A Leader in Organic Farming

Governments have been involved in regulating agricultural production and supporting farm incomes since the 1930s.¹ Since the mid-1980s, scientists, environmental NGOs, environmental authorities and policymakers have increasingly become aware of the fact that modern agricultural production is a source of surface water and groundwater pollution, and has harmful effects on biodiversity. Further, and over the last few years compelling evidence has emerged that food production is a major emitter of greenhouse gases. One of the policy responses to address agricultural pollution and environmental damage has been government support for organic farming.

In most developed countries, governments are involved in promoting the organic food and farming sector. While the concept of organic farming dates back to Rudolf Steiner’s thoughts in the 1920s and 1930s, it was not until the late 1980s that national governments saw organic farming as a policy measure to address environmental issues in the farming industry. The European Union (EU) became involved in promoting organic farming in the 1990s. It introduced subsidies for organic farming and baseline standards for organic farming and food production with which member states were obliged to comply (Lynggaard 2006). Member states can provide additional support for organic farming and formulate national policies to grow the organic industry. There is significant variation in the way in which the member states have used this flexibility to design their organic food and farming policies.

Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have adopted policies to promote organic food and farming. They have introduced a variety of regulatory, subsidy

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and information dissemination measures and have provided funding for research in organic farming methods to increase the production and consumption of organic food. The Danish policy is the most comprehensive amongst the Nordic countries and rests on two pillars. It includes supply-side policy measures aimed at creating conditions for farmers to convert to and maintain organic farming and demand-side policy measures designed to increase the demand for organic food. Such an organic policy model has been coined *active market development policy* (Daugbjerg and Sønderskov 2012; Halpin et al. 2011). The policy has provided conditions which enable Denmark continuously to lead globally in terms of increasing organic food consumption. It has displayed innovative policymaking by designing and effectively implementing policy instruments which were new and unseen within the agricultural policy domain. It has integrated both conventional and organic interest associations in policymaking, and built a consensus that organic farming is an integral part of the Danish farm industry. It has generated unique policy capacity. Finally, it has set the policy on an enduring course of promoting the organic food and farming sector.

Hence, the Danish organic food and farming policy can be considered a success despite short-lived programmatic setbacks. We use the PPPE heuristic to assess policy success across the following four dimensions:

- **Programmatic dimension**: effective implementation of instruments, goal achievement and impact;
- **Process dimension**: use of expertise and stakeholder involvement in policy design;
- **Political dimension**: extent to which policy enjoys social, political and administrative support;
- **Endurance**: consolidation and continuation of policy.

We start by analysing the success of the Danish organic food and farming policy across the three first-mentioned dimensions. Before we turn to endurance, we firstly analyse policy context, challenges and agents and secondly, policy design and choices. This enables the analysis of endurance in the subsequent section. The two final sections explore whether a counternarrative exists and conclude the analysis.

**A Policy Success?**

While factors other than government policy affect the growth of the organic farm and food sector, there is a significant impact from the Danish organic food and farming policy (Daugbjerg and Sønderskov 2012). Since the Danish government became engaged in promoting the organic farming and food sector in 1987, the government interest has been to expand the organic sector, though there has been
a slightly different emphasis on the degree of government involvement over time. While the governments led by the Social Democrats generally have been more willing to intervene in the organic farming and food sector than governments led by the Liberal Party, there has been a general agreement on the desire to grow the organic sector (Schvartzman 2012).

The Danish organic food and farming policy has been widely considered a success and very little opposition to it has been articulated. The achievements of the policy are broadly supported by the political parties across the spectrum as well as the farm associations. Government officials take pride in the policy and what it has achieved. No actor with a stake in policy has claimed to be negatively affected. It provides benefit to the organic farming and food industry but not at the expense of other actors, and it does not exclude farmers or other market actors from benefiting from policy if they decide to ‘go organic.’ The policy costs are shouldered by taxpayers but discontent within this broad group has not been voiced to an extent at which a political party has articulated it in the policy debate.

Programmatic success

The objectives of the Danish organic food and farming policy were broadly formulated and difficult to translate into specific goals for evaluation purposes. However, a comparative perspective can enable us to assess the programmatic success of the Danish policy.

