

PRESS RELEASE

Towards a new policy framework for organic farming – good aims but many open questions

Brussels, 24/03/2014 – Today the European Commission presented a legislative proposal for a new Organic Regulation and a European Organic Action plan to the Council. Maintaining consumer confidence which is already very high, supporting the further development of the booming organic sector and guaranteeing fair competition are the main objectives set out by new organic framework. The legislative proposal and action plan provide some means to reach these goals, but a committed implementation of the action plan will be essential to make this a success.

“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. Consumers recognise these benefits and trust organic products, as demonstrated by the continued growth of the organic market in recent years, despite the financial crisis,” says IFOAM EU President Christopher Stopes. “Citizens’ demands for high quality organic food must be supported through the development of organic production in Europe. For the proposed European Organic Action Plan to become a success, the Commission and Member States must fully support financially as well as politically. Real funding must be provided, for example through the EU Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. EU institutions must also make sure that no unnecessary bureaucratic burden is created for farmers who want to become and stay organic.”

“IFOAM EU agrees that improvements in the legal framework are needed for the growth of organic farming in the EU and is pleased that a number of important IFOAM EU suggestions for improvement are included in the Commission proposal. 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 and environmental performance requirements for processors and traders have been introduced. These are good improvements, however the question remains as to whether the proposal delivers real improvements to the implementation of controls in Member States and regions – one of the most significant problems with the existing regulation,” said IFOAM EU Vice President Sabine Eigenschink. “The comprehensive report to the Commission from the von Thünen Institute, and IFOAM EUⁱ, have provided concrete suggestions for improvements.”

A major concern is that, according to the legal proposal, 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! Organic production is a complete system of farming practices and much more than just a product without pesticides. Costs for additional laboratory testing and the risk of being contaminated by conventional neighbours hits in particular small farmers,” underlines Marco Schlüter, IFOAM EU Director.

The European Council and European Parliament will now discuss and adapt the legal proposal, with the final legislation expected to enter into force in 2017. Aiming to continue addressing consumer’s demands and to put on the market high quality products, 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.ⁱⁱ

As the situation develops, our [website](http://www.ifoam-eu.org) will continually be updated and our Regulation Unit is available to answer your requests at + 32 2 808 60 79 and +32 2 808 79 91. More information on: www.ifoam-eu.org & @ifoam-eu.org

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.

ⁱ http://www.ifoam-eu.org/sites/default/files/page/files/ifoameu_reg_imports_position_201210.pdf & http://www.ifoam-eu.org/sites/default/files/page/files/ifoameu_reg_control_position_201210.pdf

ⁱⁱ To give policy makers and stakeholders an opportunity to discuss, IFOAM EU is organizing a regulation hearing on 29 April. More information is available at: www.ifoam-eu.org/en/events/hearing-organic-regulation-review