Dear members and supporters,

We know that organic food and farming practices already provide the strictest EU legal standard for sustainable farming and high quality food production in the EU, responding to citizens’ growing expectations for food to be environmentally sustainable and healthy. That is why we devote ourselves to the challenge of making Europe more organic.

We also know that consumers recognise the benefits of organic, that they trust organic products, and that the market continues to grow – even if it’s not as fast as some we would want.

It is in this light that we must evaluate the European Commission’s legislative proposal for a new Organic Regulation and a European Organic Action Plan. Commissioner Cioloş highlighted Commissions plans “…for more and better organic farming in the EU by consolidating consumer confidence in organic products and removing obstacles to the development of organic agriculture…” To make this endeavour a success an ambitious implementation of the EU action plan is needed, full financial as well as political support by the Commission and Member States. Real funding must be provided, not just nice words. For example through the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, as well as by encouraging organic support through the CAP at national and regional level. EU institutions must also make sure that no unnecessary bureaucratic burden is created for farmers who want to become and stay organic. This is how the success of the EU institutions has to be measured in the end.

It has always been the IFOAM EU position that some improvements in the legal framework are needed for the growth of organic farming in the EU and we are therefore very pleased that a number of important IFOAM EU suggestions for improvement are included in the Commission proposal, also some entering just last minute. For example, the approach to developing the organic seed supply is more practical, group certification for small farmers in Europe has been included, origin labelling has been corrected, the list of permitted non-organic ingredients has been reduced and environmental performance requirements for processors and traders have been introduced.

Despite these good improvements IFOAM EU has been very clear that the sector does not want a new legislation but improvements of the current legislation as it was just introduced in 2009/2010. The transfer to a new structure bears the risk of technical mistakes, and indeed it seems that there are some relevant shortcomings in the Commission proposal. This shows that more will have to be done for the legislative proposal to meet the goals the Commission has set out for itself and to support – rather than hinder – the organic sector. In the first analysis it seems that little will be done to improve the implementation of controls in Member States and regions – one of the most significant problems with the existing regulation, even though IFOAM EU* and the comprehensive report to the Commission from the von Thünen Institute have provided concrete suggestions in this area. As well, removing the equivalency concept for control bodies acting in third countries would have a very negative impact on the ability of developing countries to export to Europe. Another major concern is that the introduction of a threshold for pesticide residues would mean that the only food supply chain in the EU that prohibits the use of pesticides would be made to pay for harm done by the majority of farmers in the EU who are using pesticides. This would turn the polluter pays principle upside down - when a neighbouring farmer uses pesticides, the organic farmer would have to pay!

At IFOAM EU, we look forward to the challenge that lies ahead of us – engaging with you and policymakers at the EU institutions and national governments to improve the new European Organic Action Plan and legislative proposal so that they indeed do help Make Europe More Organic.

Marco Schlüter
Director

COMMISSION PRESENTS NEW EUROPEAN ORGANIC ACTION PLAN AND NEW ORGANIC LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL

On 24 March 2014, DG AGRI Commissioner Dacian Cioloș presented the Commission’s new European Organic Action Plan and new organic legislative proposal to the Council of the European Union. Whilst the EU Organic Action plan will be adopted by the European Commission, the legislative proposal for a new regulation must be decided in a co-decision process between the European Parliament and the Council. However, with parliamentary election in May 2014, the European Parliament will only deal with the issue by autumn 2014. According to the proposal the new regulation will enter into force in July 2017.

IFOAM EU has been involved since the process was launched by the Commission in 2012 and will continue to work hard to make sure the final results help the European organic sector develop – both in terms of quality and quantity.

With regard to the action plan, the Commission and Member States must fully support it financially as well as politically for it to become a success. Funding must be earmarked for organic research in the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, CAP and other policy tools.

With regard to the Commission’s proposal for a new regulation, IFOAM EU positions on the following were partly taken up:
- Environmental performance
- Group certification
- Origin labelling clarification
- Cutting Annex IX by half
- Tethering
- Seed
- Animals for breeding
- Young aquaculture stock

This marks significant achievements in IFOAM EU’s advocacy work both before the leak of a draft in January and after, as many improvements have been made to since the time of the leak.