There is no consensus on how to measure organic policy success on the programmatic dimension. A measure of programmatic policy success often used by policymakers is the area of land converted to organic farming. For instance, Austria aims to maintain its position as the EU member state with the highest share of farmland converted to organic farming (Darnhofer et al. 2019). While this measure of policy success can be used to assess change in agricultural land use over time, it can also be misleading as a measure of transition to more sustainable farming practices and food consumption. For example, Australia has the largest area of certified organic land in the world but at the same time domestic consumption is very low and not even recorded. In fact, half of the world’s organic area can be found in Australia. Most of the organically certified land can be found in the Australian outback where agricultural production is based on very extensive grazing (Schlatter et al. 2021: 37–39, 67). Organic certification under such conditions would require minimal change of existing production practices. In contrast, conversion to organic farming on intensively farmed land would mean substantial change of farming practices. Hence, a better indicator of organic food policy success in programmatic terms is the level of organic food consumption, measured as the share of the total food purchases that is certified organic. Such a measure of
the degree of programmatic success resembles the degree of transformation of the food market towards sustainability.

The Danish government became involved in supporting organic farming in the late 1980s when parliament adopted the Act on Organic Farming in 1987 (Lov no. 363, 1987). The aim was to promote organic food production, but no specific objective was stated. Prior to the adoption of the Act, a report prepared within the Ministry of Agriculture had emphasized that the expansion of organic food production should be driven by the development of the market for organic produce (Landbrugsministeriet 1986, see also the following section). Hence, the degree of programmatic success of the Danish organic food and farming can best be established by using organic food consumption as the key indicator.

Denmark emerged quite early as a frontrunner in developing and growing the organic food sector. It belongs to a group of four front-running countries also including Austria, Switzerland and Sweden. Since the late 1990s when comparable international sales data became available, Denmark has had the highest level of organic food sales. By 1997, 2.5 per cent of the food purchased in Denmark was organic, positioning Denmark as the lead country (Willer and Yussefi 2000: 52). By 2019, Denmark was still leading with 12.1 per cent of the food sold by retailers and online outlets being organic, followed by Switzerland with 10.4 per cent and Austria with 9.3 per cent. Achieving 9.0 per cent, Sweden ranked fourth. Finland and Norway were well behind with 2.6 and 1.7 per cent (2016) respectively. No data were recorded for Iceland (Schlatter et al. 2021: 67–68). Growth in organic consumption is mainly driven by private purchases but consumption initiatives within the public sector have also had an impact.

Broadening the programmatic success indicator beyond consumption, the Danish organic food and farming policy has performed well in relation to other aspects. Government engagement in the Danish organic farming and food sector was originally motivated by a political desire to avoid potential future imports of organic food products which could be produced in Denmark. As the organic sector grew, it became an export industry. Exports increased from 2.3 million Danish kroner in 2003 to 3 billion kroner in 2019. Finally, the Danish organic farming sector has progressively been recognized by government for its positive contribution to the increase of sustainability in the farming sector, in particular in relation to biodiversity, reduction in pollution of surface water, groundwater and animal welfare, as for instance stated in the 2015 Agricultural Accord (Landbrugspakken).

Process success

The design and management of the organic food and farming policy process have been pivotal to both its programmatic and its political success. Stakeholders have been fully integrated into the decision-making process. A collaborative approach
to policy design and decision making has developed. By bringing together actors with relevant resources in this manner, a high level of expertise and a firm web of relationships, both crucial components of policy capability, have developed throughout the policy domain.

The Danish government became involved in the organic farming sector in 1987 when adopting the Act on Organic Farming which also established the Organic Agriculture Council (later the Organic Food Council). The government reached out to interest groups representing organic farmers and other industry, retailers and environmental groups with an interest in developing the organic food sector. Early developments within the Organic Food Council cemented a close relationship between the organic policy actors and resulted in collaborative governance arrangements within both pillars of the Danish organic farming policy, which has been a key factor in growing the organic market (Michelsen et al. 2001). This is widely acknowledged within the policy sector as documented in a series of interviews conducted by the authors in 2016. Similarly, the organic business team, which was an ad hoc committee set up by the Liberal government in 2015 and consisting of people with organic industry expertise, concluded that an important factor explaining the growth of the organic market is ‘the close collaboration between the organic industry and public authorities’ (Det økologiske erhvervsteam 2017: 9, authors’ translation).

Initially, there were ideological differences between the farm groups represented in the Council. The two main associations in organic policymaking are Organic Denmark (previously the National Association for Organic Farming) and the Agriculture and Food Council. The former represents organic farmers, consumers and food companies with an organic production line and food retailers, and the latter is a peak organization, representing mainstream farmers and the cooperative food-processing industry. Organic Denmark pursued a transformation of the whole Danish farm sector into an organic industry, wanting long-term ecological concerns to be prioritized over economic concerns. The mainstream farm unions opposed this idea and argued that increase in the size of the organic sector should be driven by consumer demand. They were against a purely state-driven form of development based upon permanent subsidies for organic production. It was considered unfair competition in relation to traditional farming; conversion subsidies were acceptable though.

