Abstract: Despite only receiving a small amount of available research funding at European and national levels, the organic food and farming system has performed remarkably well. On the one hand it provides market and development opportunities for a huge number of farmers, SMEs and rural areas. On the other hand it has improved the environmental performance of farming and offers a leading example for a sustainable food and farming system. The Strategic Research Agenda provides a guide to the key research goals identified that, with sufficient research funding, could significantly contribute to achieving greater sustainability of food and farming.

Key words: research funding, organic food and farming, research goals, key Challenges, Vision, climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, Empowerment of rural areas, Eco-functional intensification, Food for health and wellbeing.

TP ‘Organics’ is a platform for organic food and farming research which joins the efforts of industry and civil society in defining organic research priorities and defending them vis-à-vis the policy-makers. It serves as a carrier, which ensures integration of the needs of organic agriculture in: the food sector involved in European research agendas, the EU framework programmes, national ministries and research institutions.

The Platform is a growing bottom-to-top initiative of (currently) 20 EU umbrella organisations and 18 enterprises with a big potential to integrate many more business partners, and national and EU-level public and private actors in the field.

Members of the organic agriculture movement, the scientific community and the wider civil society have already offered to contribute on a voluntary basis to the work of the Platform.

In December 2008 the Platform officially published its Vision for Organic Food and Farming 2025. The Vision reveals the huge potential of the organic food production to mitigate some of the major global problems of the century from climate change, to food security, to the whole range of socio-economic challenges in the rural areas.

This vision takes a long-term perspective on the research needs of organic agriculture and food systems.

In the Vision, three strategic provide a framework for the definition of Key Challenges and the associated research goals that can support ongoing development of the organic sector and other low external input systems to secure healthy food supplies, protect rural economies and and safeguard ecosystems. The three themes are: 1. Empowerment of rural areas and economies at a local, regional, national and global scale; 2. Eco-functional intensification of food production to secure food supplies and ecosystem services; 3. Food for health and human wellbeing as a basis for healthy diets to improve the quality of life.

The Vision provided the basis for the development of the Strategic Research Agenda (SRA), prepared following comprehensive stakeholder engagement and consultation during 2009. Special attention was given to the involvement of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).
The SRA was developed in three steps:

1. Key Challenges were identified for each of the three themes outlined in the Vision; 2. Research goals were defined based on the feedback from stakeholder consultations and expert advice; 3. Research goals were formulated as project descriptions. For each of the Key Challenges research goals were identified and these are presented and described more in detail.

The consultative process involved the active participation of many different countries (Figure 1). Consultation involved researchers, advisors, members of inspection/certification bodies, as well as different users/beneficiaries of the research such as farmers, advisors, processors, market actors and members of civil society organisations throughout Europe and further afield in order to gather the research needs of the whole organic sector. The types of organisations involved in the consultation are presented in Figure 2, with a detailed breakdown of the types of SMEs that participated in Figure 3.

Over 300 stakeholders and researchers contributed to the process. In addition more than 110 experts were involved in formulating and/or reviewing descriptions of research goals/topics. Three major cross-cutting challenges were identified and considered separately from the themes outlined in the Vision: climate change, biodiversity loss and water scarcity.

A further horizontal cross-cutting issue is that of knowledge management and communication. In each of the three Vision themes the Key Challenges were identified and for these up to six research goals and research topic descriptions were worked out. These descriptions include information about the goal, the rationale behind it, the research questions, the expected impact, the priority (short, medium or long term) and possible funding schemes.

Altogether 61 detailed research goals and detailed topic descriptions have been formulated. Following the process of consultation 11 of the 61 topics have been identified as of the highest short term priority. These are listed below:

- **Cross-cutting issues:**
  - Minimising the climate footprint through improved soil management (enhanced carbon sequestration) in organic farming systems
  - European knowledge sharing and transfer platform for organic and low-external input farming
- **Empowerment of rural areas and economies:**
  - European social sustainability impact of organic and low external input farms and supply chains;
  - Innovative ways to implement key principles in organic standards and regulations
  - Data network for better European organic market information
- **Eco-functional intensification:**
  - Improved use of ecological support functions for resilient organic and low external input crop production
  - Innovative forms of mixed farming for optimized use of energy and nutrients
  - Assessment of organic aquaculture for further development of regulatory framework
- **Food for health and human wellbeing:**
  - Development of quality testing methodology for organic food quality
  - Processing with care – development of a Code of Practise for organic food processing
  - Identification of appropriate biomarkers through animal feeding studies to evaluate effects on health from consumption of food from different production systems.
Figure 1 - Country of participants in TP Organics consultation.

Figure 2: Organisations involved in TP Organics consultation.

Figure 3: Types and numbers of small medium enterprises (SMEs) involved in TP Organics consultation.