

EU water blueprint must lead to a "blue" and sustainable CAP

Nicosia, 26/11/2012 – IFOAM EU (1) welcomes the 'Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Waters' (2) launched and discussed at the EU Water Blueprint presidency conference in Cyprus today. However, to overcome the pressure on water resources, Member States and EU institutions must now follow up with concrete, actionable policies.

"Water is a precious resource for our future. Cyprus is one of the two European countries with the lowest water availability per capita and 70% of Cypriot water resources are consumed by agriculture. Here, we are very aware that farmers are highly dependent on good water policies, while at the same time the food and farming sector play an integral role in sustainable water use," says Savvas Mouzakis, IFOAM EU Board Member. "To reduce pressure on water resources, the EU should invest more in organic farming. Scientific studies and farmers' experience suggest that organic farming systems tend to be more resilient to water scarcity through the improved water retention capacity of soil. Moreover, organic farming shows a significantly lower rate of nitrates leaching into ground water and does not pose any risk of ground and surface water pollution from synthetic pesticides (3)."

"The Blueprint is a good step into a more water-sustainable future and clearly identifies areas where more efforts need to be made. It is high time that all EU member states implement the Water Framework Directive and its requirements become mandatory preconditions for receiving payments under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)(4)", adds Antje Kölling, IFOAM EU Group Policy Manager. "Moreover, despite budget quarrels, we call on policy makers to use CAP reform to take substantial steps towards more water sustainability by adopting a strong, mandatory greening package and dedicating a large share of the rural development budget to environmental targets." For example, ecological focus areas under "greening" can be used to implement water retention measures, or buffer strips along water courses. Rural development measures such as organic farming, agro-environmental practices, advisory services and investment must be used to convert to the organic farming system which performs better on a wide range of environmental indicators including water protection (5), as well as to respond to specific and local environmental challenges by targeted measures, moreover to increase farmers' capacities to save water and reduce water pollution.

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NOTES:

- (1) The **IFOAM EU Group** represents more than 300 member organizations of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) in the EU-27, the EU accession countries and EFTA. Member organizations include consumer, farmer and processor associations; research, education and advisory organizations
- (2) Communication from the Commission to the European parliament, the Council, the European and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, A Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources, Brussels, 14.11.2012, COM (2012) 673 final, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/blueprint/pdf/COM-2012-673final_EN_ACT-cov.pdf
- (3) 57% less nitrate leaching on average (M. Stolze, A. Piorr, A. Häring, S. Dabbert, the Environmental Impacts of Organic Farming in Europe, in Organic Farming in Europe: Economics and Policy, vol. 6. University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart, 2000.); the costs arising from contamination of drinking water with nitrate in the UK result in £16 million and the UK has to spend an estimated £ 120 million per year to mitigate contamination of drinking water with pesticides (Pretty, J. N. et al. (2005), Farm costs and food miles: an assessment of the full cost of the UK weekly food basket, Food Policy (30): 1-19)
- (4) IFOAM EU group contribution to the stakeholder public consultation on the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water, <http://www.ifoam-eu.org/>
- (5) Organic food and farming – a system approach to meet the sustainability challenge, IFOAM EU Group 2010: www.ifoam-eu.org/workareas/policy/pdf/IFOAMEU_dossier_organic_farming_system_approach.pdf