Despite the ideological controversies, the members of the Organic Food Council have succeeded in agreeing on a shared principle to guide policymaking. As the Council stated in 1999, reflecting an earlier and similar statement: ‘The underlying logic is that the organic farming sector can best be developed in accordance with the market which is created by the demand for organic produce. Thus, conversion is based on voluntary action and positive motivation’ (Strukturdirektoratet 1999: 16, authors’ translation). However, in practice, this market-orientation principle was somewhat relaxed as the Council accepted subsidies for maintaining organic
production as long as these were considered temporary measures that could be reconsidered in the future (Daugbjerg and Halpin 2010; Lynggaard 2001).

As the organic sector grew in the 1990s, the Agriculture and Food Council began also to represent organic farming interest (Schvartzman 2008). For instance, the Danish Farmers’ Union established organic advisory services for their members as early as 1987, and set up an ad hoc organic group in 1996 which existed for four years. In 2000, it became permanent as the organic farming committee. Its first chairperson, Evald Vestergaard, later became president of Organic Denmark. The increasingly positive attitude towards organic agriculture was also a reflection of developments in the organic food market. Outside the farmers’ associations, the two largest dairy cooperatives (which were also represented in the Organic Food Council) envisaged a growing market for organic dairy products. In 1990, they made their big entrance into the organic food market by offering a 40 per cent price premium for organic milk to their members. Finally, the retailer FDB (now Coop), the second largest food retailer, launched their first marketing campaign for organic food in 1981. The largest retailer, Danish Supermarkets (now Salling Group), began marketing organic food in 1994 (Schvartzman 2008).

A recent indication of the collaborative relationship within the organic food policy sector is Organic Denmark and the Agriculture and Food Council’s joint proposal of May 2018 to grow the organic food and farming sector. The proposal, Organic 2021—Together on Development (Økologi 2021—Sammen om udvikling), consisted of 12 policy initiatives and stated that organic production is important for the future of Danish farming. The two associations committed themselves to collaboratively promoting the organic sector. Disagreements between the two associations on policy proposals have been limited, but when these have been adopted, both associations have contributed to implementing them. For instance, when the government proposed a programme for kitchen conversion in the public sector in 2011, the Agriculture and Food Council was somewhat sceptical. Nevertheless, it took part in the implementation of the programme. Some tension may occur as both associations compete to obtain government funding for organic export promotion projects.

Political success

The organic food and farming policy also scores high on the political success dimension. Amongst the political parties and agricultural interest associations, there is broad agreement on supporting growth of the organic sector. However, limited disagreements may emerge on the extent to which the government should directly support the development of the sector, particularly in relation to demand-side measures.
Despite such differences, all consecutive ministers of food, agriculture and fisheries have wanted to appear supportive of organic farming. Some ministers, particularly those from the Social Democratic party, have used policy initiatives to promote the organic sector as a signature measure of their term in office. Though these are all considered to have performed well in this respect, for some of them organic policy initiatives probably contributed positively to their reputation and political capital. This applies most notably to Henrik Dam Kristensen who rose from this ministerial position to become a prominent figure within the Social Democratic Party and is currently the Speaker of the Folketing (the parliament). His successor, Ritt Bjerregaard, moved on to become EU Environment Commissioner. In contrast, Mette Gjerskov, who enthusiastically promoted the organic sector, saw herself demoted to a backbench position in a cabinet reshuffle—but for reasons unrelated to organic food and farming policy. Other Social Democratic ministers of food, agriculture and fisheries made less of a footprint on organic food and farming policy and did not use it as one of their signature policies or held the appointment too short a time to do so.

Liberal ministers have not displayed the same level of personal and political commitment to organic food and farming policy since they saw themselves more closely affiliated with the conventional than with the organic farming industry. Nonetheless, they were supportive of expanding the organic farming and food industry. Notably, the Liberal/Conservative government’s Green Growth Agreement of 2009, agreed with the Danish People’s Party, stated that the area farmed organically should increase from 6 per cent of the agricultural area in 2007 to 15 per cent in 2020—a goal also supported by the subsequent Social-Democratic-led coalition government. As a liberal fingerprint, the Agreement emphasized that the increase should be market-based, meaning that farm conversion should be driven by increasing demand for organic food. This aligned with the policy principles adopted by the Organic Food Council in the mid-1990s.

**How Organic Farming’s Winning Streak Happened**

In this section, we provide an overview of how the organic policy domain developed. The circumstances in which the policy was initiated, the political support behind the policy, who became engaged and how they collaborated are key factors explaining how the organic food policy was put on a trajectory which resulted in a high degree of success.