But more improvements must be made. Unnecessary bureaucratic burden must not be created for farmers who want to become and stay organic, and real improvements must be made to the implementation of controls in Member States and regions – one of the most significant problems with the existing regulation. As well, organic is a process of production and must remain so – also in the eyes of the regulation.

Setting a separate threshold for organic products would turn the polluter pays principle upside down – when a neighbouring farmer uses pesticides, the organic farmer would have to pay! The only food supply chain in the EU that prohibits the use of pesticides would be made to pay for additional laboratory testing and the risk of being contaminated by conventional neighbours. The impact would be especially hard for small farmers to bear.

Additional concerns are linked to rules that would:
- Make producers in developing countries with completely different meteorological, environmental and structural conditions comply with the rules made for European conditions
- Force farmers who want to become organic to convert their entire holding at the same time
- Require organic farmers to provision themselves with more organic seed and feed in a time frame that is not realistic in all regions of Europe

Aiming to continue addressing consumer’s demands and to put high quality products on the market, IFOAM EU looks forward to working with the EU institutions to find the best regulatory framework for an efficient and realistic regulation for citizens, the farmers and all other operators in the organic food chain.

IFOAM EU Press Release: Towards a new policy framework for organic farming – good aims but many open questions
IFOAM EU Media Briefing
IFOAM EU Position on Residue Threshold in Organic Products
IFOAM EU’s policy option to improve the legislative and political organic framework from July 2013

The Commission’s legislative proposal & the Annexes
The Commission’s proposed European Organic Action Plan
The Commission’s Q&A

To give policy makers and stakeholders an opportunity to discuss, IFOAM EU is organizing a regulation hearing on 29 April. More online and on the next page.
1 NEWS FROM IFOAM EU WORKING FIELDS

1.1 REGULATION

HEARING ON THE ORGANIC REGULATION Review 29 April 2014, Rue Belliard 60-62, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Organised by IFOAM EU and the Baden-Württemberg State Representation at the European Union

Register now and have your say on the Organic Regulation Review!

NEW AMENDMENTS IN ORGANIC IMPLEMENTING RULES AND TRADE

At the 116th Standing Committee on Organic Farming in Brussels in March, the Commission submitted Member States representatives a proposal to amend Regulation (EC) No 889/2008 and asked for an opinion. The proposal would amend Annexes I (fertilisers, soil conditioners and nutrients), II (plant protection products), V (feed materials) and VI (feed additives); and Article 24 point 2 (Veterinary treatments).

The amendments have been proposed with reference to the two reports produced in 2011 on plant protection products and on fertilisers and soil conditioners by the Expert Group for Technical Advice on Organic Production (EGTOP).

The opinion of the Member States was positive and a new implementing regulation is expected to be published in the coming days.

As for organic international trading, South Korea accepted a 6-month transitional import regime period, entitled “educational period”, during which European organic products can still easily be exported to this Asian Country. The transitional period will end on 30 June 2014 and the aim is to reach a mutual trade agreement between the EU and South Korea by then.
POLICY

CAP

COMMISSION ADOPTS DELEGATED ACTS ON CAP REFORM PACKAGE

Delegated acts for the final CAP reform package including rural development, direct payments and horizontal aspects such as cross compliance were adopted by the Commission on 11 March. The delegated acts, which form part of the CAP implementing rules, include further details on certain articles set out in the basic legal texts. The delegated acts, among others, outline criteria for how Pillar 2 organic farming payments can be worked out. These calculations start from basis that organic farming is compliant with greening. This means that in order to avoid double funding – paying twice for the same practice – only income forgone and costs that go beyond or are outside the scope of Pillar 1 measures can be compensated by organic farming support payments e.g., The Commission has chosen not to include strict criteria that would prohibit the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides in Ecological Focus Areas when cultivating nitrogen-fixing crops. Instead, Member States will have the option to put in place national bans.

Member States still have the power to ensure good CAP implementation

Good CAP implementation at regional and national level remain subject to the political will of Member States. They still have the power to ensure agrochemicals are not permitted on Ecological Focus Areas and that advanced sustainability measures supporting organic farming are given priority. Additional to the organic measure, this can be high level agri-environment-climate measures that can be supported via Pillar 2 Rural Development Programmes. Putting pressure on national governments is now of utmost importance to reach a good CAP outcomes.

