.

There are other discussions at EU level that have an impact on organic producers: the revision of the seed legislation which enters its final phase, the new legal framework for NGTs. But also the Commission's proposal on biocontrol. Organic farmers are main users and developers of biocontrol solutions and we are looking forward to adaptations of the legal framework to increase the availability of biocontrol solutions. At the same yet we regret that the Commission chose to mix the discussions on biocontrol with proposals to extend the marketing of synthetic pesticides. Such mixed signals are not helpful, and this even contradicts the goal of incentivising more farmers to adopt biocontrol. We will remain constructive and vigilant all along this negotiations process.

I was told that the **collaboration** of the organizing committee was intensified this year and that it delivered great results. This is a wonderful example how people in the organic community work together all over Europe in a spirit of solidarity. This is how Europe builds itself, not only through the great speeches of heads of state, but through the everyday work of practitioners who share their knowledge, experience and insights for the common good. This is an **inspiring signal of hope** in these challenging times, and I wish you all very lively discussions and a good conference.