

Z ZNANJEM ZREMO V PRIHODNOST

EKOLOŠKO KMETOVANJE IN VARSTVO NARAVE – PRILOŽNOSTI IN IZZIVI ZA SLOVENSKO KMETIJSTVO

40. TRADICIONALNI POSVET JAVNE SLUŽBE KMETIJSKEGA SVETOVANJA IN DAN SISTEMA ZNANJA IN INOVACIJ (AKIS)

# DEVELOPING ORGANIC FARMING: BENEFITS AND THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE

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Professur für  
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Landbau

ZREČE, 18. NOVEMBER 2025



REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA  
MINISTRSTVO ZA KMETIJSTVO,  
GOZDARSTVO IN PREHRANO



Sofinancira  
Evropska unija



# High productivity gains in (German) agriculture...

+283%



## Ernteertrag für 1 ha Weizen (Winterweizen einschl. Dinkel und Einkorn)

|                       |          |
|-----------------------|----------|
| 1950*:                | 2.580 kg |
| 1980*:                | 4.890 kg |
| Durchschnitt 2017–19: | 7.303 kg |



## Ernteertrag für 1 ha Kartoffeln

|                       |           |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1950*:                | 24.490 kg |
| 1980*:                | 25.940 kg |
| Durchschnitt 2017–19: | 40.400 kg |

+333%



## Milchleistung pro Kuh und Jahr

|        |          |
|--------|----------|
| 1950*: | 2.480 kg |
| 1980*: | 4.538 kg |
| 2019:  | 8.250 kg |



## Legeleistung einer Henne pro Jahr

|        |          |
|--------|----------|
| 1950*: | 120 Eier |
| 1980*: | 242 Eier |
| 2019:  | 298 Eier |

\* früheres Bundesgebiet

...but at the expenses at high external costs! (ZKL, 2021):

(21bn € < 90bn €)



# Developing organic farming: benefits and the role of knowledge

1. **Organic Farming as a role model – what does science say about the benefits of organic farming**
2. The role of research in delivering the potential of organic farming
  - The yield problem and how to overcome this?
  - Eco-functional intensification in organic cropping systems
  - Organic crop-livestock systems: example of GreenDairy & ClieNFarms
3. Concluding words



# Organic Agriculture in the European Union 2023

## Organic Farmland



### Farmland in million hectares Top 3 countries

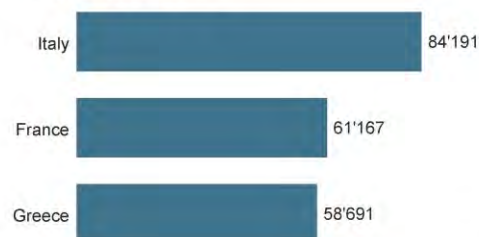


## Organic Producers

The number of organic producers is increasing

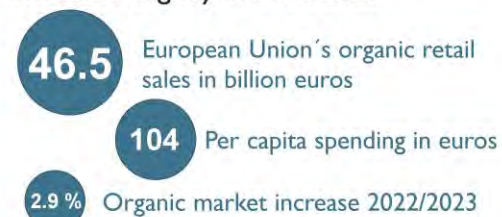


### Number of producers Top 3 countries

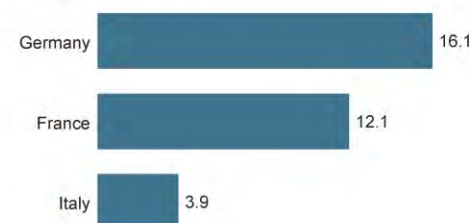


## Organic Market

The European Union's market increased slightly in 2022/2023



### Market in billion euros Top 3 countries



### Market growth in percent Top 3 countries 2022/2023



## EUROPE: ORGANIC FARMLAND 2023

Europe  
19.5 M  
hectares

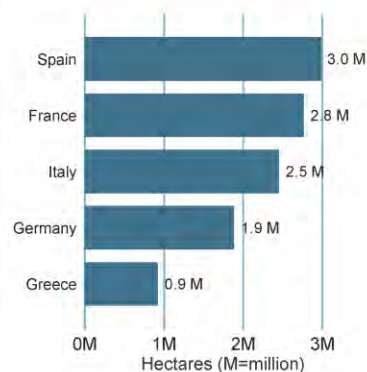
Four countries hold more than half of Europe's organic agricultural area.



Distribution of organic agricultural land by country 2023

Spain  
3.0 M  
hectares

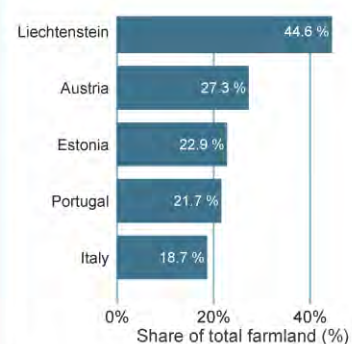
The countries with the largest organic agricultural area were Spain, France and Italy.



The 5 countries with the largest areas of organic agricultural land 2023

3.9 %  
of Europe's  
farmland is  
organic

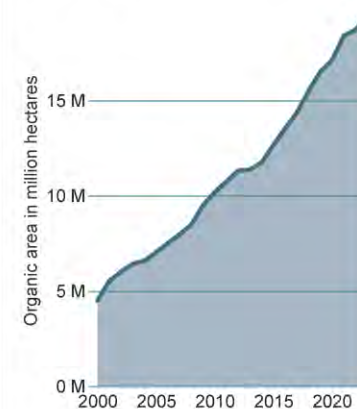
16 countries had 10 % or more of their agricultural land under organic management.



Top 5 countries with an organic share of more than 10 % of total agricultural land 2023

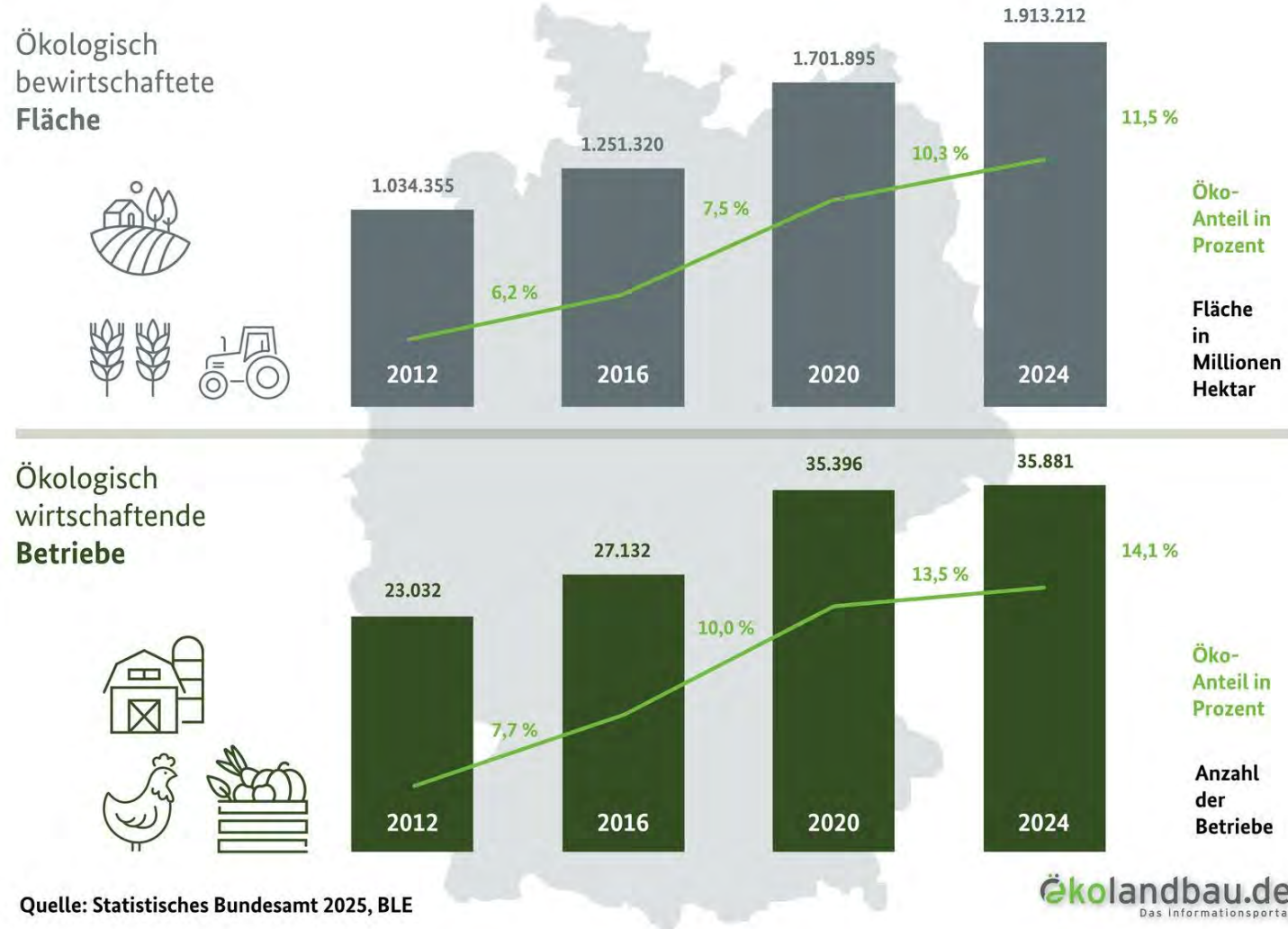
4.1 %  
growth  
since 2022

In 2023, about 767'000 hectares more were reported compared with 2022.