European Parliament and AGRI Council set to scrutinise delegated acts

During the drafting phase, Member States and European Parliament were widely consulted on the delegated acts. They have now been published and presented to the European Parliament and the AGRI Council who have two months to scrutinise the texts and may reject them or request an additional two-month period to review. It is therefore likely that the delegated acts will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union by July 2014. In addition the Commission is also drafting implementing acts, to be agreed between the Commission and Member State representatives. This includes issues such as the combination of Pillar 2 area payments and criteria for advisory services. The implementing rules are expected to follow soon after the adoption of the delegated acts.

ROUNDTABLE ON SUSTAINABLE BIOGAS PRODUCTION ON ORGANIC FARMS BRUSSELS

Belgium, 8 April

Stakeholders and policy makers will discuss the potential of sustainable biogas production on organic farms as a way to contribute to the “20-20-20” goal and to farm income on 8 April at the European Parliament in Brussels from 9.30 to 12.00. The “Sustainable biogas production” handbook, which provides practical guidelines for sustainable biogas production, will also be presented at the event.

Register here and visit the SUSTAINGAS website for additional information about the project. If you have questions, kindly contact: laura.maeso(at)ifoam-eu.org
FARMERS INTEREST GROUP MEETING
27–28 May

The farmers’ interest group is going to meet on 27 May to discuss the potential of the rural development programmes under the CAP 2014–2020. Special focus will be paid to the new cooperation measure. The agenda will also include other topics of concern for organic farmers and an excursion. More information will be available soon.

If you would like to join the meeting, please contact stephen.meredith [at] ifoam-eu.org.

CLIMATE CHANGE

TRAINING ON CLIMATE-FRIENDLY FARMING
Rome, Italy, 26 March

The SOLMACC European project is gaining momentum: the first organic farms to participate in the five-year long application of climate-friendly practices have been found. A group of Italian farmers, coordinated by the Italian organic farmers’ organisation AIAB, will gather on 26 March in Rome for training on optimised crop rotation, nutrient recycling, tillage and agroforestry practices to apply on their farms. The Swedish and German farmers will receive training in the coming months. From autumn 2014, the 12 participating demonstration farms will adjust their farming methods to become more climate-friendly; the impact will be closely monitored by farm advisors and scientists. The outcomes of the project and the data gained will make it possible to transfer the practices to other farms. A dedicated SOLMACC website will soon be available to share project activities and results.

SOLMACC is implemented by FiBL, AIAB, Ekolantbruk, Bioland Beratung and IFOAM EU and is co-financed by LIFE, Directorate-General for the Environment.

SOIL

MEMBER STATES CALL FOR EU SOIL DIRECTIVE TO BE SCRAPPED

Environment Ministers have decided to scrap plans to introduce an EU directive on the protection of soils at the last ENVI Council on 3 March. This comes after nearly a decade of deadlock among Member States with a blocking minority in the Council including Germany and the United Kingdom. The EU will continue to be confronted by ongoing soil degradation challenges and IFOAM EU will continue to call for a binding legal framework to protect soil, also pointing to the emphasis placed on soil protection in the EU’s recently adopted Seventh environmental action programme (7EAP proposal). For further information see IFOAM EU’s position on a future EU Soil Directive.
TRADE, GMOs & BIODIVERSITY

CIVIL SOCIETY OUTLINES CONCERNS ABOUT EU-US TRADE DEAL

In the context of the 4th round of EU-US trade negotiations held in Brussels on 10–17 March, farming and other civil society groups from the US and EU, including IFOAM EU, expressed concerns about the risks the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) would pose to sustainable food and farming systems. At an event on 13 March entitled “Untangling the trade talks: What are the likely consequences of an EU-US trade deal for our food and environment?” Antje Kölling, IFOAM EU Policy Manager, outlined that while IFOAM EU was in favour of trade based on fairness and the principle of food sovereignty, it had serious concerns about the negative implications the trade deal could have on European-wide food standards and the environment. Similar views were echoed by civil society groups at the event. The same message was also heard at the European Commission Advisory Group on the International Aspects of Agriculture held on the same day and attended by IFOAM EU.

