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Revision of Organic Farming Regulation

Reaction to EU organic label proposals



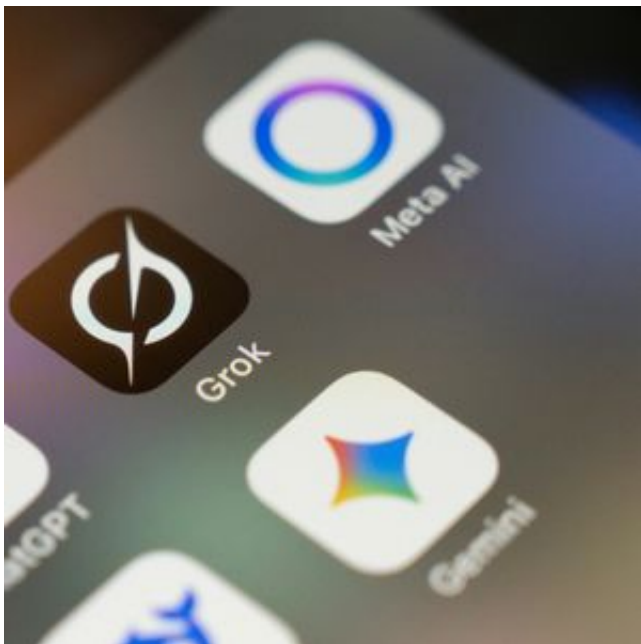
Today the European Commission has published long-awaited proposals to revise EU legislation on organic farming, following a presentation to the Council yesterday. Greens firmly believe that organic agriculture is and should continue to be the flagship of best practice in farming. In buying into such a "do no harm" farming system, consumers need to be confident that when they buy an EU organic label product that farmers have not used damaging pesticides and that the product is free from contamination. Organic production needs to maintain its positive image and be free from scandals that have hit the food sector. But consider that pesticides are used everywhere, they saturate the landscape and affect every terrestrial and freshwater ecosystem. This means that even if a farmer conscientiously follows all the rules they still risk being contaminated through no fault of their own, and losing out because they are not able to sell on the organic market and are forced to sell their produce as conventional. It is not fair that organic farmers who have been contaminated bear the costs of loss of earning and also of repeated testing for pesticides in their products. Costs should be covered by those generating the contamination, according to the polluter pays principle, and we insist that agro-chemical companies shoulder their responsibility in this state of affairs. The draft regulation seems to go in right direction, but certain aspects must be fine-tuned to meet the needs of organic producers so that growing organic markets are not detrimentally affected. For example, we must make sure there are allowances for farmers in those MS or regions where there is not a ready supply of organically-bred seed, so their products come under the organic label as long as they follow all the other agro-ecological and agronomic principles; in some regions organic breeding for some plant species is lagging and we want to ensure that seed adapted to local conditions can still be used. We need to strike a balance on thresholds for testing for pesticide residues: it's a trade-off between consumer confidence and the problem of contamination from a pesticide-saturated food system all around the

organic farm. If thresholds are too high, consumers won't trust organic as being toxic-free; if it's too low the tests are very sensitive and results are not repeatable, the smallest contamination would trigger a reject of the batch, even if a farmer has followed all the rules, and applied no pesticides themselves. On pesticide residue thresholds, we need a solution: The problem of contamination from around the organic farm should be tackled by measures based on the precautionary and the polluter pays principles. The objective must be that organic food is free of pesticides and their residues. If it is not, the polluter should carry the costs of the loss. Whether this will be solved by obligatory precautionary measures taken by conventional farms or an insurance system remains to be decided. We call upon the Commission to come up with practical solutions which do not punish farmers who work hard to supply healthy and food.

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