Growth of the organic agricultural land 2000-2023

# Development of organic farming in Germany (area, farms)



# Organic food sales in Germany

In billion EUR excl. Catering



In total:

## Other sales channels

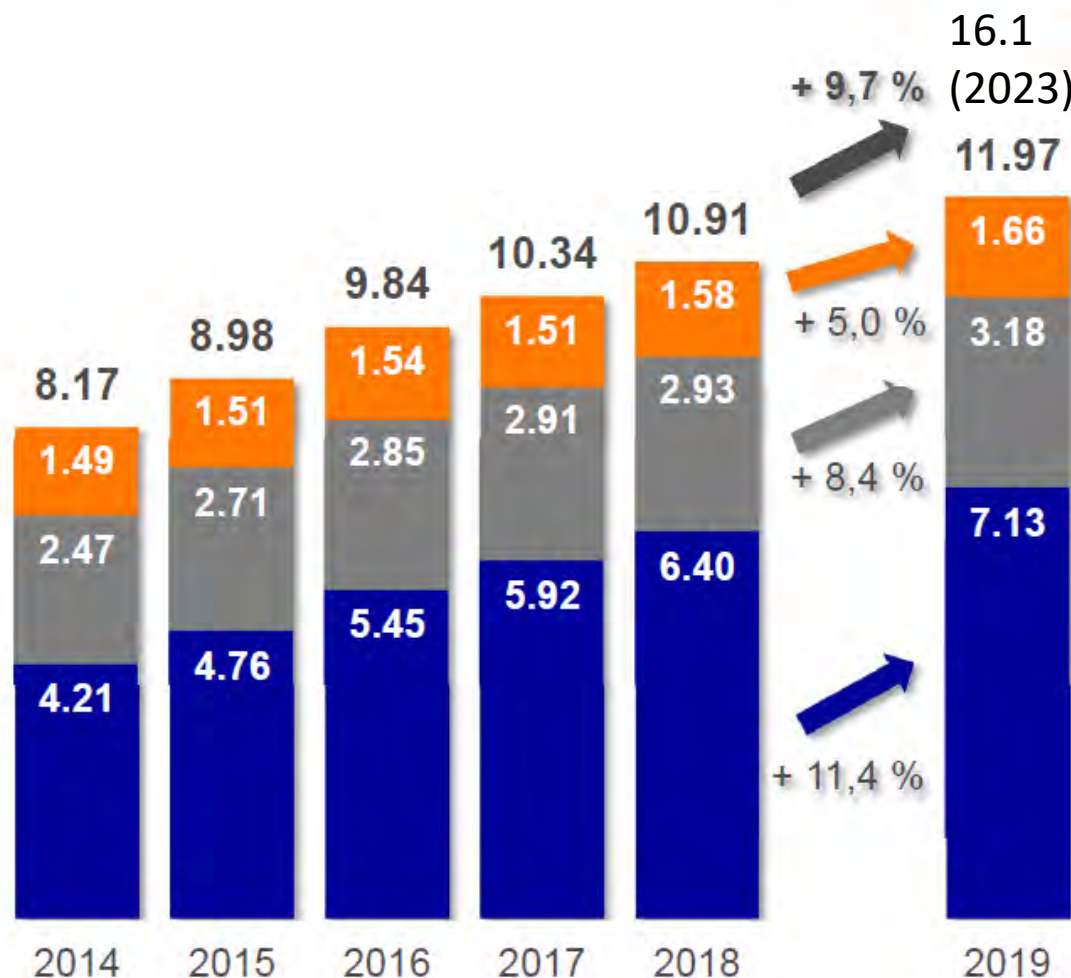
Bakeries, butchers, fruit & vegetable shops, farmer's markets, small farm shops, Online shops, health food shops, petrol stations

## Natural food stores

Incl. big farm shops with more than 50,000 EUR additional purchase

## Supermarkets

Incl. drug stores



# The 4 principles of organic farming

## Principle of Health

*Organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible.*



## Principle of Ecology

*Organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.*



## Principle of Fairness

*Organic agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.*



## Principle of Care

*Organic agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.*

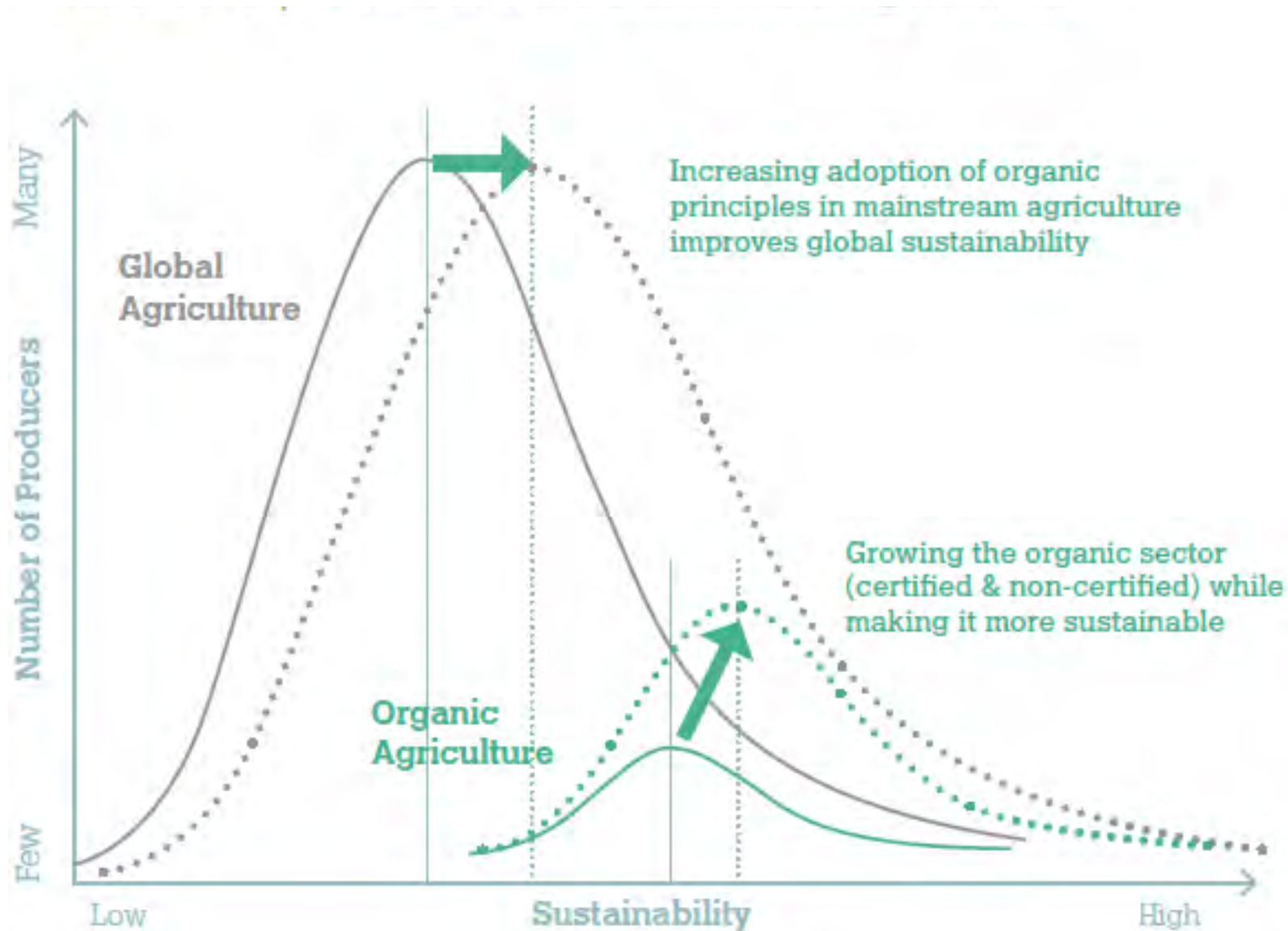


## Other non-organic labels drawing on organic (IFOAM )principles



But: Organic farming is the system with the highest level of legal certainty and consumer trust (since 1993)

# Organic farming as role model for agricultural transformation



# Organic Agriculture – the answer to the multiple crises?

UNIVERSITÄT GIESSEN





The research was funded by German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) within the framework of the Federal Organic Farming Scheme (BÖL)



