

PRESS RELEASE

Ministers question organic regulation proposal

Brussels, 14/07/2014 – Today the EU Agriculture Council discussed the Commission's proposal for a new EU organic regulation. The Italian Council Presidency put the organic proposal on the Council agenda for the first time and asked ministers about exceptional rules, controls and alignment with the Lisbon treaty. IFOAM EU welcomes the debate in the Council; nevertheless it should be noted that today's discussion was restricted to only a few elements of the proposal. Similar to IFOAM EU, ministers welcomed the Commission's good intention, but were critical of initiatives included in the Commission proposal.

Ministers were concerned that the current proposal would lead to a decline in organic production in Europe and urged for a better balance between developing organic standards and recognising the highly varied situation of organic operators across Europe. Further, ministers raised concerns about the inclusion of retailers in the control system, setting up of separate threshold levels for pesticides residues and opposed the current use of delegated acts in the proposal, which would significantly increase Commission powers and is not in line with their interpretation of the Lisbon treaty. Several ministers stressed the specificity of organic inspection and therefore the need to keep organic control within the organic legislative framework, and not to shift it to the horizontal legislation for food and feed control as is being proposed by the Commission. Some ministers questioned the proposal as such and recommended improving the current framework, saying that improvement of the current legislation would better achieve the Commission's aims.

The discussion clearly demonstrated that the current proposal is not sufficient to create a positive framework for progressive, principle- and process-based, organic development. The proposal would lead to a significant decline of organic production in Europe, in particular at the expense of small organic farms and businesses, and in regions where organic is less developed, as mentioned by many ministers. It puts at risk one of the few positive and growing food sectors in Europe, one that meets consumer and community expectations whilst protecting and enhancing the environment.

IFOAM EU demands a proposal from the EU institutions that maintains the innovative elements of the Commission proposals, such as group certification for small farmers in Europe, improved origin labelling and the introduction of environmental performance requirements for processors and traders. A revised organic regulation must support the development of the sector through a progressive step-by-step process with clear vision, taking the diversity of Member States, regions and organic operators into account. Further, improvements to ensure proper implementation of controls in Member States and regions should be a key element of a new proposal.

The European Council and European Parliament are currently discussing the legal proposal. With the aim of continuing to address consumer demands and bringing high quality products to market, IFOAM EU looks forward to working with the EU institutions to find the best regulatory framework for an efficient and realistic regulation for the benefit of citizens, farmers and all other operators in the organic food chain.

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IFOAM EU represents more than 160 member organizations in the EU-28, the EU accession countries and EFTA. Member organizations span the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors organisations, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies