

Arable Cross Visit Report

Water protection, water saving management and value chain solutions in eastern Germany

GERMANY, HALLE

19-21 JUNE 2025

Practical water management strategies are among the key challenges of the future. This topic was addressed at the arable cross visit 2025 in Germany, a 2.5-days cross-border exchange combined with the Organic Field Days. Participants came from the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Finland and Germany.

Something for everyone: The Organic Field Days

The event kicked off at the Organic Field Days near Leipzig. The host was Wassergut Canitz, a partner company of the waterworks whose primary goal is to protect drinking water resources in the catchment area. The [Organic Field Days](#) take place every two years at a different location. This year, the fair attracted 362 exhibitors and about 9,000 visitors. It covers all topics related to organic crop production and organic animal husbandry.



Image 1: Overview of the exhibition grounds, photo: Phillip Leingärtner

Participants were able to learn about concepts ranging from crop rotation and soil cultivation to resource-saving irrigation techniques, to see innovative technology in use on site and make personal contact with manufacturers.

The morning began with a guided tour of six stations on different topics: agroforestry, legumes, mulch, crop rotation, seeds and varieties. The Federal Agency for Agriculture and Nutrition provided information about the Federal Organic Farming Programme (Project funding and Research in Germany, www.bundesprogramm.de) and selected projects. The participants were particularly impressed by the various systems of agroforestry, e.g. the keyline agroforestry system (www.keyline-agroforst.de), and the large selection of organically bred varieties. Afterwards the participants were able to explore the fair on their own.

The afternoon programme also included a workshop in the networking area, which was also open to others and three visitors from Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom joined in. In addition to a presentation of the aims of the [OrganicAdviceNetwork project](#), there was time to express their expectations and wishes; building a network of experts, knowledge transfer from science into practice and or continuity even after the project has ended were mentioned.

The conclusion of the day: It was so exciting that we could have stayed much longer!



Image 2: The networking area provided space for further exchange, photo: Timo Seibert

Diversity convinces: the Farm of Jörg Schröder

On the second day, the group first visited a farm that focuses on soil health. On its fundamentally very good soils (loess, 85-95 points on the German 100-point scale), water is the limiting factor (annual precipitation 465 l/m²).



Image 3: Group photo in the courtyard of the Schröder farm, photo: Timo Seibert

In the experience of the farmer, the conversion to organic farming and changes in crop rotation have significantly improved soil quality, water retention capacity and yield stability. He now manages 302 hectares without ploughing, cutting flat with a cultivator.