Organic farming emerged as an alternative to conventional farming during the 1970s but was still a very small niche industry. In 1984, attention to pollution from agricultural production was growing (Schvartzman 2012). This was one of the factors motivating the Minister of Agriculture to set up an Agriculture Commission tasked with considering the legislative, economic, spatial and social conditions for
agricultural production (Schvartzman 2012). In 1986, the Commission published its first interim report on agricultural and environmental conditions. For the first time, organic farming was mentioned by government as a possible alternative to conventional agricultural production. The report described organic farming as a niche industry which could become increasingly important in the future and could potentially serve as a tool for addressing the environmental challenges within the farming industry (Schvartzman 2012).

In order to provide an overview of the conditions in the organic farming sector, the ministry set up a working group led by Flemming Duus Mathiesen to prepare a report on opportunities for organic production in Denmark. The position of the Ministry of Agriculture was from the outset that ‘farmers should not be producing something that then could not be sold and thus had to be thrown out’ (Schvartzman 2012: 112, authors’ translation). This attitude was not reserved for organic food but reflected the general position of the Ministry.

The working group had doubts about the potential of organic farming as an instrument for environmental improvement and, given the lack of scientific evidence, this aspect was somewhat downgraded in the discussions. Instead, it decided to assess the economic potential of organic agriculture as an instrument for developing the food market (Schvartzman 2012). The working group recognized the importance of conversion support for farmers but also highlighted the importance of developing sales channels and motivating consumption as a condition for expanding Danish organic production. Estimating that organic consumption could potentially achieve a market share in the region of 10 per cent (Landbrugsministeriet 1986: 6–7), it therefore recommended earmarked support for developing strategies and practices for the marketing of organic produce.

In the Danish parliament, two political parties in particular pushed for support for organic farming. The Socialist People’s Party (SF) had included promotion of organic farming as part of its environmental policy agenda since the beginning of the 1980s (Jacobsen 2005). The Social Liberal Party (Radikale Venstre) saw organic farming as a tool for maintaining and developing small- and medium-sized farms (Ingemann 2006). In 1986, the two parties initiated a parliamentary debate on organic farming. The parties were interested in supporting the development of distribution channels that would give consumers access to organic products. Furthermore, especially SF’s Steen Gade was keen on establishing a national certification scheme. Finally, the parties favoured subsidies for farmers converting to organic production. Subsequently, the two parties put forward a proposal for a support scheme for organic agriculture. Inspired by the working group’s report, the proposal introduced measures for subsidizing both organic farmers and marketing. The parties to the right in parliament were positive about organic farming due to its domestic and export-market potential (Schvartzman 2012) and supported the proposal. The Act on Organic Farming was adopted in 1987.
Outside the political arena, the National Association for Organic Farming (NAOF, later Organic Denmark) was founded in 1981 as the first association with the aim of promoting organic farming, facilitating cooperation between alternative growers, assisting new entrants and pursuing the political interests of organic farming. The association organized the majority of organic farmers until the mid-1990s. It founded the Organic Service Centre (OSC) in 1992 which worked to promote marketing and sales of organic products (Schvartzman 2008).

By the mid-1990s, a substantial number of farmers who were members of the conventional farm unions had converted their farms to organic production. Many of these were initially driven by the economic prospects of farming organically and not necessarily as ideologically committed as those who had converted their farms at earlier stages. The conversion wave of the 1990s meant that the mainstream farm unions affiliated with the Agriculture and Food Council became representatives of the majority of organic farmers (Schvartzman 2012). Yet it was still the NAOF which took the lead in advocating for an organic policy that also maintained a focus on establishing an organic market (Halpin et al. 2011). In 2003, NAOF merged with the OSC and became Organic Denmark. Over the years, it has developed a strong focus on the promotion of organic food to consumers. The mainstream agricultural associations focussed on farmers, mainly by providing organic advisory services (Schvartzman 2012). As export of organic food increased, they increasingly engaged in export promotion, sometimes in competition with Organic Denmark. As mentioned earlier, both mainstream and organic farm associations were members of the Organic Food Council, which by then had developed into a major forum of collaboration between actors in the organic food sector. However, strong collaboration in the implementation of the Danish Organic Policy developed outside the Council. We will address parts of this collaboration in the following sections.

