Country Profile
DENMARK

Access to Land · Land Markets · Generational Renewal

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Published by: Access to Land Network (A2LN), 2025

Sources: Danmarks Statistik; Landbrugsstyrelsen; DN (Sadan ligger landet); JRC Report on Land Market Regulation (2021); Agrocura; Danmarks Økologiske Jordbrugsfond

2.6M ha	31,400	202 ha	~40%
Utilised Agric. Area (61% of country)	Farms (2021)	Avg. Full-Time Farm Size	Land Leased (2020)

I. GENERAL AGRICULTURAL CONTEXT

Denmark is a small, densely farmed country where agriculture covers 61% of total land area. Its land market is among the most liberalised in the EU — the result of deliberate deregulation over the past three to four decades. The country faces a classic squeeze: rising prices driven by competing land uses, rapidly ageing farm operators, and a political environment dominated by the interests of large, industrial-scale agriculture.

Farm Structure

Indicator	Value / Description
Total UAA	2.6 million ha (~61% of total national territory)
Number of farms (2021)	31,400 — down from 206,000 in 1951
Full-time farms (min. 1 FTE)	7,500 (2020) — down from 12,300 in 2010
Average size (full-time farms)	202 ha (2024)
Land under lease	~1 million ha out of 2.6 million (approx. 40%)
Farms cultivating rented land	~50% (2020)
Ownership: farmer-owned	91% of farm ownership
Ownership: corporate	9% of farm ownership
Ownership: public	0% (public land is negligible)

Sources: Danmarks Statistik; DN Sadan ligger landet; JRC 2021

The concentration process has been dramatic: in 1970, only 1% of farms above 5 ha were larger than 100 ha, while 58% were between 5 and 20 ha. By 2021, 23% of farms above 5 ha were over 100 ha, and the share of small farms (5–20 ha) had fallen to 45%. Full-time farm numbers have nearly halved in just ten years (2010–2020).

Land Use Distribution

The majority of Danish agricultural land serves animal feed production — most cereal and grass hectares are grown for livestock. Key land uses include: cereals (predominantly for feed), permanent grassland, sugar beets, vegetables, and fruits. The dominant livestock sector — particularly industrial pig production — is the single largest driver of land demand, environmental pressure, and competitive land pricing.

Organic & Agroecological Farming

Denmark has a relatively developed organic sector, with 11.4% of UAA under organic management in 2023 — 304,000 hectares across 3,960 farms. This places Denmark above the EU average, though well below its own stated ambitions.

Sector	Farms (2023)	Hectares
Extensive plant production	1,142	29,000 ha
Feed production	529	30,000 ha
Other	881	54,000 ha
Fruit and berries	286	12,000 ha
Specialized plant production	258	25,300 ha
Small livestock production	282	13,400 ha
Milk production	318	102,000 ha
Meat (beef, sheep, goat)	151	24,500 ha
Poultry	64	5,500 ha
Pigs	49	7,500 ha
TOTAL	**3,960**	**304,000 ha (11.4% of UAA)**

Source: Landbrugsstyrelsen — Statistik over økologiske jordbrugsbedrifter 2023

Milk production dominates organic land use at 102,000 ha (a third of all organic land). Despite this headline figure, Danmarks Økologiske Jordbrugsfond reports that political support for organic farming as an environmental tool remains weak: politicians "do not dare to use the full potential of organic farming as a tool for the protection of the environment, groundwater and sea."

II. FARM SUCCESSION & GENERATIONAL RENEWAL

Age Profile

57 yrs	23%	27%	41 yrs
Average farmer age (2017)	Farmers under 50 (2017, down from 45% in 1997)	New farms 2010–20 with farmer parent	Age limit for young farmer start-up grant

The Danish farming population is ageing rapidly. The average age in 2017 was 57 years, and the share of farmers below 50 has fallen from 45% in 1997 to just 23% in 2017 — a near-halving in two decades. Only 27% of farmers who established new farms between 2010 and 2020 had at least one parent who was a farmer in 2010, suggesting family succession pathways are narrowing.

Support for Young Farmers & New Entrants

Support Measure	Amount / Scope
Basic organic subsidy	1,200 DKK/ha/year (~€161/ha)
Transition add-on (3 years)	1,600 DKK/ha/year (~€215/ha)
Fruit and berries add-on	4,000 DKK/ha/year (~€537/ha)
Reduced nitrogen add-on	650 DKK/ha/year (~€87/ha)
Young farmer start-up (full-time)	729,000 DKK one-off (~€97,850)
Young farmer start-up (part-time)	364,500 DKK one-off (~€48,925)
Specific support for new organic entrants	None

Source: Landbrugsstyrelsen — Etableringsstøtte til unge landbrugere 2025

Young farmers under 41 can access a one-off establishment grant — 729,000 DKK for full-time farms (minimum 1,665 annual working hours) or 364,500 DKK for part-time farms. Beyond this, public succession policy is largely absent: as the reporting organisation notes, succession "is left to the market." There is no specific support for new organic entrants.