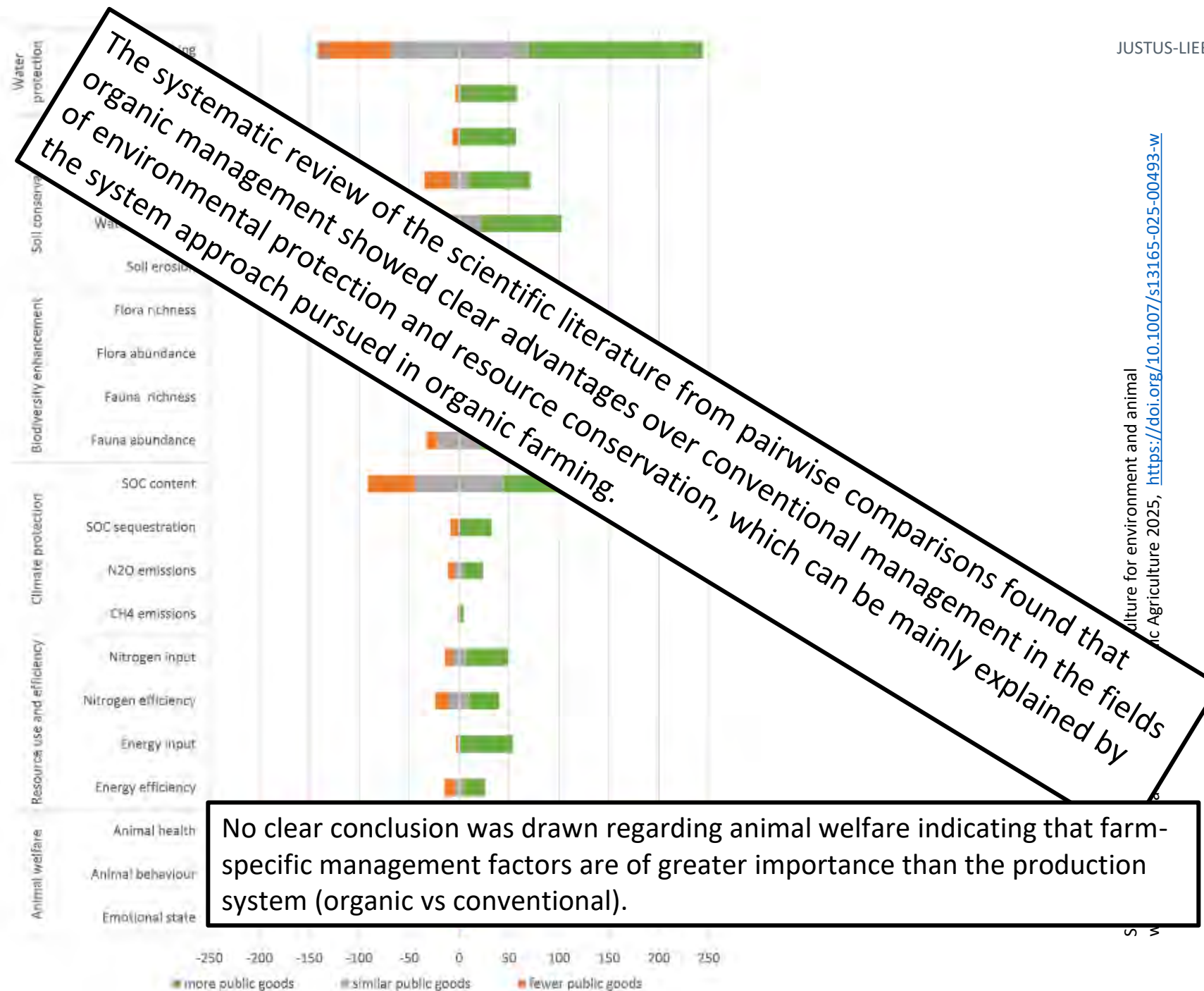
Seite 12



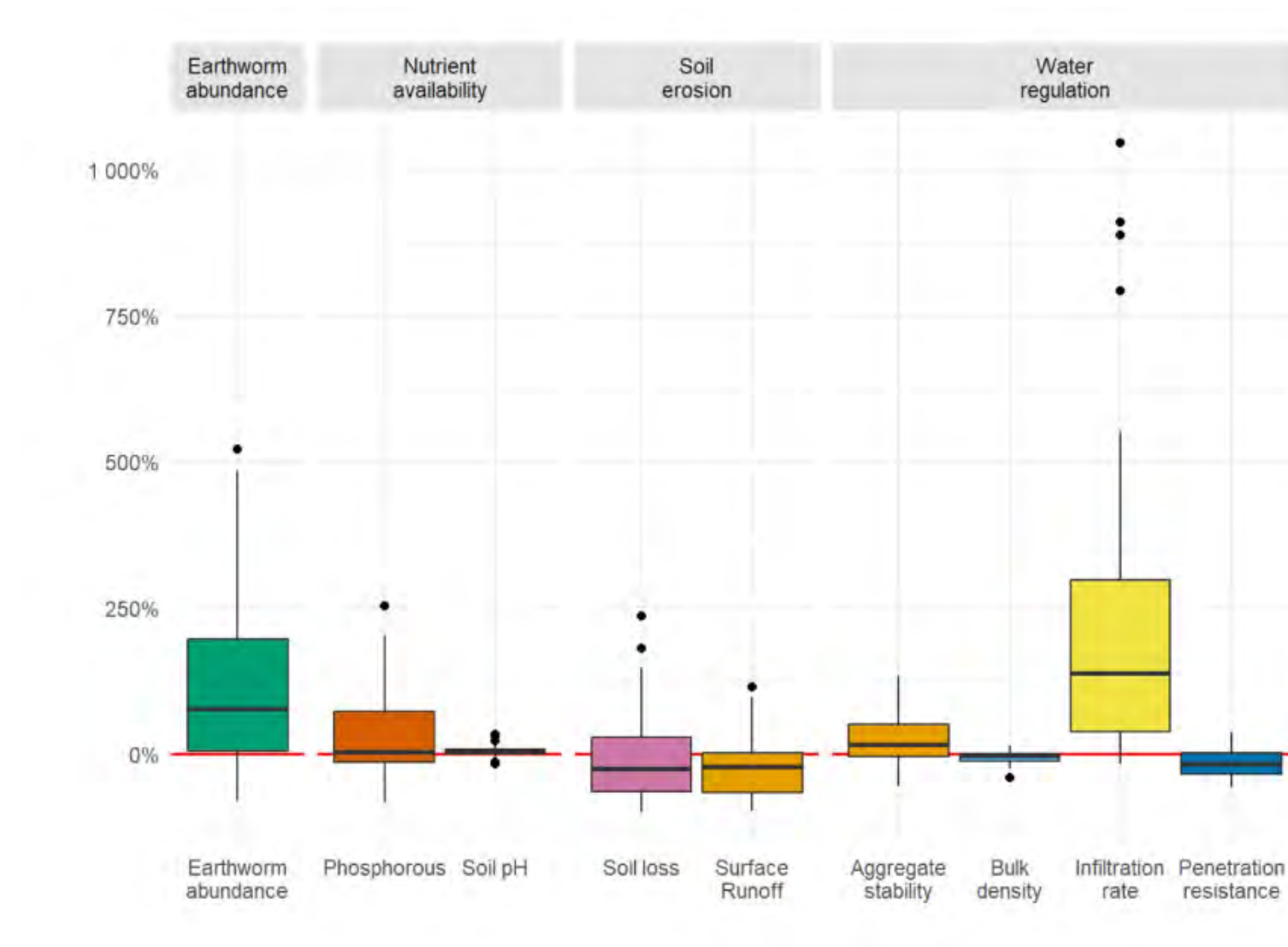
# Systematic and quantitative literature analysis



based on  
528 scientific studies  
2.816 single pairs



# Soil quality & function



# Long-term organic farming and soil quality

(DOK Trial Switzerland, \*1977)



**Conventional (CONMIN)**



**Organic (BIODYN)**

## Water retention of arable soils after **heavy** rain (20 mm/h) DOK Trial Switzerland



**Conventional (CONMIN)**



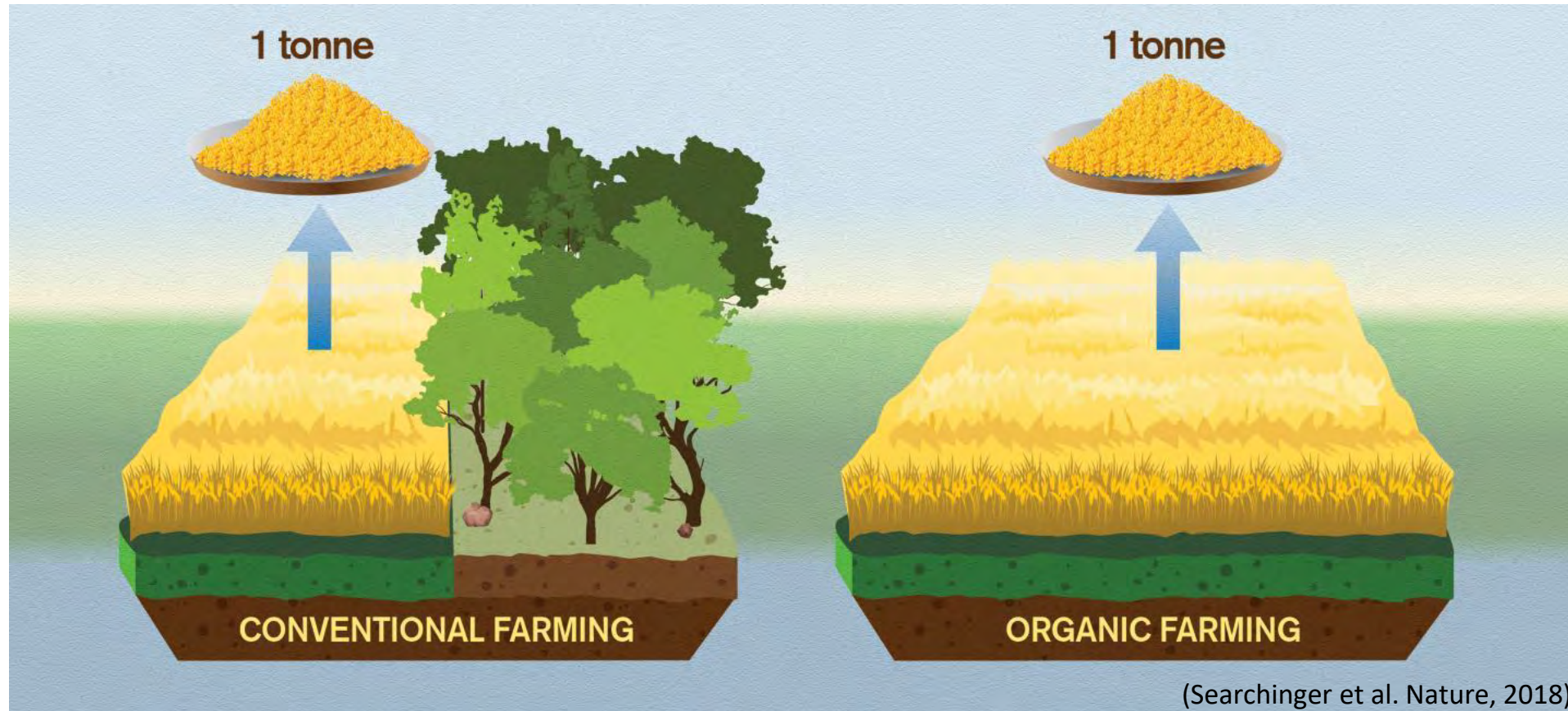
**Organic (BIODYN)**

# Developing organic farming: benefits and the role of knowledge

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# Organic Farming and the long shadow of less yield...



Yen Strandqvist/Chalmers  
University of Technology

**Globally: -9 to -25%** (Seufert et al. 2012, De Ponti et al. 2012, Ponisio et al. 2015, Wilbois & Schmidt, 2019)

**Germany: -20 to 43%** (Noleppa 2016, Treu et al. 2017, BMEL 2019)

# Less **crop yields** in organic farming

| Category of differentiation         | n <sup>a</sup> | Relative yield (%) | Remarks                                              |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Overall                             | 362            | 80                 |                                                      |
| Asia                                | 22             | 89 a               | Many from India, rest from five other countries      |
| Central Europe                      | 16             | 88 ac              | Switzerland, Austria                                 |
| Middle-East & North-Africa          | 14             | 85 ac              | Incl. Turkey (7) and four other countries            |
| North-America                       | 126            | 84 ad              | USA, Canada                                          |
| Southern Europe                     | 34             | 81 ab              | European Mediterranean countries                     |
| Eastern Europe                      | 18             | 80 ab              | Post-communist economies, excl. Albania, Croatia     |
| NW-Europe                           | 78             | 73 bc              | Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, GBR                   |
| Latin-America                       | 8              | 73 ab              | Vegetables (7), coffee (1)                           |
| Australia & New Zealand             | 12             | 73 bcd             |                                                      |
| Northern Europe                     | 34             | 70 b               | Finland, Sweden, Norway                              |
| Netherlands & Denmark vs. rest      | 50 vs. 312     | 74 vs. 81          | High external input countries, $P = 0.019$           |
| Developing vs. developed countries  | 33 vs. 296     | 84 vs. 79          | $P = 0.13$ (ns)                                      |
| Tropical vs. non-tropical countries | 29 vs. 327     | 86 vs. 80          | $P = 0.12$ (ns)                                      |
| Long-term vs. Short-term            | 66 vs. 249     | 84 vs. 80          | Long = > 5 years. Short = 1–5 years. $P = 0.17$ (ns) |
| On-farm vs. trial                   | 42 vs. 226     | 88 vs. 81          | $P = 0.038$                                          |
| On-farm statistics                  | 59             | 76                 |                                                      |