Policy design

Government can choose among different policy strategies for developing the organic food sector. Some governments have chosen a light-touch organic market facilitation strategy in which they assist in creating a basic market infrastructure, such as introducing baseline standards for organic food production and processing, and establishing an accreditation system for private certification and labelling schemes. A second option is a supply-driven policy strategy which concentrates mainly on farm conversion encouraged by organic production subsidies. The financial support is aimed at easing farm conversion and maintaining organic production. The basic idea behind such a policy strategy is that increased supply will create its own demand and hence an organic market will develop. This is the standard policy model used across most European countries but with varying levels
of subsidization. Though there are probably no practical examples, in principle government can adopt a policy strategy in which demand-creation is the focal point by introducing, for example, consumer subsidies (e.g. lowering value-added taxes for organic food) and supporting marketing activities. Finally, governments can adopt an active market-development policy strategy in which a variety of policy instruments are combined to increase both the supply of and demand for organic food products (Daugbjerg and Sønderskov 2012; Halpin et al. 2011).

As mentioned previously, a broad political majority and the Ministry of Agriculture saw organic farming as an instrument for developing the Danish food market to cater for consumers with preferences for sustainable food. Right from the initial phases, the Danish organic food and farming policy therefore took shape as an active market-development policy (Schvartzman 2012). The Act of Organic Farming, mentioned earlier, was based on two main pillars. On the supply-side, subsidies were provided to ease farm conversion directly through conversion subsidies for farmers and indirectly through government-sponsored research and development activities as well as support for organic farm extension services. Prior to 2004, organic farm subsidies were differentiated between arable and various types of livestock production in order to motivate particular groups of farmers to switch to organic production (Halpin et al. 2011). On the demand-side, funding has been allocated to promote market development by supporting processing, marketing and distribution of organic food (Schvartzman 2012). More specifically, funding has been applied to subsidize product development, develop sales concepts and fund marketing campaigns.

In order to create consumer confidence, the Act also provided the legal framework for the establishment of a government organic certification and labelling scheme. In 1989, the government launched the now widely known red organic label which guarantees that organic products have been checked and approved as organic by Danish government authorities (Geer and Jørgensen 1996). The labelling scheme introduced government inspection of production, marketing, storage, distribution, labelling and retail sales of organic products to assure consumers that the goods they purchase are produced and processed in compliance with the organic standards. The government organic certification and labelling scheme has proved vital as it has generated a high level of consumer confidence in organic food (Sønderskov and Daugbjerg 2011; YouGov 2017).

Policy evolution

The active market-development policy strategy with its two pillars has remained intact since the organic food policy was introduced in 1987. Government subsidies for motivating farm conversion have continued, and funding for product innovation and marketing activities increased by more than 350 per cent between 1994
and 1996 (Halpin et al. 2011; Schvartzman 2012), highlighting that the 1990s under the political leadership of the Social Democratic Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Henrik Dam Kristensen (and later Ritt Bjerregaard) was a period of consolidation of the two-pillar strategy and of policy expansion. In the 2000s, the election of a Liberal and Conservative government led to a temporary setback as government funding for demand-side activities were lowered between 2002 and 2005, but the architecture of the policy remained untouched. Demand-creation initiatives were still implemented, with funding increasingly coming from the Land Tax Foundation (Promilleafgiftsfonden) and the Foundation for Organic Agriculture (Fonden for Økologisk Jordbrug) (Schvartzman 2008).²

Growing domestic and international demand for organic food products in 2006 and 2007 persuaded the Liberal/Conservative government to increase support for market development and marketing (Halpin et al. 2011). In 2009, a government organic cuisine label for public and private food services was introduced. Later that year, the government’s Green Growth Agreement (Aftale om Grøn Vækst) stated that the area farmed organically should increase from 6 per cent of the utilized agricultural area in 2007 to 15 per cent in 2020. Organic farm subsidies and support for extension services would be increased and more resources would be allocated to export promotion (Daugbjerg 2020).

In the 2010s, there was continued emphasis on facilitating growth in the demand for organic food and on motivating more farmers to convert their production. The Organic Action Plan 2020 (Økologisk Handlingsplan 2020) launched in 2012 by the Social Democratic Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Mette Gjerskov had as its flagship policy measure a scheme that supported increased procurement of organic food in the public sector. It was estimated that if 60 per cent of the meals served in the public sector were organic, an additional 20,000–30,000 hectares of land could be farmed organically. The scheme boosted the public sector’s demand for organic food products and increased organic certification of kitchens in public-sector institutions. The policy directions and priorities set out in the Action Plan 2020 and in previous policy decisions were reaffirmed and continued in the subsequent Organic Plan Denmark (Økologiplan Danmark) (Daugbjerg 2020; Daugbjerg et al. 2020). To motivate more farmers to farm organically in order to reach the goal of doubling the area farmed organically, a new organic extension service was introduced in 2010. Farmers considering converting to organic production were eligible to a so-called ‘conversion check’ (omlægningstjek) which was free of charge and consisted of an analysis of the likely

² The two foundations were established to fund various activities in the agricultural sector (for example, research, advisory services, education and sales promotion). Their revenue sources are land and pesticide taxes. The Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries appoints their governing boards, on which representatives of the agricultural sector form the majority. The foundations are administered by the Agricultural and Food Council.
economic consequences of converting to organic farming as well as professional advice regarding investment in new equipment and new production methods.