Organic farm succession: a structural risk

- When an organic farmer retires and has no family successor, they must compete in the open land market — against industrial pig producers and other buyers who can pay significantly higher prices.
- Organic farm enterprises are at structural risk of being converted back to conventional use at each generational transition.
- Danmarks Økologiske Jordbrugsfond identifies this as one of the most critical long-term threats to the organic sector.

III. ACCESS TO LAND

Tenure Structure

Approximately 1 million of Denmark's 2.6 million agricultural hectares are leased — around 40% of UAA. This share has grown significantly from less than 10% in 1965. Around 50% of all farms now cultivate some rented land. A full-time farm cultivated, on average, 190 ha in 2020, of which 70 ha were rented (JRC 2021).

Historically, owner-cultivation was the defining principle of Danish agricultural law — enshrined as a goal in the Agricultural Act. Decades of liberalisation have dismantled most of the practical protections associated with this principle, opening the market to corporate buyers and investors.

Land Prices & Market Trends

Danish farmland prices have risen dramatically over recent decades, driven by multiple competing demands. Average prices (DKK/ha):

- Early 1990s: ~400,000–600,000 DKK/ha
- 2007–2008: Peak of over 200,000 DKK/ha (agricultural crash followed)
- 2016: Recovery phase underway
- 2024: Slight downward adjustment from recent highs (agrocura.dk)

In Q1 2025, Denmark's largest pig producer, Martin Lund Madsen, purchased more than 1,000 hectares in a single deal for 198 million DKK — equivalent to approximately 198,000 DKK/ha (~€26,600/ha). This transaction illustrates the scale at which industrial operators can move, and the price levels that effectively exclude smaller or organic buyers.

Key land price drivers:

- Competition from industrial livestock producers — particularly pig farmers — who can generate higher returns per hectare and therefore bid higher.
- Energy sector demand — solar, wind, and biogas infrastructure investors competing with agricultural use.
- Recreation, nature development, and infrastructure — including the 2025 tripartite agreement to take 400,000 ha out of production for nutrient and climate reasons.
- Wealthy non-farming buyers — private individuals purchasing for amenity, investment, or rural lifestyle reasons.
- CAP subsidies capitalised into prices — per-hectare payments flow partly to landowners through higher prices, not to active farming families.

Notable Land Concentration Event

Q1 2025: 1,000+ ha purchase by Denmark's largest pig producer

- Martin Lund Madsen — Denmark's largest pig producer — acquired more than 1,000 ha in a single transaction in early 2025, for a total price of 198 million DKK (~€26.6 million).
- This deal illustrates the competitive disadvantage of smaller, organic, and new entrant farmers, who cannot match such purchasing power.
- Ownership data for the largest landholders in Denmark is difficult to establish: different sources name different individuals and no comprehensive public registry exists.

IV. LAND MARKET REGULATION

Legal Framework: From Protection to Liberalisation

Danish agricultural land is governed by the Agricultural Act (Landbrugsloven). Historically, this law enshrined owner-cultivation and personal farming as core goals. Over the past three to four decades, systematic liberalisation has dismantled most of these protections:

- No upper limit on how much land a farmer can own (removed).
- No education requirement for landowners (removed).
- No requirement for the owner to personally farm the land (removed).
- No requirement for the owner to live on the property (removed).
- Since 2010: Companies — Danish or foreign — can acquire agricultural property, provided the person with controlling influence meets the conditions for personal acquisition.

The result is a land market that the JRC (2021) characterises as having "a limited number of measures" from its regulatory categories — one of the most liberal in the EU. Both the rental and sales markets operate with very few restrictions.

What Remains of the Regulatory Framework

Indicator	Value / Description
Owner-cultivation principle	Still mentioned as a goal in the Agricultural Act — but most practical protections have been removed.
Company ownership	Permitted since 2010; controlling shareholder must

Indicator	Value / Description
	meet personal acquisition conditions.
Lease market	Rental share grew from <10% (1965) to ~40% (2020); no maximum rental price regulation.
Pre-emptive rights	Not applicable in general; no farmer priority purchase rights.
Land control authority	None (no SAFER equivalent; no approval process for purchases).
Farm matching platforms	Dansk Økojord and similar land banks operate as civil society tools (not state-run).
Enforcement	Assessed as functioning well; public data integration (corporate + personal) enables effective compliance monitoring.

Source: JRC Report on Land Market Regulation 2021

2025 Tripartite Agreement

A landmark political agreement — the "tripartite" — aims to take 400,000 hectares of farmland out of production to reduce nutrient runoff to seas, lakes, and waterways, and to reduce climate impact. This represents approximately 15% of total Danish UAA and will significantly reshape land availability. The agreement creates new pressures on remaining agricultural land and raises urgent questions about who will farm the land that remains.