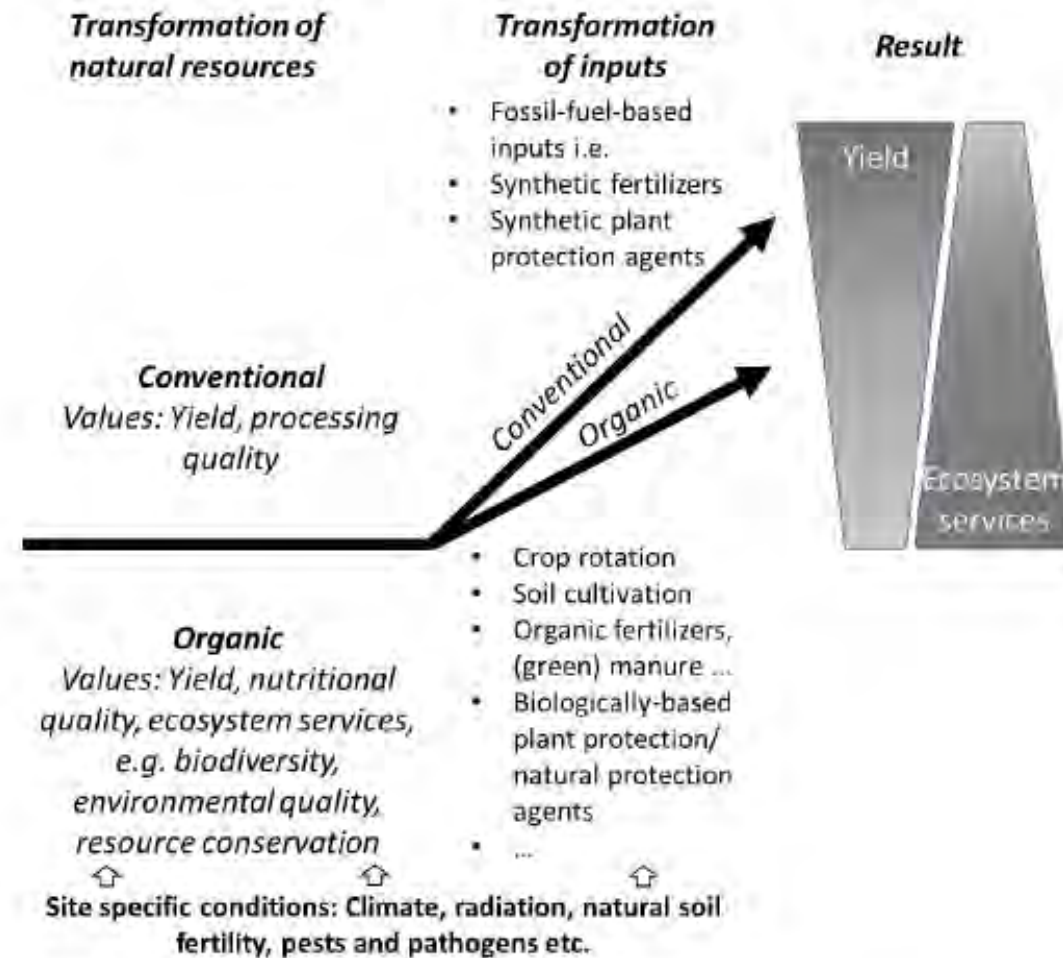
<sup>a</sup> Categories do not always add up to the total number of entries, as for some data it was uncertain to which category they belong. There may also be partial overlap of categories.

On a global level in average 20% less yield in organic farming. In high external input countries, yield gap is even more pronounced. Poor data base for developing countries.

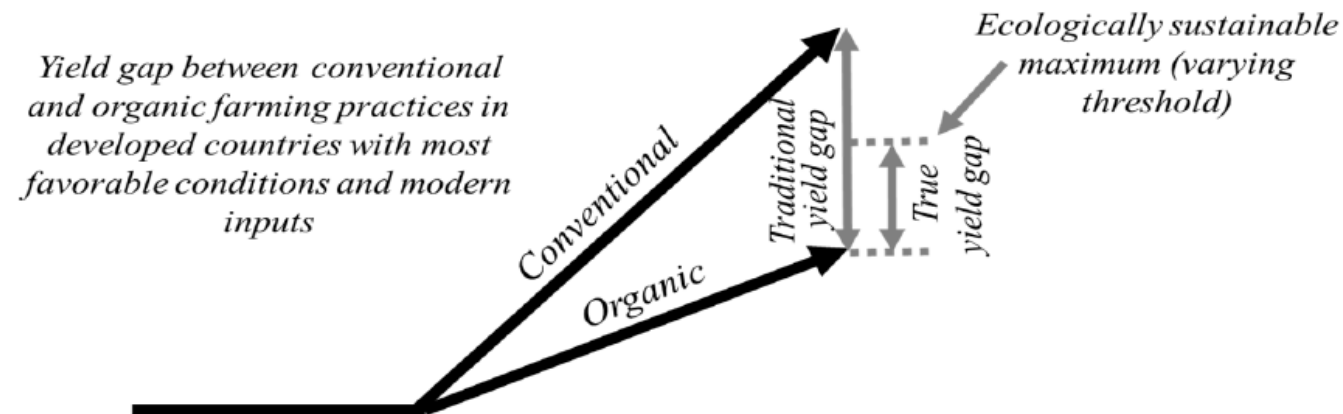
# Cereal yield gap in Germany



# Trade-offs between productivity and ecosystem services

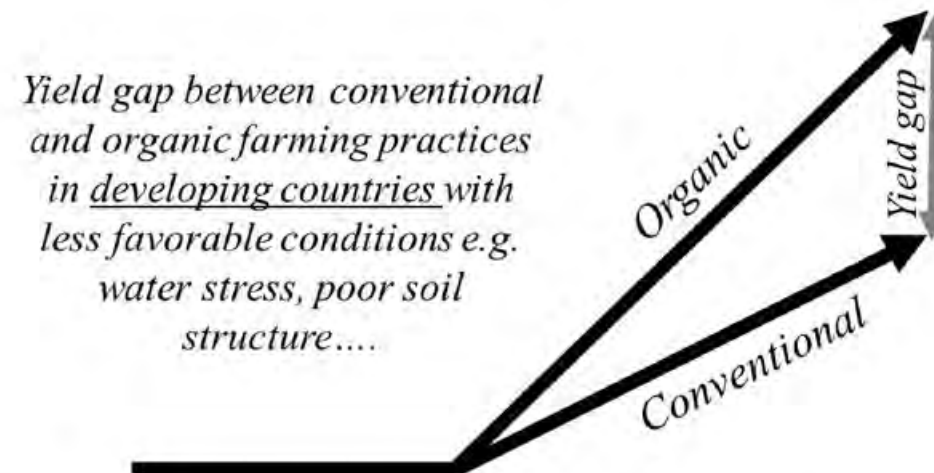


# Yield as a result of transformation processes in cropping systems/agro-ecosystems



- The true yield gap between organic and intensive conventional management shrinks when an ecologically sustainable threshold is set as benchmark when productivity is balanced out with ecosystem services.

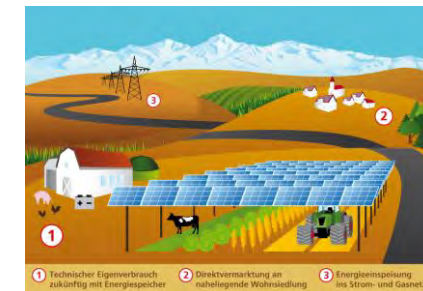
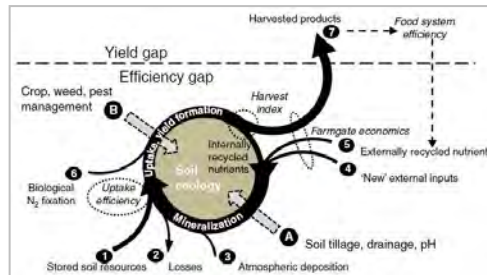
# Yield as a result of transformation processes in cropping systems/agro-ecosystems



- The gap between organic and conventional yield may go into reverse under less favorable conditions. (see Lal, Science, 2004)

# Eco-functional intensification and circular economy in the crop-livestock system

- Closing yield and efficiency gaps according to best ecological practices
- Targeted utilisation of natural processes and ecosystem services



Nordwijk & Brussard (2014), Current Opinion Environmental Sustainability, 8:62-70



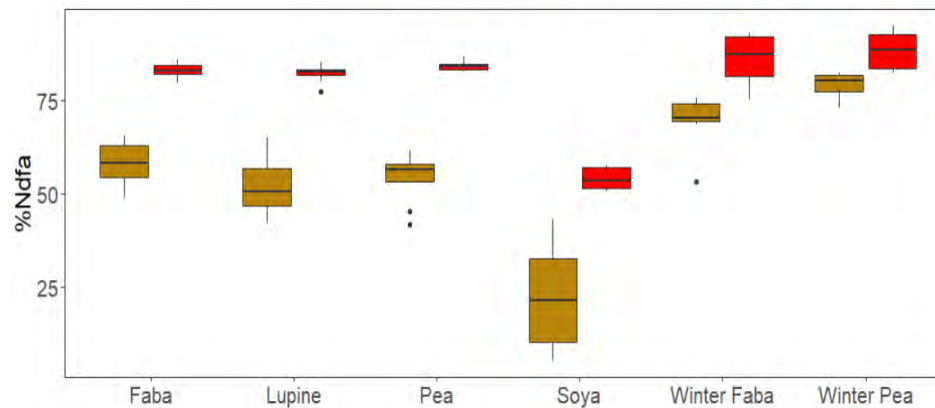
## Diverse crop rotations with legumes – keyword: N autonomy!



Monitoring of biological nitrogen fixation (BNF) in grain legumes shows a fluctuation between 9 and 92% (highest at site Oberfeld and winter varieties)

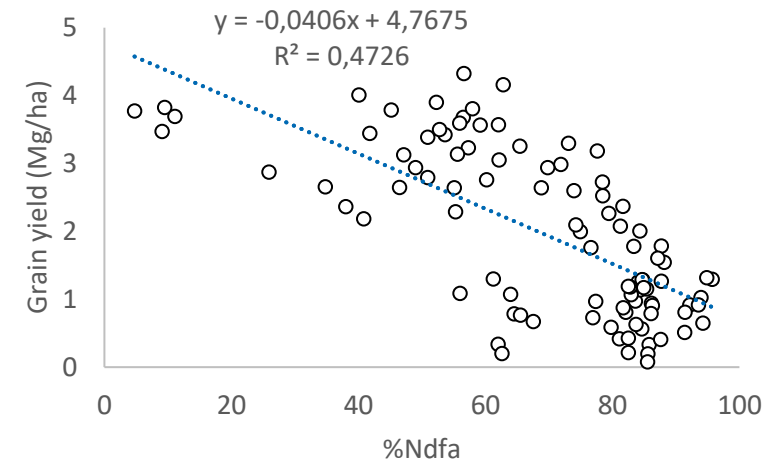
$$\% \text{ Ndfa} = \frac{\delta^{15}\text{N}_{\text{Control}} - \delta^{15}\text{N}_{\text{Legume}}}{\delta^{15}\text{N}_{\text{Control}} - \text{B}_{\text{Legume}}} \times 100$$

■ Gladbacherhof ■ Oberfeld



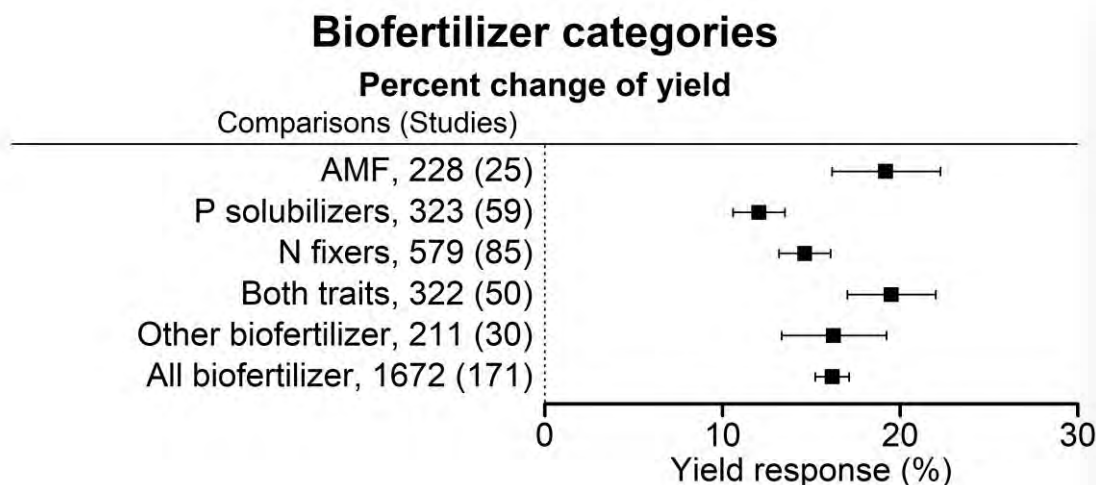
Gladbacherhof → soya fixed lowest N (17-71 kg N)  
faba highest (113.3-157.3 kg N)