Commission say food standards not up for negotiations, but fears remain

The European Commission has indicated that European food standards and food safety legislation is not up for negotiation. Reference has been made to permitting growth hormones in beef, the use of the feed additive ractopamine in pig production, cloning and the low-level presence of non-authorised GMOs. However, the EU decision to permit the use of lactic acid to treat bovine carcases, widely used in the US, as a concession for the US proposing to lift beef and veal export bans demonstrates that nothing is really off the table in the pursuit of a deal on the TTIP which covers a vast array of sectors in addition to agriculture. If TTIP negotiations follow this spirit, it could result in substances and products deemed safe in one block being automatically accepted in another. Civil society groups have therefore voiced alarm at the pursuit of regulatory coherence during the negotiation rounds. The proposed Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) is also a serious issue. It would give large corporations the opportunity to sue governments for compensation if governments introduce rules the companies deem to undermine projected profits. The next round of talks is expected to take place before summer in Washington. Current indications suggest that no deal is expected to be reached before 2015 at the very earliest.

UPDATE – RIGHT TO BAN GMOS

As announced in the February newsletter, the possibility for member states to ban the cultivation of GMOs on their territory has been discussed by ministers during the Environment Council on 3rd March 2014. National bans would not solve the contamination risk for the whole food sector; therefore they must not be used by the Commission to push through GMO authorisations! On the other hand, if the proposal which has been on hold since the Danish EU presidency would be significantly improved, it could help to strengthen the right for national bans. Further discussions on the text are ongoing and you should send your minister a clear messages that

- The current compromise text is unacceptable, especially the idea of basing the right to ban the cultivation of a GMO in a member state on industry consent, which means sovereign states and private companies are treated as equals in making important policy decisions.
- The Council needs to consider the points that have been brought up by the European Parliament: allow a band on the basis of complementary environmental grounds and make measures to prevent contamination with GMOs compulsory for all member states.

Moreover significant improvements in the EU rules of risk assessment and risk management in the authorisation of GMOs are needed, following the still not implemented conclusions of the Environment Council of December 2008 as well as a full implementation of the polluter-pays-principle through adequate liability rules.

TAKE ACTION – BIODIVERSITY AND ORGANIC SEED

With the EU elections taking place from 22–25 May this year, candidates who present themselves to be elected for the European Parliament should now be challenged on their positions as regards the ongoing seed law reform. If you want to engage in actions, please contact the office for further information: antje.koelling [at] ifoam-eu.org
1.3 EU RESEARCH & INNOVATION POLICY/TP ORGANICS

TP ORGANICS STAKEHOLDER FORUM
10 July 2014
Revising the Strategic Research Agenda for Organic Food and Farming

This year, the TP Organics Stakeholder Forum, 10 July 2014, will be dedicated to the revised version of its Strategic Research Agenda. Experts started revising the current agenda in January with the aim of developing a new list of the priorities of the organic food and farming sector for Horizon 2020. This event will be the first opportunity for our members and stakeholders to provide feedback on the drafts.

The Stakeholder Forum will also feature the launch of TP Organics’ Action Plan for Innovation and Learning, which will demonstrate the innovation potential of organic farming and agroecology and provide policy recommendations for promoting innovation and learning in agriculture.

More information soon available on www.tporganics.eu.

EUROPEAN INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

On 11 March, the Commission launched a call for experts with the goals of gathering best practices and research in their respective themes, proposing directions for further research and suggesting operational groups or other forms of cooperation to test solutions and disseminate outcomes.

The four new focus groups in need of experts are:

1. High Nature Value (HNV) farming profitability – How to make HNV farming more profitable without losing its HNV characteristics?
2. Mainstreaming precision farming – How to organise data capture to facilitate the application of precision farming for an optimisation of inputs and yields?
3. Profitability of permanent grassland – How to manage permanent grassland in a way that combines profitability, carbon storage and biodiversity?
4. Fertiliser efficiency – focus on horticulture in open field – How to resolve the conflict between crop quality demands and legislative requirements through innovative fertilisation and nutrient recycling?

The deadline for application is 8 April.

More information and application forms here.

