

Reviewing the Drivers and Barriers to Conversion to Organic Fruit and Vegetable Production in the UK

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Abstract

In the last few years the market for organic food has continued to increase and yet the conversions of new farmland in the UK has failed to keep up. Clearly, there are a range of factors that affect the ability of organic producers in different sectors to meet consumer demand. This paper reports on a research project, which has reviewed data, information, and literature from the UK organic fruit and vegetable sectors, with the view to identifying factors which encourage farmers in these sectors to convert or barriers to prevent them from doing so. In common with other sectors, the main factors driving farmers to convert are economic ones, although other additional factors are also important. There are also economic factors which are acting as barriers, including the high "costs of conversion," and the lowering of organic prices, which is making organic production less viable. This has recently been combined with an increase of nonorganic prices, which has made the switch to organic production less tempting. Key structural and technical barriers are further constraining the conversions to organic production. These include lack of high-quality land, growing and marketing skills, and appropriate varieties and seeds.