Oberfeld → pea lowest (30.4-38.7 kg N)  
soya highest (63.4-66.8 kg N)

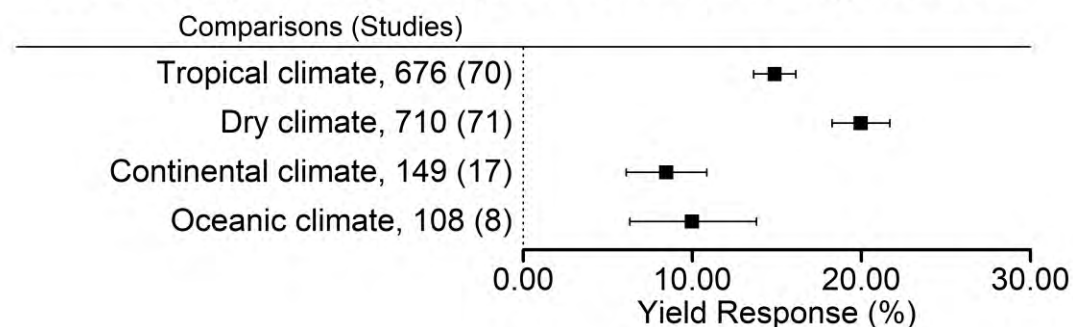


BNF as a response to limited soil N availability

# Biostimulants for improved nutrient uptake and productivity (without mineral-synthetic nitrogen fertilization)



## Percentage change of yield as affected by climate



**OXFORD** **FEMS**

FEMS Microbiology Ecology, 2024, 97, fiae023  
DOI: 10.1093/femsec/fiae023  
Research Article

### Long-term detection of *Hartmannibacter diazotrophicus* on winter wheat and spring barley roots under field conditions revealed positive correlations on yield parameters with the bacterium abundance

Santiago Quiroga<sup>1</sup>, David Rosado-Porto<sup>1,2</sup>, Stefan Ratering<sup>1</sup>, Azin Rekowski<sup>1</sup>, Franz Schulz<sup>1</sup>, Marina Krutych<sup>1</sup>, Christian Zöb<sup>1</sup>, Sylvia Schnell<sup>1,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Applied Microbiology, IFZ, Justus-Liebig University Gießen, 35392 Gießen, Germany  
<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Basic and Biomedical Sciences, Simón Bolívar University, Barranquilla, Colombia  
<sup>3</sup>Quality of Plant Products 360, Institute of Crop Science, University of Hohenheim, 70593 Stuttgart, Germany  
<sup>4</sup>Organic Farming with Focus on Sustainable Soil Use, Department of Agronomy and Plant Breeding II, Justus-Liebig University Gießen, 35394 Gießen, Germany  
\*Corresponding author. E-mail: Sylvia.Schnell@uni-giessen.de  
Editor: Anton Hartmann

#### Abstract

Monitoring of bioinoculants once released into the field remains largely unexplored; thus, more information is required about their survival and interactions after root colonization. Therefore, specific primers were used to perform a long-term tracking to elucidate the effect of *Hartmannibacter diazotrophicus* on wheat and barley production at two experimental organic agriculture field stations. Three factors were evaluated: organic fertilizer application (with and without), row spacing (15 and 50 cm), and bacterial inoculation (*H. diazotrophicus* and control without bacteria). *Hartmannibacter diazotrophicus* was detected by quantitative polymerase chain reaction on the roots (up to  $5 \times 10^6$  copies  $g^{-1}$  dry weight) until advanced developmental stages under field conditions during two seasons, and mostly in one farm. Correlation analysis showed a significant effect of *H. diazotrophicus* copy numbers on the yield parameters straw yield (increase of  $453 \text{ kg ha}^{-1}$  in wheat compared to the mean) and crude grain protein concentration (increase of 0.30% in wheat and 0.80% in barley compared to the mean). Our findings showed an apparently constant presence of *H. diazotrophicus* on both wheat and barley roots until 273 and 119 days after seeding, respectively, and its addition and concentration in the roots are associated with higher yields in one crop.

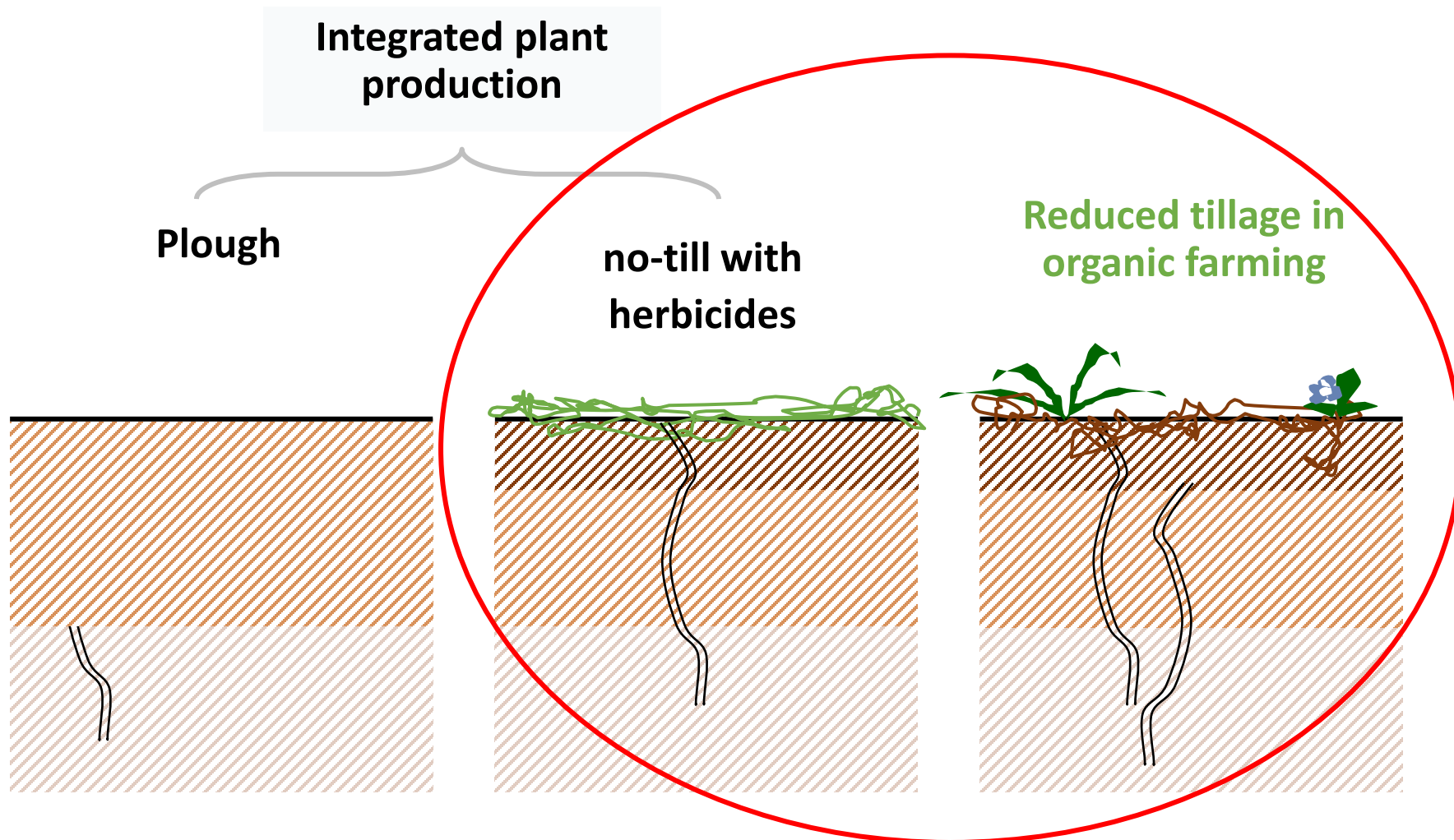
**Keywords:** coating; detection; gum arabic; PGPR; qPCR; root colonization; seed inoculation; survival

#### Introduction

Since Kloepper and Schroth (1978) introduced the term plant growth-promoting rhizobacteria (PGPRs), a broad spectrum of research has focused on revealing the complexity of plant-microbial interactions and how they are able to induce beneficial effects on plant immunity, growth, and productivity (Kloepper 1981, Kirchhof et al. 1997, El Zermamy et al. 2006, Burns et al. 2015, Singh et al. 2022). PGPRs enhance plant performance through different mechanisms that have been widely reported over the years, such as nitrogen fixation (Hartmann et al. 1988), phosphorus solubilization (Wani et al. 2007), phytohormone production (Coswami et al. 2014), or triggering plant defense responses (Kloepper et al. 2004). These advances in PGPR research over the last decade have been linked to a paradigm shift toward sustainable agriculture (Singh et al. 2011, Backer et al. 2018). The current global attempt to reduce the use of mineral fertilizers and chemical pesticides has become an important issue, with special attention paid to most cultivated crops because of their environmental, economic, and social impacts (Thudi et al. 2021). The excessive use of mineral fertilizers contributes to not only the release of nitrous oxide ( $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ) to the atmosphere but also soil erosion and nitrate ( $\text{NO}_3^-$ ) leaching into groundwater. The latter has become a serious problem in Germany, reporting an excess of the maximum  $\text{NO}_3^-$  permissible value ( $50 \text{ mg l}^{-1}$ ) in several groundwater-sampling sites in recent years (Sundermann et al. 2020). Wheat and barley are among the six most produced cereals around the world, being fundamental in human nutrition, but at the same time, their cultivation may have a negative environmental impact due to the energy consumption for the production of fertilizers and pesticides, whose excessive use can lead to eutrophication and contaminated drinking water. Thus, several strategies have been considered to enhance yield from a sustainable perspective, including molecular breeding (Würschum et al. 2017), bioformulations (Yahya et al. 2022), or disease resistance (Skoppek et al. 2022). In this context, the use of PGPR has led to the release of several biofertilizers into the market. They aim to avoid soil degradation, reduce greenhouse emissions, and, at the same time, maintain soil fertility without reducing crop production (Aloo et al. 2022). However, PGPRs have to face and overcome many challenges. The effectiveness of PGPRs tested *in vitro* under