COMMISSION INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP WORKSHOPS ACROSS EUROPE

The Commission is organising regional workshops about the practical aspects of establishing operational groups (innovation partnerships) under Rural Development Programmes. Workshops have already taken place in Portugal and Slovenia. The next workshop will take place in Tallinn on 2 and 3 April. This workshop will be for participants from Estonia, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. Two more workshops will be organised in May, one in France (for Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Romania) and one in Czech Republic (for Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovakia, United Kingdom). Participants are invited by the Member States. For more information and for showing interest to be invited, please contact your national rural development network. Please send us some notes on the national workshops: bram.moeskops[at]ifoam-eu.org.
2 EVENTS

2.1 PREVIEW OF EVENTS

8TH EUROPEAN ORGANIC CONGRESS
Implementing innovative ecological solutions for farmers and rural communities

Rural Development Programmes – European Innovation Partnership – Organic Regulation Review

Bari, Italy, 11–12 September 2014

Member states and regions will launch the Rural Development Programmes of the new EU Common Agricultural Policy in 2015. What will the impact on farmers and rural communities throughout Europe be? How can the new programmes stimulate greater delivery of public goods and green job creation?

The new rural development regulation offers the potential for greater recognition for organic farming, yet the sector faces the prospect of considerable regulatory changes in the coming years. How can the new organic regulation help make Europe more organic and drive innovation for sustainable food production?

Share your view and learn about experiences from all over Europe and beyond at the 8th European Organic Congress. Registration and the website will be available soon!

9TH ORGANIC MARKETING FORUM
Warsaw, Poland, 1–2 June

Under the theme “Marketing strategies for the organic sector,” European organic traders, processors and raw material producers will meet at the 9th Organic Marketing Forum on 1–2 June 2014 in Warsaw.

Much of the focus of this international exhibition and organic conference will be on finding new marketing strategies, setting up new markets and making new business contacts. With more than 350 professional participants expected from about 30 countries, the Organic Marketing Forum will be the most important international business meeting for the organic sector in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Polish Ministry for Agriculture and IFOAM EU are patrons of the event.

Find more information and register here.
3 MAKING EUROPE MORE ORGANIC – SUPPORT IFOAM EU

IFOAM EU KEY SPONSORS 2014

The contributions of sponsors allow IFOAM EU to focus on its most important work – representing organic stakeholders. This funding is a means to co-finance IFOAM EU events, projects and publications and is a highly valued contribution to our work.

A DECADE OF ORGANIC ADVOCACY IN BRUSSELS

“This anniversary publication gives a voice to our people; each contribution gives a personal perspective on how IFOAM EU has played a part in developing and delivering a common vision for organic, influencing public and business policy as well as personal practice. They speak of how our ethos is expressed in our daily lives, how the ethics of our standards and codes of conduct brings food from our farmers and growers to our tables.”

Christopher Stopes
IFOAM EU President

EIP-AGRI DOSSIER

Download the “European Innovation Partnership – Opportunities for Innovation in Organic Farming and Agroecology” dossier by IFOAM EU, TP Organics and ARC2020.

The publication aims to help the organic sector and the agroecological community understand the implementation of this new policy instrument.

The dossier explains the EIP-AGRI activities at EU level and the importance of the work to be done by the rural development programmes at the national and regional levels, providing operators with examples they can follow. The dossier is also available in French.
4 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- 8 April: Roundtable on sustainable biogas on organic farms
  Berlin, Germany
- 16–17 April: B.I.O.N’DAYS
  Valence, France
- 29 April: IFOAM EU hearing on the organic regulation review
  Nuremberg, Germany
- 1–2 June: Organic Marketing Forum
  Warsaw, Poland
- 10–12 September: 8th European Organic Congress
  Bari, Italy

THE IFOAM ORGANIC LEADERSHIP COURSE (OLC) EUROPE 2014
First residential session: 12–21 July 2014 in the Netherlands

Do not miss this unique opportunity to develop your skills, knowledge and leadership attitude. The IFOAM OLC brings international expertise and vision to a course that will help you attain your personal development goals. Applications are currently being accepted. The deadline is 15 April, so follow the instructions on the OLC Europe page and apply.

Find out more about the leadership course

This newsletter exists to inform IFOAM EU members about the work of the IFOAM EU Group and its liaison and coordination office in Brussels. IFOAM EU is the European Regional Group of the worldwide umbrella organisation IFOAM and is responsible for all matters related to organic farming with a Europe-wide scope.

Please send any comments or contributions to the newsletter to communication [at] ifoam-eu.org. For further information contact your national board member or the office in Brussels.

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