In 2018, the Growth Plan for Organics (*Vækstplan for dansk økologi*) was adopted. Similar to the preceding action plans, it maintained the mantra of market-driven development of the organic industry. Funding for organic farm conversion was granted as part of the Agricultural Accord. 130 million Danish kroner were allocated to the Foundation for Organic Agriculture to support innovation, marketing, research and development, education, advisory services, etc. for the period 2018–2021 (*Daugbjerg 2020*).

**Collaborative implementation**

To implement the policy, government had to collaborate with interest groups with relevant capacities. Within the Organic Food Council, Organic Denmark played an important role, for instance in relation to shaping the series of action plans which have set the direction for the Danish organic food and farming policy since the mid-1990s. In relation to policy delivery, Organic Denmark has been pivotal in developing capacities to assist the government in implementing the organic food policy measures. The association’s success can to a large extent be attributed to its highly qualified political team spearheaded by Paul Holmbeck.

Since farming policy has traditionally been farmer focussed, the government had expertise and an administrative organization for allocating subsidies for organic farmers, research and development activities and organic product innovation (*Ingemann 2006*). It also had well-established collaborative relationships with the mainstream farmer associations in relation to developing organic advisory services. However, both parties lacked expertise and administrative capacity to implement policy measures aimed at increasing demand for organic food. Growth in the consumption of organic food requires extensive marketing activities and the establishment of stable distribution channels through retailers (*Thøgersen 2010*). Creating stable distribution channels requires the formation of well-functioning networks among retailers, distributors and processors. To ensure an ongoing flow of organic products that fits the needs in the value chain, both in terms of quantity and quality, food retailers, food manufacturers, wholesalers and farmers have to coordinate expectations and develop long-term strategies. Since government lacked capacities for marketing of organic produce and consumer communication, it had to rely on private actors to coordinate sales promotion activities with retailers (*Schwartzman 2012*).

Competition law prohibited government from collaborating directly with retailers in relation to marketing and consequently could not generate its own administrative capacities in relation to organic marketing (*Schwartzman 2012*). The Organic Service Centre (OSC), which the NAOF had established, filled this gap.
The basic idea of the Centre was to perform as ‘the farmers’ extended arm to the consumer and to retailers’ (Halpin et al. 2011: 160). In 1995, the OSC was engaged in activities such as in-store demonstrations, answering consumer enquiries, conducting analyses of retailers’ needs and attitudes to organic products, preparing product-information material, organizing open farm days, participating in food fairs and exhibitions and handling media contacts. A highly prioritized aim was strengthening relations with retailers. The OSC’s activities were funded by fees for services and government subsidies for information campaigns. A project department, fully funded by government subsidies, was established within the OSC.

In 1999, the OSC was strongly criticized by Flemming Duus Mathiesen, who had been a key figure in designing the organic food policy in the 1980s and chaired the Organic Food Council, for not doing enough in relation to marketing, in particular with regard to marketing of organic dairy products (Schvartzman 2008, 2012). Such criticism coming from him could not be ignored and as a response the OSC launched a government-funded marketing campaign targeted at organic dairy products and a campaign for organic produce in general. In the late 1990s, the OSC established a marketing department which developed considerable expertise in marketing organic food. Moreover, it obtained important experience in facilitating coordination between processors and distributors and in engaging directly with retailers in sales campaigns focussed on specific organic products. The activities of the department were funded by government project grants or by funding granted by the Land Tax Foundation or the Foundation for Organic Agriculture (Schvartzman 2008).

These strong coordination activities undertaken by OSC and later by Organic Denmark were a significant factor in promoting sales of organic products on a large scale. Importantly, these activities brought together and created trust amongst the market actors who were essential for growing the organic market. Furthermore, they played an important role in engaging the large retailers in marketing and promoting sales of organic products and also helped processors to adjust their products towards consumer preferences (Schvartzman 2012).

The programme to increase procurement of organic food products in public-sector kitchens, introduced in 2012, moved Danish organic food policy into new territory. It became clear quite early in the programme design phase that food wholesalers were pivotal for the programme to succeed. It was essential that food wholesalers would offer organic food products to the kitchens, which most of them did not at that time. To engage them, the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, which was responsible for implementing the programme, to a considerable extent relied on Organic Denmark’s experiences in working with market actors obtained from engaging with food retailers over a number of years. The association used its market coordination expertise in a similar fashion in relation to ensuring that the food products which wholesalers wanted to market could be supplied.
It also helped them introduce administrative tools to calculate organic shares for their public- and private-sector customers certified under the organic cuisine label (Daugbjerg 2020).