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# Conservation tillage



# Mulch vegetable farming – planting vegetables into a mulched biomass enables open-field vegetable production without irrigation and more soil carbon and similar emissions

**Saat einer  
geeigneten  
Zwischenfrucht**

- Gemenge aus Grünschnittroggen- Zottelwicke- Erbse (60;20;20)
- Benötigt ca. die geplante Gemüsefläche x Faktor 2 (zzgl. 100 %)



**Mulchen und  
Nachstreuen**

- Geräte: Schlegelmulcher, Ladewagen mit Streuwerk
- Ziel: min. 15 t TM ha<sup>-1</sup>



**Pflanzung der  
Jungpflanzen**

- Pflanzung mit spez. Pflanzmaschine („MulchTec“)



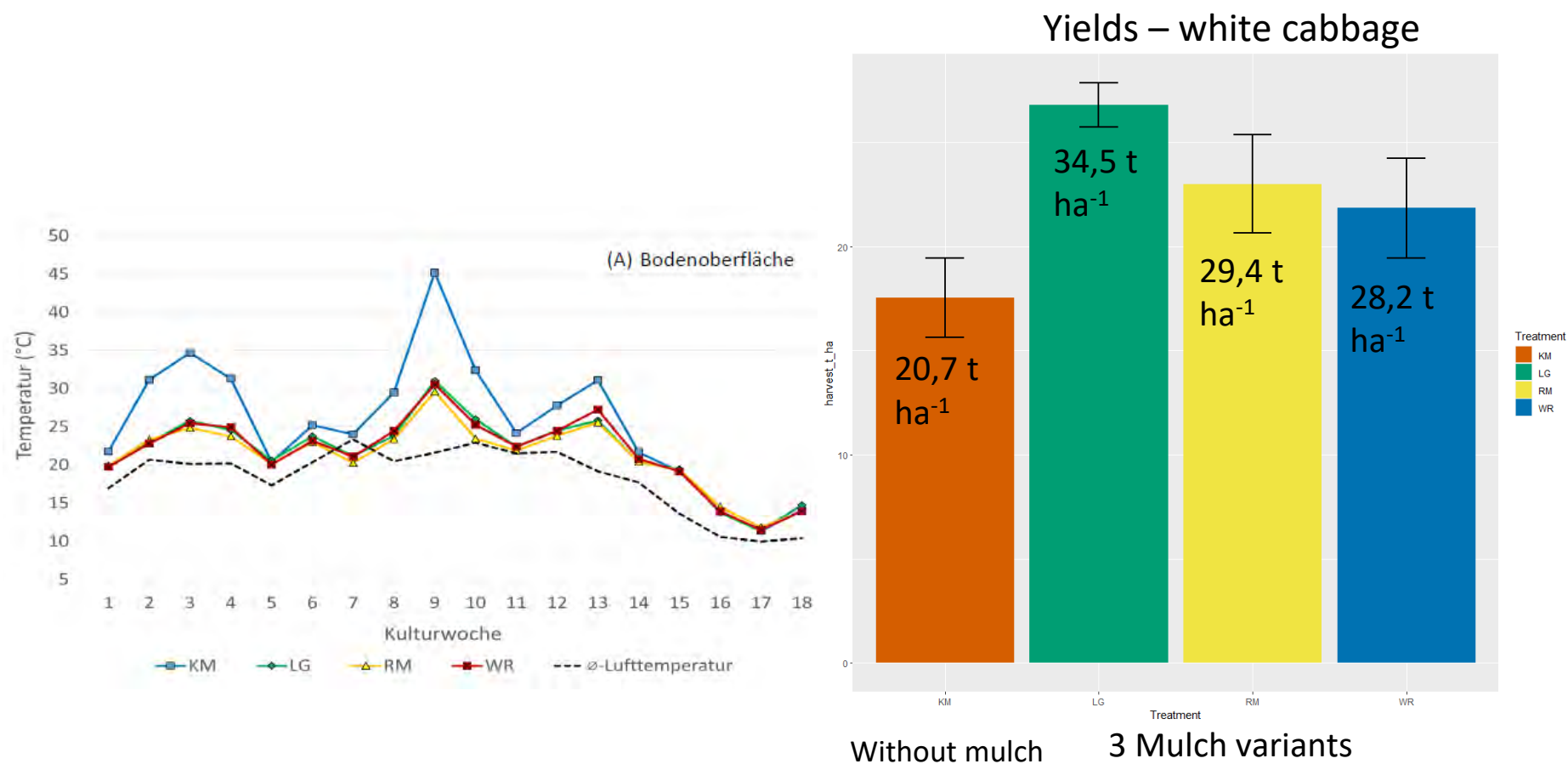
# Organic cabbage cropping as influenced by different green mulch materials (August 2022)

TÄT GIESSEN



Dix, Hauschild et al. 2024, Hauschild, Dix et al. in prep.; Dix et al. in prep.

Mulch reduces ground temperature, reduces water losses and increases yields in dry conditions



# Developing organic farming: benefits and the role of knowledge

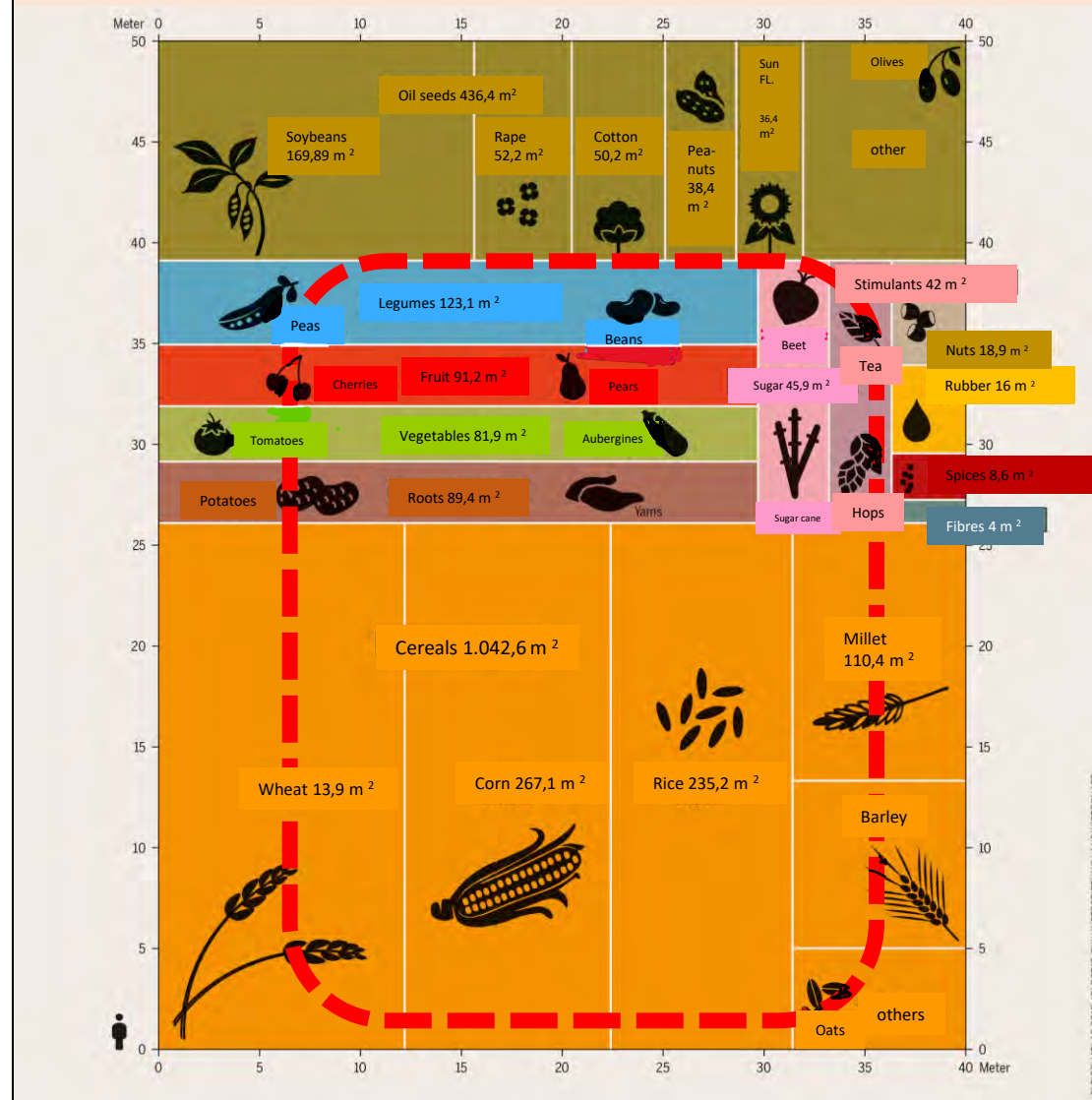
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# High land use due to livestock farming

## A GLOBAL ACREAGE OF 2.000 SQUARE METERS

Global cultivation of crops on fields and in permanent crops, area per capita of the world population, 2014, selection



**77% (of 2.000 m²) =  
1.540 m² for animal  
feed (meat, milk, eggs)**

## Reduction in grass feeding in favour of increased proportions of maize, cereals and soya in the ration... decline in grazing! (ruminant nutrition?)



„Feedlots“ in Argentina

<http://portaldelinterior.com>

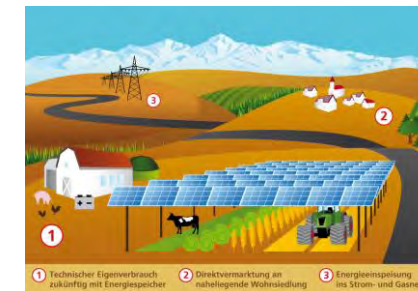
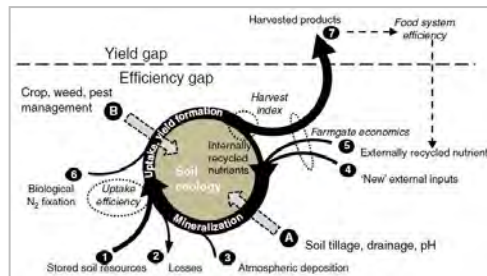


Bull fattening barn in Germany

[agrarheute.com](http://agrarheute.com)

# Eco-functional intensification and circular economy in the crop-livestock system

- Closing yield and efficiency gaps according to best ecological practices
- Targeted utilisation of natural processes and ecosystem services
- **Strong linkage between crop production and animal husbandry: soil-animal-plant systems, no competition between livestock and human food/feed**
- **Instead symbioses, synergies, multidimensionality incl. bioeconomy**