V. POLICY & POLITICAL CONTEXT

CAP & Subsidy Distribution

Denmark does not use the full potential of CAP Pillar 2 (rural development). Most subsidies are per-hectare area payments with no upper limit — meaning the largest farms receive the largest absolute subsidy amounts. This structure reinforces the competitive advantage of large industrial operators and contributes to capitalising subsidy value into land prices.

A better CAP — with less per-hectare payment and more ecosystem services payments — is identified by Danmarks Økologiske Jordbrugsfond as a potential game-changer for land access and agroecological transition, though the strength of the agricultural lobby makes this unlikely in the short term.

Key Farmer Organisations

Organisation	Constituency & Position
Landbrug og Fødevarer	Main farmers' union. Very effective lobby; has successfully resisted or delayed most environmental and animal welfare legislation for 40 years. Primarily serves interests of existing large owners.
Økologisk Landsforening (Organic Denmark)	Union of organic farmers. Some organic farmers are also members of Landbrug og Fødevarer. Advocates for organic transition and ecosystem services payments.
Bæredygtigt Landbrug	Most aggressive conventional farmers' association; organises tractor protests; opposes environmental regulation.
Danmarks Økologiske Jordbrugsfond	Danish Organic Land Fund; develops land bank solutions (Dansk Økojord); negotiation-based approach; alliances with water utilities, municipalities, and nature foundations.

VI. KEY BARRIERS & OPPORTUNITIES

Top Barriers to Land Access

- Price of land — driven by industrial farm operators, energy companies, nature restoration programmes, and wealthy private buyers, all competing for a finite and shrinking supply of agricultural land.
- Industrial farm competitive advantage — large pig and poultry producers generate higher returns per hectare and can consistently outbid smaller, organic, and new entrant farmers in both the purchase and rental markets.
- Absence of CAP ecosystem services payments — current flat per-hectare subsidies flow disproportionately to large farms and are capitalised into land prices, providing no specific advantage for agroecological or new entrant farmers.
- Complete market liberalisation — no pre-emptive rights, no land control authority, no purchase approval process, no size limits. Corporate and investor buyers face essentially no regulatory barriers.
- Organic succession risk — at each generational transition, organic farm enterprises compete in an open market against buyers with far greater financial capacity, risking permanent conversion back to conventional use.

Opportunities for Change

- Alliance with water utilities — water companies have strong financial and regulatory incentives to support organic farming in catchment areas (preventing pesticide and nitrate contamination of drinking water). This creates a natural partnership for land access, with water utilities potentially acquiring or long-leasing land to organic farmers.
- Alliance with nature foundations — nature conservation organisations seeking to restore habitats and reduce nutrient loads share interests with organic farmers; the 2025 tripartite agreement creates specific opportunities.
- Civil society land banks — Dansk Økojord (an initiative of Danmarks Økologiske Jordbrugsfond) operates as a land bank, acquiring land outside the speculative market and providing long-term access to organic farmers. This model can be scaled.
- Municipal land engagement — municipalities hold some land and can engage as community-interest landowners, prioritising organic or ecological tenants.
- CAP reform pressure — a shift from per-hectare payments to ecosystem services payments would fundamentally rebalance competitive dynamics in favour of agroecological producers.

VII. ADVOCACY & ALLIANCE PRIORITIES

Danmarks Økologiske Jordbrugsfond — Priorities

- Negotiation-based approach: direct engagement with water utilities, municipalities, and nature foundations to secure land for organic farmers outside the open market.
- Scaling the Dansk Økojord land bank model — acquiring land with citizen investment and long-leasing to organic farmers at affordable rates.
- Building informal national networks on land ownership, young farmer access, and organic succession.
- Engagement with A2LN for cross-border learning and EU-level advocacy.

Strategic EU-Level Themes

- CAP reform: ecosystem services over area payments — the single most impactful structural change available. Requires sustained EU-level advocacy against well-organised agricultural lobbies.

- Stronger EU environmental standards — reducing the competitive pressure from below-standard imports (Mercosur; Ukraine) that drive domestic farmers toward intensification.
- Chemical and pesticide regulation — stronger EU limits to reduce the environmental harm that industrial-scale conventional farming inflicts on shared water and soil resources.
- Shared land access framework — supporting EU-level discussion of pre-emptive rights, land control mechanisms, and transparency in land ownership data.

VIII. KEY SOURCES

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DN (Danmarks Naturfredningsforening) — Sådan ligger landet (dn.dk/om-os/publikationer/sadan-ligger-landet)

Danmarks Statistik — Portrait of Danish farmers; agricultural area statistics (dst.dk)

Landbrugsavisen — Full-time farm size milestone: over 200 ha (landbrugsavisen.dk)

Landbrugsstyrelsen — Organic farm statistics 2023; young farmer establishment grant 2025 (lbst.dk)

Agrocura — Land price data 2024 (agrocura.dk/nyheder/nye-jordpriser-let-nedjustering-i-2024)

Effektivt Landbrug — Martin Lund Madsen land purchase Q1 2025 (effektivtlandbrug.landbrugnet.dk)

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Danmarks Økologiske Jordbrugsfond — internal research and advocacy data