Staying relevant is a key factor for policy endurance. Policies not adjusted over time to adapt to new challenges to which policy is expected to respond can become irrelevant and even collapse. For policy to endure, government must make changes at the instrumental level of policy or recalibrate policy instruments to maintain the idea underpinning policy (Daugbjerg and Kay 2020). Since the inception of the organic food policy in 1987, it has rested on the idea that expansion of the organic farming and food sector should be market driven, meaning that demand should drive expansion of production. Further, the architecture of the policy—a two-pillar structure consisting of a balanced set of demand-side and supply-side policy measures—has been sustained.

To address challenges such as stagnant or sluggish growth in demand or insufficient farm conversion, introduction of new policy instruments or recalibration of existing ones has taken place. For example, to reach the objective of doubling the area farmed organically agreed in 2009, demand for organic produce needed a boost to persuade more farmers to convert to organic production. As already discussed, this resulted in the introduction of a set of policy instruments directed at increasing the procurement of organic food within the public sector (Daugbjerg 2020). Though the policy trajectory is marked by a series of adjustments, these have not affected the policy’s overall coherence.

While some adjustments have been ad hoc, larger policy revisions and expansions have had a more institutionalized nature in the form of periodic action plans that have launched new initiatives spelt out as a set of measures to be adopted. So far, five action plans have been implemented—in 1995, 1999, 2012, 2015 and 2018. The first four were adopted under Social Democratic ministers of food, agriculture and fisheries eager to promote the organic food sector. Inputs from the organic interest associations as well as from within government formed the basis for the plans. The last mentioned action plan of 2018 was adopted by the Liberal Minister of Environment and Food and dubbed a growth plan. Unlike the previous plans, it was based on the recommendations of an ad hoc committee consisting of individuals with organic industry expertise (the organic Business team).

### Fledgling Counternarratives

Denmark is leading globally in organic food sales, which is the key indicator for programmatic success. Organic food consumption is driven mainly by food retail sales (including online outlets). While Denmark does fairly well in the field of organic food procurement in the public sector, it is well behind Sweden. The governments in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have launched policy
initiatives to increase consumption of organic food within the public sector. In relation to this aspect of promoting organic food consumption, the Danish policy has been less successful. Sweden has been most successful with 39 per cent of the food purchased in the public sector being organic in 2019, while Denmark was at 22 per cent. Finland reached 12 per cent and Norway lagged well behind with only 1 per cent (Ekomatcentrum 2020: 20). While the performance on organic food procurement in the public sector shows that in terms of programmatic success, there are aspects of the Danish organic food policy which have fared less successfully than in Sweden, this does not amount to a counter narrative. Rather, it suggests that there are aspects of policy in which there is room for further development.

As argued earlier, there is broad political support for the organic food and farming policy and expansion of the organic sector in parliament. Furthermore, the mainstream Agricultural and Food Council has long considered organic farming and food as an important interest to represent. However, within the farming community there are some dissenting voices questioning the economic and climate sustainability of organic farming, mostly expressed within the break-away farm group Sustainable Farming (Bæredygtigt Landbrug). It is focussed on the economic sustainability of the farming industry, rolling back existing agri-environmental regulations and preventing new ones; hence its name appears misleading (Daugbjerg et al. 2020). Despite the critical attitudes towards organic farming voiced by the group, on its webpage it claims also to represent organic farmers!

It has been difficult for the few dissenting voices to gain a foothold in the policy debate as there has been broad political support for the organic sector. While the political parties to the left fully embraced organic farming right from the early stages, the parties to the right initially saw the organic sector in a market perspective and considered it a niche industry which would cater to only a segment of consumers. Over time, the basis of their support broadened as they now also recognize the contribution of organic farming to sustainable food production, as for instance expressed in the 2015 Agricultural Accord which was agreed by all parties to the right in parliament.

**Conclusion: The Power of Inclusive Coalition-Building**

The government’s original intention was to grow the organic food sector, and this has been accomplished. Denmark has been leading globally in terms of organic food sales for more than two decades. The organic food policy process was set up in a way that integrated the relevant interests in the policy-making process. Amongst these interests, agreement on the basic policy principles emerged in the early phases of the policy trajectory. Importantly, new and unique capacities
were generated to successfully deliver the policy. Finally, there has been a broad political coalition behind the policy and it never developed into an arena of party competition.