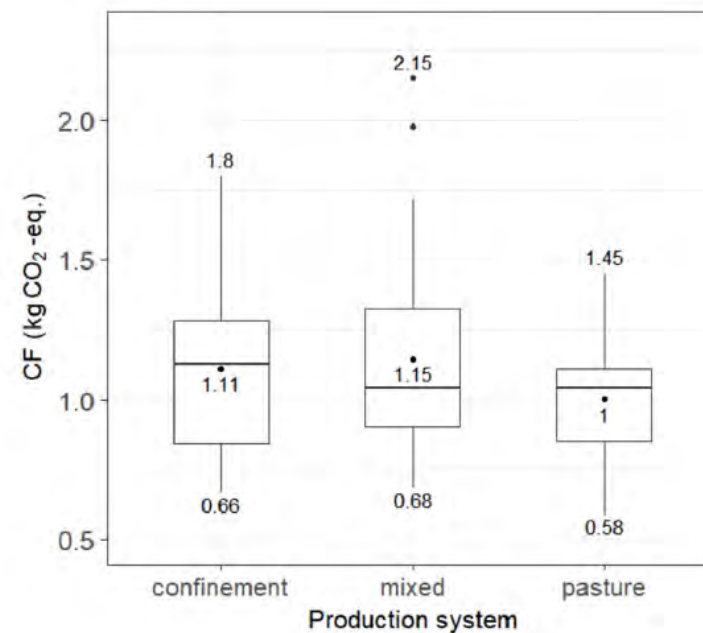


Nordwijk & Brussard (2014), Current Opinion Environmental Sustainability, 8:62-70

# Equal „Carbon footprint“ in grass based / low-input dairy production despite lower productivity compared to in-door systems



**Prof. Dr. Friedhelm Taube**  
Uni Kiel & Uni Wageningen

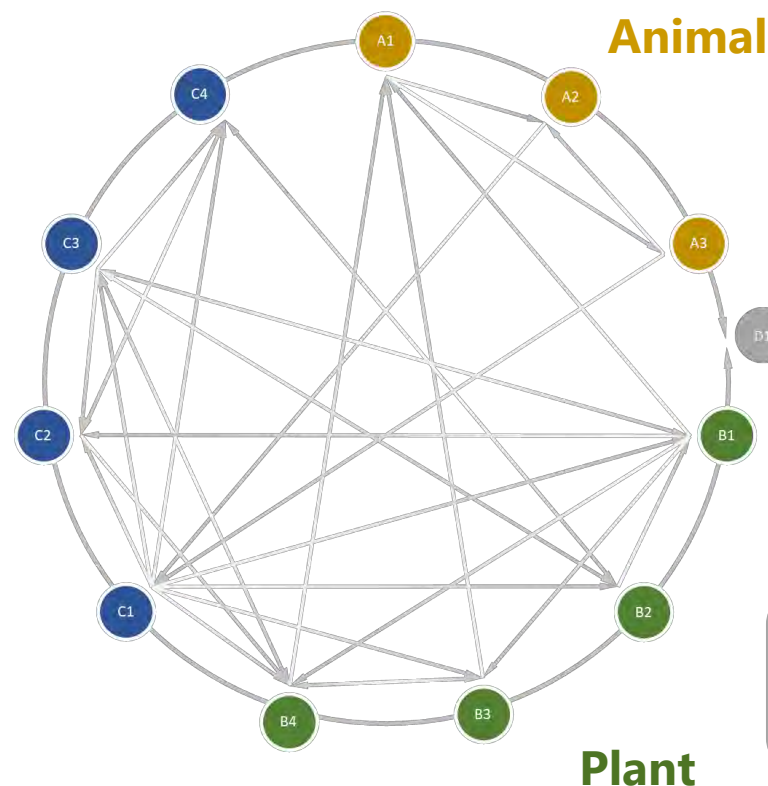


# GreenDairy: Goals

...Developing innovative crop-livestock systems, which are ecologically and economically sustainable at highest animal welfare levels and so they will be accepted by the society.

Information and data flow

Environment



Bewertung

Datenintegration

Synthese

Übertragbarkeit

Betriebsnetzwerk Upländer  
Bauernmolkerei  
LLH Eichhof  
Uni Kassel Frankenhausen

# Research Farm Gladbacherhof

## Gladbacherhof in short

Agricultural Teaching and Research Facility (LFE) for Organic Farming at JLU Giessen (since 1990)

- Mixed farm in a low mountain range location (9.5°C avg T, 655 mm annual precipitation)
- 110 ha arable land, 77 ha permanent grassland
- 8-year crop rotation with maize cultivation

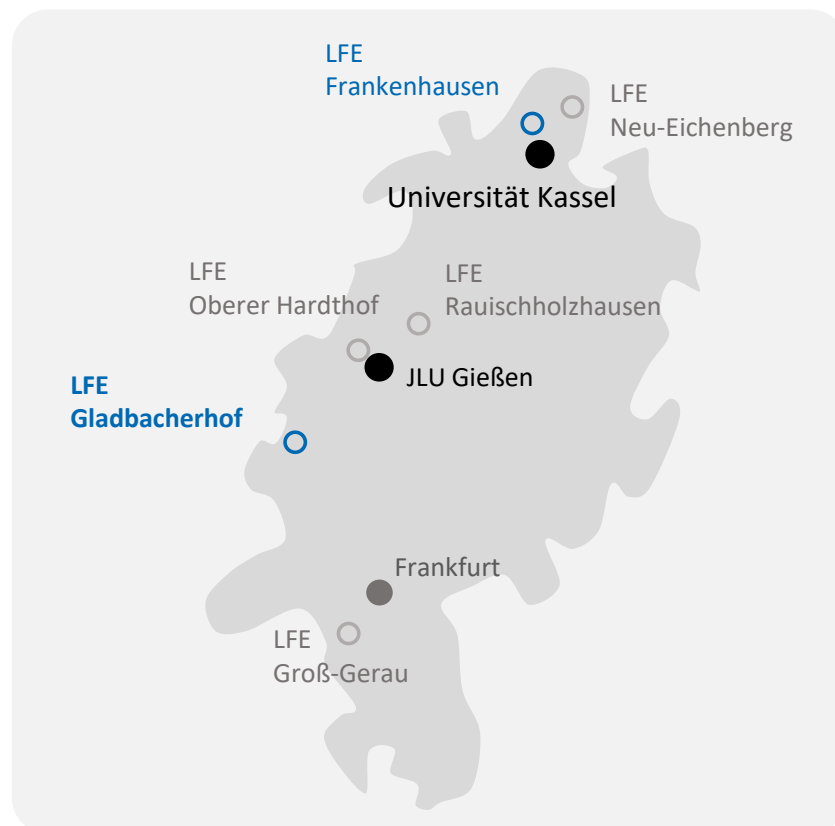
Main areas of operation:

- Dairy farming (2x 64 Holstein Friesian cows with 9,000 or 7,200 kg milk/cow/year), breeding goal: lifetime production
- Seed and planting material production
- Laying hens (mobile chicken coop)
- Direct marketing



Impacts of our research

- Working together with extension services in several research projects
- New Leibnitz Institute: Innovation Centre for Agricultural Transformation (IAT) in Brandenburg and Hessen (5 Living labs)



## GreenDairy – Research platform Gladbacherhof, Uni Gießen: Organic farming since 1983 (110 ha arable, 70 ha permanent grassland; Rainfall: 640 mm; silty-sandy loam)



## GreenDairy – modern technologies in organic cattle husbandry



Feeding robot Lely Vector, but also Slurry robot (Lely Collector) and milking robot (Lely Astronaut)

## GreenDairy – cows have 24/7 free access to pastures and milking robots



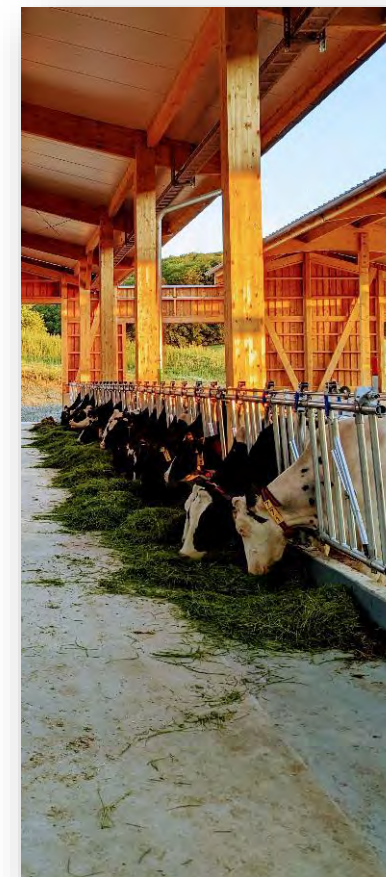
Grasshopper platometer for determination of forage uptake through grazing

## GreenDairy – which feeding intensity for dairy cows in organic crop-livestock systems?

### Feeding regime since 01/2024 after 9 months of transition

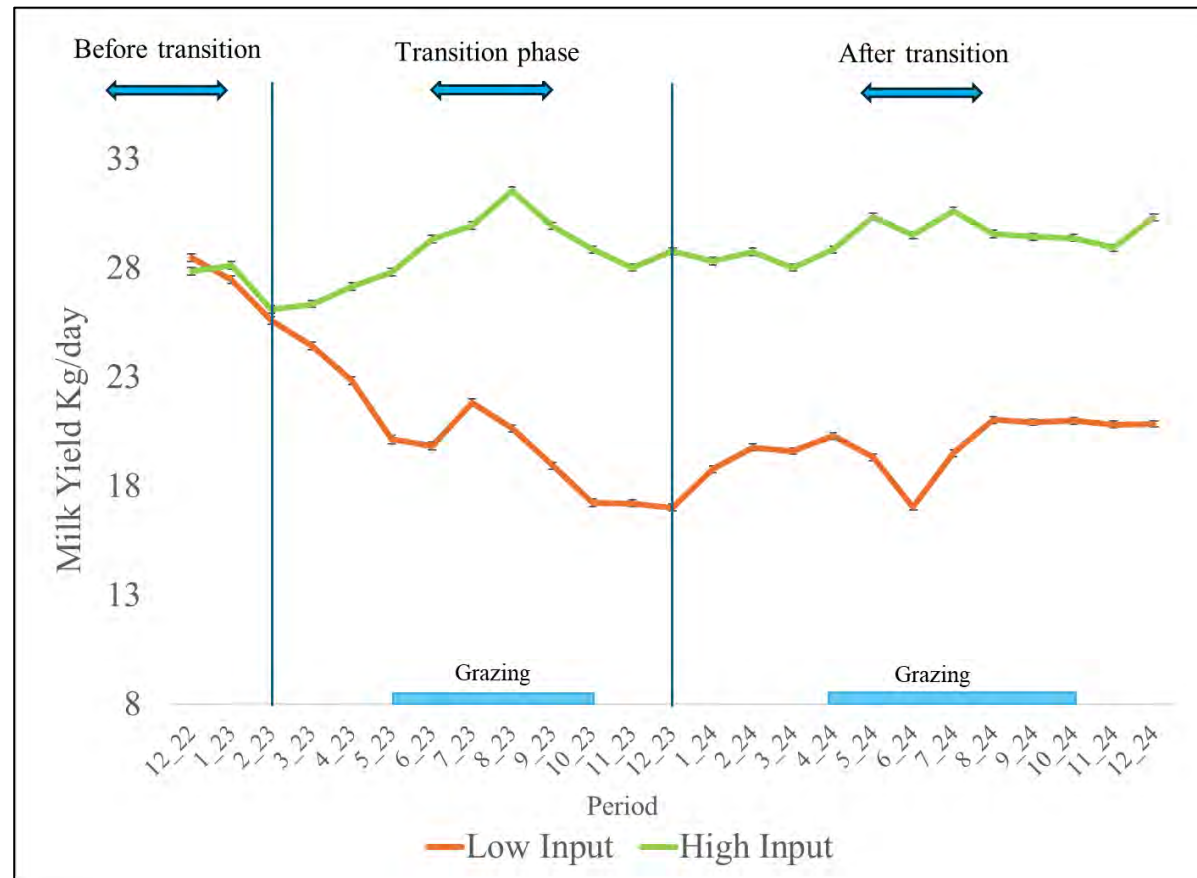
| Share on the total DMI        | High-Input | Low-Input |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Dry matter intake Kg/cow/day  | 22.1       | 20.3      |
| Alfalfa Silage % (N-fixation) | 36         | 27        |
| Grass Silage %                | 12         | 49        |
| Corn Silage %                 | 23         | 0         |
| Concentrate %                 | 29         | 24        |

