

Brussels takes pride in its new organic regulation

EU agriculture ministers have reached political agreement on a new regulation on organic production and labelling, which they claim will be simpler for both farmers and consumers.

Under the new rules the use of the EU organic logo will be mandatory, although it can be accompanied by national or private logos. The location of where the products were farmed has to be indicated on the label to inform consumers.

Food will only be able to carry an organic logo if at least 95 percent of the ingredients are organic. The use of genetically modified organisms will remain prohibited in organic food but it is now to be made explicit that the general limit of 0.9 percent for the accidental (adventitious) presence of authorised GMOs will also apply to organic products.

This new regulation delivers no changes in the list of authorised substances for use in organic farming but promises the addition of rules on organic aquaculture, wine, seaweed and yeasts.

Agriculture Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel, says - "This is an excellent agreement which will help consumers to recognise organic products throughout the EU more easily and give them assurances of precisely what they are buying. Organic food is a successful and growing market and I hope that this new set of rules will provide the framework to allow this growth to continue."

The organic sector itself is slightly less gushing in its view of the new EU rules. "We and others have managed to secure some considerable improvements compared to the original proposal, which we welcome", says Francis Blake, IFOAM EU Group President.

"However, we regret that the Council missed the opportunity of addressing other major concerns which would have enabled fuller support for this regulation", he continued. "Worst of these are the inadequate exclusion of GM contamination, a compulsory EU logo, and the lack of any formal means for the organic agriculture movement to be involved in making decisions about its own regulation. "

A snapshot of the new EU organic regulation (June 2007) It will:

- lay down more explicitly the objectives, principles and production rules for organic farming while providing flexibility to account for local conditions and stages of development,

- assure that the objectives and principles apply equally to all stages of organic livestock, aquaculture, plant and feed production as well as the production of organic foods,
- clarify the GMO rules, notably that GMO products continue to be strictly banned for use in organic production and that the general threshold of 0.9 percent accidental presence of approved GMOs applies also to organic food, ,
- close the loophole under which the unintended presence of GMOs above the 0.9 percent threshold does not currently preclude the sale of products as organic,
- render compulsory the EU logo for domestic organic products, but allow it to be accompanied by national or private logos in order to promote the “common concept” of organic production,
- not prohibit stricter private standards,
- ensure that only foods containing at least 95 percent organic ingredients can be labelled as organic,
- allow non-organic products to indicate organic ingredients on the ingredients list only,
- not include the restaurant and canteen sector, but allow Member States to regulate this sector if they wish, pending a review at EU level in 2011,
- reinforce the risk-based control approach and improve the control system by aligning it to the official EU food and feed control system applying to all foods and feeds, but maintaining specific controls used in organic production,
- set out a new, permanent import regime, allowing third countries to export to the EU market under the same or equivalent conditions as EU producers,
- require the indication of where the products were farmed, including for imported products carrying the EU-logo,
- create the basis for adding rules on organic aquaculture, wine, seaweed and yeasts,
- make no changes to the list of permitted substances in organic production, and require publication of demands for authorisation of new substances and a centralised system for deciding on exceptions,
- be the basis for the detailed rules to be transferred from the old to the new Regulation, containing among others the lists of substances, control rules and other detailed rules.

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