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RE: The organic regulation review has reached a dead end – we need to turn around

Agriculture in the EU is facing crises across the board: from the declining livelihoods of farmers and exodus from rural areas, to the contributions to climate change, and from the harm to biodiversity to the degradation of soils. Meanwhile across the EU, science and consumers are showing that organic delivers. Organic empowers farmers to design agronomic systems that are more resilient economically and environmentally, enabling them to reduce dependence on external inputs, and promoting the development – rather than the degradation – of the natural resources on which we depend for food production. At the same time, year-on-year growth for organic in the EU is 6-7%, far beyond any other food & drink market segment, and consumers regularly cite environmental reasons and bans on synthetic pesticide use as reasons for their choice.

Continuous improvement is part of the organic mindset and the organic movement welcomes initiatives to help organic farming and food develop. A review of the existing organic regulation had the potential to improve the legal framework; to support farmers who want to go organic; to guarantee fair competition and improve the functioning of the single market; to make application of the rules simpler and clearer; and to sustain the already high level of consumer confidence among EU citizens. There were positive proposals from the EU institutions (Commission, Council and Parliament), such as the establishment of environmental performance criteria for traders and processors, and new means to increase integrity in the controls and in the import rules governing organic.

Nevertheless, thirty-three months since the initial Commission proposal and twelve months since the start of trilogue negotiations, the innovative aspects are no longer on the table and there is no positive development in sight. Unfortunately, much time and energy has been spent essentially rewriting the proposed rules to match what already exists. In addition, some important elements of the current regulation are under fire. For example, annual inspection of all organic operators is crucial for helping those implementing the regulation to stay on track, while simultaneously ensuring consumer confidence.

There have also been setbacks in comparison with today's rules. For example, those who expressly reject the use of chemical substances are at risk of being made to pay for their presence in the environment – very difficult to completely avoid when 94% of agriculture allows for their use. As well, instead of improving the way the regulation was implemented for organic imports from abroad and supporting the development of the organic markets abroad, the new proposal focuses solely on the EU regulation – forcing smallholders in developing countries to fulfil the regulation developed for the EU conditions.

Despite the uncertainty created by the current situation, farmers and citizens are increasingly choosing organic. To strengthen their impact and to deliver on the environmental and social goals the EU has set for itself concerning agriculture, what is needed now is a legal framework that goes beyond today's regulation and that actually supports organic development.

The ingredients currently in the mix will not help achieve this development and the negotiations have reached a dead end. IFOAM EU calls on the EU institutions to really reflect the best way to proceed: either stop the process or start again based on the day-to-day reality of farmers, processors and citizens.

Organic regards,



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