- Feed less food: High input cows take 88% of their feed and low input 51% feed from arable land; low input spares 27% potential human food
- All cows have continuous grassland access from April to November
- Young livestock feeds 100% on pastures from April to November



## GreenDairy – organic High Input dairy cows (Holsteins) in 2 groups

64x High Input (+maize), 64x Low Input (-maize) in a longterm trial

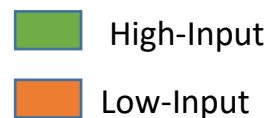
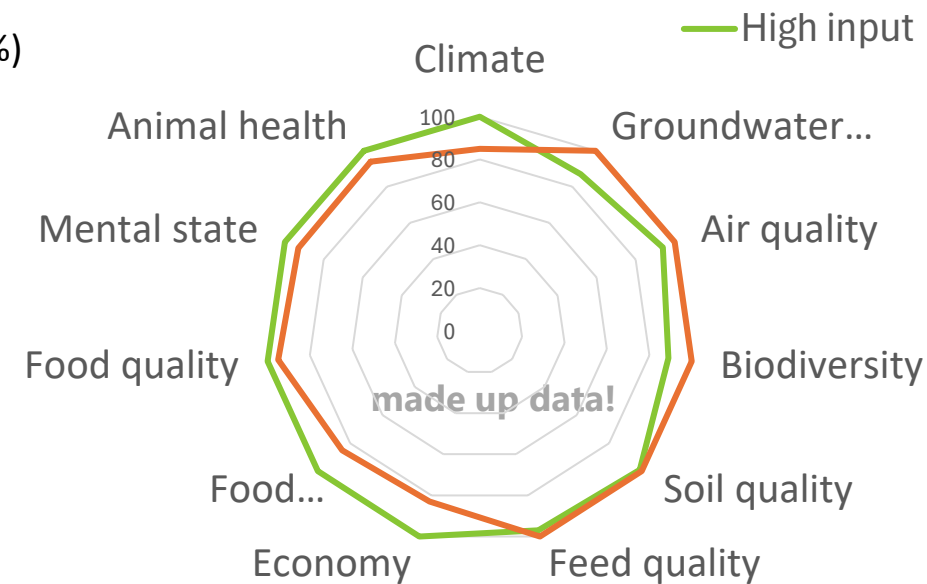


# GreenDairy – Milk yields 2024

| Variable                     | High-Input   | Low-Input    |      |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------|
| Milk Yield (kg/d)            | 29.3 ± 0.04  | 19.8 ± 0.04  | -30% |
| ECM (kg/d)                   | 32.4 ± 0.05  | 22.7 ± 0.04  |      |
| Milk Kg /Cow /Year           | 8800         | 6200         |      |
| Fat (%)                      | 4.26 ± 0.004 | 4.43 ± 0.004 |      |
| Protein (%)                  | 3.19 ± 0.002 | 3.27 ± 0.002 |      |
| Lactose (%)                  | 4.54 ± 0.001 | 4.55 ± 0.001 |      |
| SCS                          | 2.14 ± 0.01  | 1.38 ± 0.01  |      |
| Dry matter intake Kg/cow/day | 22.1 ± 0.10  | 20.3 ± 0.10  |      |
| Concentrate Kg/Cow/day       | 7.1          | 5.1          | -28% |

## System analysis – organic High-Input performs better on 11 categories, but worse on biodiversity, air – and groundwater quality (reference year 2024)

- Steps:
  1. Reduction of indicators (from >100 to <60)
  2. Classification (n=11)
  3. Data from subprojects: boxplot (min, Q1, median, Q3, max), year 2024
  4. Standardization (median of better system = 100%)
  5. Determination direction per indicator
  6. Average % of all indicators per class
  7. Radar chart for system comparison



**Living lab “Organic Dairy Germany”** Developing innovative crop-livestock systems, which are ecologically and economically sustainable at highest animal welfare levels and so they will be accepted by the society.

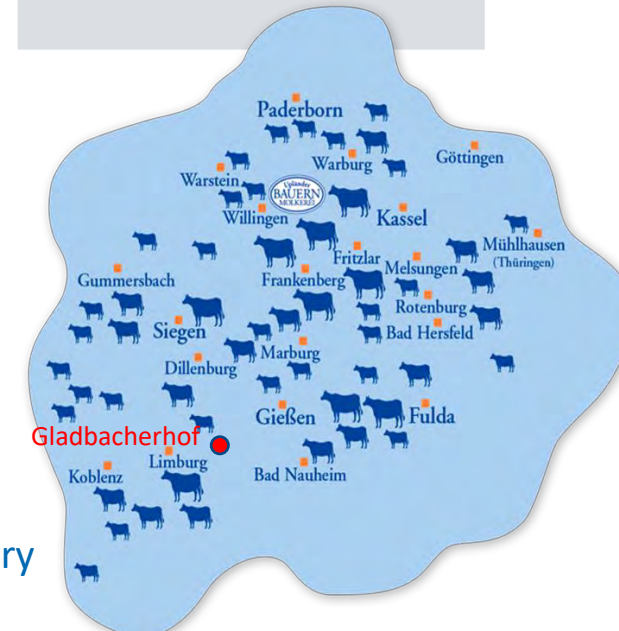
**1 Demonstration  
Farm:  
Glabbacherhof**



**10 Lead  
Commercial Farms:  
Upländer Dairy  
Network**



**100  
outreach farms:  
only Upländer Farms**



Milk producer of the Organic dairy factory  
„Upländer Bauernmolkerei“

# ClieNFarms: Carbon Footprints of 1+10 organic dairy farms in the living lab “Organic Dairy Germany”

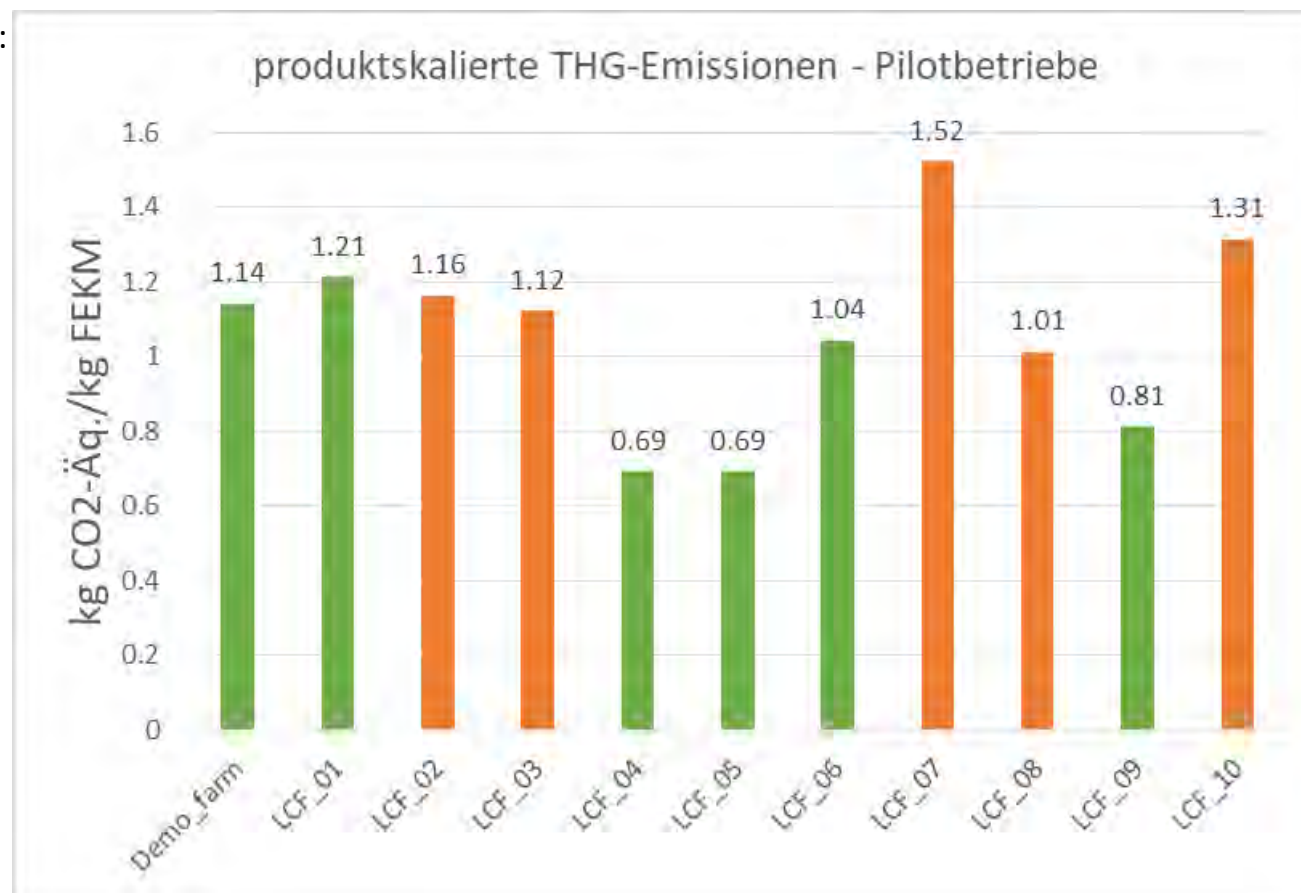
produktskalierte THG-Emissionen:  
**Durchschnitt von 11 Betrieben:**  
**1,06 kg CO<sub>2</sub>-Äq./kg FEKM**

## Milk yields of the farms (per cow and year):

High input: ca. 9.000 kg

Low input: ca. 6.000 kg

■ High-Input-Farms  
■ Low-Input - Farms



## Concluding words

- Organic farming is a system approach. It is a smart combination of traditional knowledge with modern technologies.
- Eco-functional intensification and crop-livestock integration as promising approaches for delivering the full potential of organic farming
- Organic farming is a knowledge-intensive approach: investments in research, demonstration, and advisory systems are central ingredients of success