The case of government promotion of the organic farming and food industry in Denmark reflects traditional Nordic and Danish ways of making public policy in economic sectors, in particular within the agricultural policy domain (Daugbjerg 1999). Though agricultural associations have lost some of their control over the policy agenda, they still have close relationships with government and are able to influence policy design. This traditional mode of making agricultural policy was copied by the organic food and farming policy sector and successfully combined with policy innovation in terms of the measures which were adopted and how they were implemented.

The Organic Food Council played a key role in the initial phases in which the organic food and farming policy was shaped. A broad range of interests with a stake in the policy is represented in the Council. Importantly, representatives of the conventional and organic farm interests succeeded in defusing a potential ideological conflict between mainstream and organic farm interests. A common paradigmatic platform was agreed in which the development of the organic farm and food sector should be market-driven with government in an active facilitating role. This framework was also important in nurturing collaboration outside the Council.

The innovative aspect of the policy regime relates to the introduction of policy measures which are aimed at growing the demand for organic food in the domestic market and to a new form of policy delivery. In the pre-EU membership era, the responsibility for the implementation of a number of agricultural policy schemes was delegated to the agricultural associations. EU membership implied that implementation responsibilities would lie with the agencies of the then Ministry of Agriculture. The organic food policy reinvigorated policy delivery through an interest association. Organic Denmark came to play a key role in implementing most of the demand-side policy measures. At the same time, the association, aided by government funding, developed unique organic marketing capacities and structures for market coordination, which were key factors in enabling successful implementation.

In the European Commission's Farm to Fork Strategy, published in May 2020, organic farming is seen as an important part in the transition to a sustainable food system. Organic farming is the most conceptually and institutionally developed alternative farming system available for a transition to a more sustainable European farm sector and some of the practices can readily be transferred to the conventional farm sector. It was envisioned in the Farm to Fork Strategy that the area farmed organically should increase from 8.5 per cent in 2019 to 25 per cent of the farmland in the EU by 2030. It is also suggested that the member states need to stimulate growth of supply and demand for organic food. The success of the Danish organic food policy in doing exactly that makes it an obvious
and proven model to transfer to other member states in the European Union. While the member states already have policy capacities to expand support schemes for organic farm conversion, developing a market by facilitating growth in the demand for organic food would be a challenge for many of the member states. The Danish example of designing innovative policy measures, integrating interests with a stake in the organic food policy domain and generating the capacities needed to deliver demand-side policy measures can serve as an inspiration for policymakers. Of course, the whole policy endeavour depends on a fairly broad and stable political coalition supporting policy expansion.

More generally, this case study suggests that a pathway to policy success goes through innovative thinking in relation to policy models. Innovative policy designs ‘involve reformulations and elaborations of new political visions, goals, strategies and policy programmes that aim to guide the production of public value’ (Sørensen 2017: 6). The study suggests two related critical conditions for designing innovative and effective policies: inclusive coalition building and generation of capacity. Inclusive coalition building must take place at three levels. At the political level, political parties across most of the political spectrum must subscribe to a shared policy paradigm which is politically appealing for parties of different persuasions and at the same time sets the policy direction towards delivering what is broadly considered public value. At the policy-sector level, government authorities and non-government actors with a stake in policy, particularly in relation to policy delivery, must support the policy paradigm and its visions on public value, and engage in policy deliberation and collective decision-making. Finally, at the group level, the leadership must ensure that emerging factions representing beneficiaries of an innovative policy are integrated and accepted as legitimate voices within the group.

Inclusive coalition building is a necessary but not sufficient condition for policy success. Generation of policy capacity is the second critical condition. Broadly defined, policy capacity is ‘the set of skills and resources—or competences and capabilities—necessary to perform policy functions’ (Wu et al. 2015: 166). Bringing together various actors in a coalition must enable activation and pooling of the capacities available within a sector. These must be engaged in a coordinated manner to encourage innovative thinking in relation to policy design and, importantly, to ensure successful policy delivery producing the expected impact. Such coordination would normally be the responsibility of the government authority assigned a leading role in developing and implementing policy.

Questions for discussion

1. List the components of the policy design that were important for securing policy success in the case study.
2. According to the case, which institutional and political conditions are important for securing policy success?
3. Consider whether the lessons learned from the Danish case of organic food and farming policy are relevant for other policy fields.
4. Are there additional factors that can explain the success of the Danish organic food and farming policy that are not mentioned in the case?
5. Which capacities should non-governmental organizations develop to contribute to successful policy implementation?
6. Which capacities should government officials and politicians possess in order to engage in constructive collaboration with interest groups?

Links to online resources

https://www.organic-world.net/index.html
https://www.fibl.org/en/themes
https://icrofs.dk/en/
https://icrofs.dk/en/organic-eprints-an-open-archive-for-organic-research

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