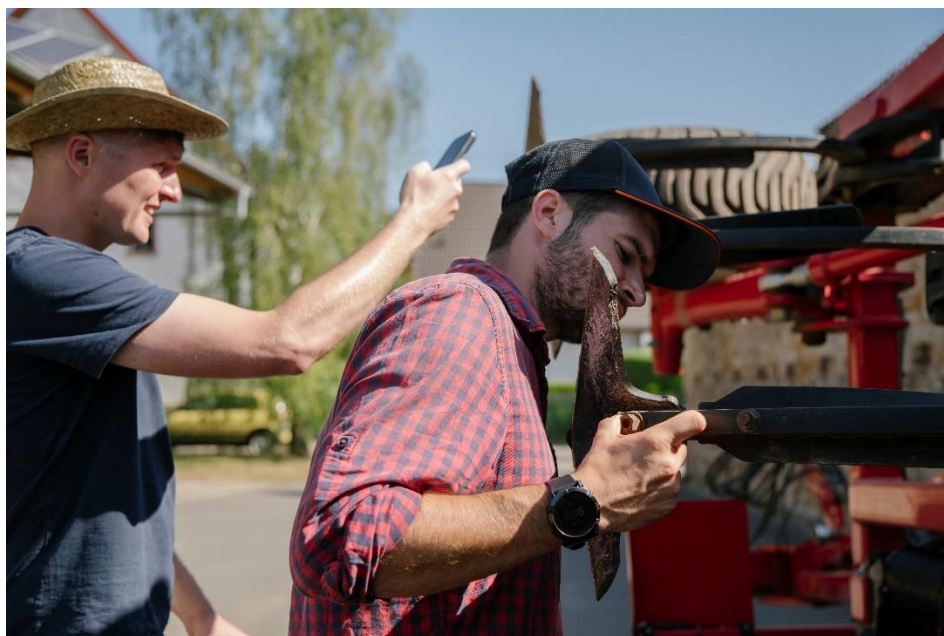


Image 4: A participant discovers that the original shares of the cultivator have been replaced. 'Yes, I get on better with this make,' explains farm manager Jörg Schröder, photo : Martin Matěj

Although the subsidy situation was unclear at the time of the conversion and many advised him against doing it, the farmer has not regretted his decision. Since then, he has been growing more crops (including sunflowers, soybeans, camelina and chickpeas) and is cleaning and

storing his harvest himself. In doing so, he is trying to counteract what he considers to be the biggest uncertainty factor: high price fluctuations.

The conversion period was very challenging, he reports. Above all, adjusting to the new crops and contractual partners. He finds the exchange with other farms very fruitful and important, whether with interested neighbours in the village or through his participation in the demo farm network. Every year, he allows himself 20-30 hectares of 'playground'. This year, he is trying oilseed flax and safflower. Hemp has not caught on, and he considers growing chickpeas to be difficult.

What impressed the participants most was that the farm manager made a courageous decision to go organic against all recommendations and was still successful. True to the saying, where there's a will, there's a way.

Holistic approach: the University of Halle

Participants saw some of the crops grown by Schröder again later at the experimental station of the University of Halle. The [SuSaKlim project](#) aims to combine the cultivation of drought-tolerant crops in the context of climate change with the establishment of regional marketing structures. The crop range extends from grain legumes (chickpeas, dry beans, peanuts, vigna beans) to new 'superfoods' (millet, sorghum, teff, sesame). The 'new' crops are integrated into a crop rotation trial.



Image 5: Urte Grauwinkel from University Halle tells participants that hemp grows well but needs too much water, photo: Werner Vogt-Kaute

Another focus of the project is on the cultivation of mixed crops, evaluating plots with field beans and spring wheat in comparison to the respective single cultures. The staff at the University of Halle also benefited from experience of a participant from Finland who reported that mixtures with oats and ryegrass are grown in his home country, but that success depends greatly on the varieties.



Image 6: Mixture of field beans and spring wheat in the trial, photo: Martin Matěj

Frequently undervalued: Soft Skills

In the soft skills workshop on Saturday morning, participants had the opportunity to address communication issues and receive tips for improvement.



Image 7: Speaker Didem Aydurmuş (Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development) leads an entertaining morning session on soft skills, photo: Werner Vogt-Kaute

Practical elements lightened up the event, e.g. active listening exercises.

One participant said at the end: 'I didn't realise how important it is to ask the right questions'.

Keep it up: Conclusion and outlook

'The long journey was worth it,' said one participant in the final feedback round. The size of the network and the openness of the participants were appreciated and found to be extremely helpful. They would like to see more diversity and fewer monopolies in the organic sector.

The exchange with colleagues, farm managers and experts provided concrete ideas for integration into their own work. The insight into the organisation of advisory services in Germany and the environment conducive to them was also interesting.

The Czech participants had a cameraman with them and shot a video during the first two days, which will be used in consultancy. There is an intention to continue cultivating contacts and to use the expertise in the network, e.g. by inviting speakers to events.

Everyone took home fresh energy to continue working on organic farming and the desire to bring the new knowledge into their own organisations.

The most important lesson learned by everyone was that there are major infrastructural differences between the EU countries and that it is very important to

- learn from each other
- think outside the box
- consider different perspectives
- exchange ideas,

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