

# Organic food: boosting EU production and enhancing consumer trust

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**Organic farmers, processors, traders and importers must meet higher but realistic sustainability criteria and undergo strict food fraud checks to boost trust in the EU organic label, said agriculture MEPs on Tuesday. They introduced measures to avoid contamination of organic food, including on mixed organic and conventional farms, and endorsed plans to help small farmers turn organic.**

"We are satisfied with our position before trialogues. But we know that all this will only work in practice if all operators involved take responsibility to make organic farming work better," said the rapporteur, Martin Häusling (Greens/EFA, DE), who will lead Parliament's negotiating team during the talks with the Council on the final wording of the new organic law.

## **Strict controls: annual, risk-based and throughout the supply chain**

Contrary to the Commission's original proposal, the agriculture committee insisted that organic farming requires a tailored controls regime along the entire chain to avoid food fraud. MEPs backed the Commission's plans to make controls more risk-based but refused to give up on at least an annual, physical, on-site check on all organic farms. Member states should also ensure the traceability of each product at all stages of production, preparation and distribution to give guarantees to consumers that the organic products they buy are truly organic.

## **Precautionary measures instead of specific thresholds for pesticides**

MEPs introduced new precautionary measures to increase the accountability of operators throughout the organic supply chain and avoid the use of non-authorised techniques. If the EU's organic production rules are breached or the presence of, for example, a non-authorised pesticide is suspected, the final product should not bear the organic label until further investigations have been completed. The product can only be sold as an organic product if it is clear, after proper examination, that the contamination was unavoidable and the organic farmer had applied all the precautionary measures.

If deemed necessary the Commission could, after 2020, come up with a legislative proposal to set maximum thresholds for non-authorised substances and farmers' compensation for unavoidable contamination.

## **Boosting EU production: strictly regulated mixed farms and group certification**

The committee scrapped the Commission's plans to do away with mixed farms, i.e. farms producing both conventional and organic food, on condition that their conventional farming activities are clearly separated and differentiated from organic farming ones. They also backed group certification for small farmers to make their lives easier and attract more of

them into the organic farming business.

## Ensuring imports comply with EU standards

The committee supported the Commission's initial proposal to ensure that all imported products comply with tough EU rules. Current equivalence rules, which require third countries to comply with similar but not identical standards, should be phased out within the next five years. However, to avoid sudden disruptions of supply on the EU market, the committee says the Commission should be able, for a maximum of two years, to adjust import requirements for some products which do not fully comply with EU standards, because of climate conditions, for example.

## Next steps

The agriculture committee approved the draft text by 33 votes to 4, with 7 abstentions. It also gave the rapporteur and his shadows a mandate (by 37 votes to 5, with 2 abstentions) to launch negotiations with the Council on the final wording of new legislation.

*Procedure: Ordinary legislative procedure (co-decision), 1st reading, committee vote on a mandate for negotiations with the Council*

*Type of the document: Regulation*

*Tuesday, 13 October 2015*

*Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development*

*In the chair: Czesław Adam Siekierski (EPP, PL)*

## Further information

- Watch the press conference via VOD (broadcasting quality): <http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I110315>
- Video extracts from the vote and the press conference by Martin Häusling, rapporteur (broadcasting quality): <http://audiovisual.europarl.europa.eu/Assetdetail.aspx?ref=I110345>
- Profile of rapporteur Martin Häusling (Greens/EFA, DE): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/96752.html>
- EP Research: Organic farming legislation: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/568317/EPRS\\_BRI\(2015\)568317\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/568317/EPRS_BRI(2015)568317_EN.pdf)
- EP Research: Organic food - Helping EU consumers make an informed choice: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/557009/EPRS\\_BRI\(2015\)557009\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/557009/EPRS_BRI(2015)557009_EN.pdf)
- EP Research: Organic production and the European Union: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/548989/EPRS\\_IDA\(2015\)548989\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/548989/EPRS_IDA(2015)548989_EN.pdf)
- Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/agri/home.html>

# Press release

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