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EU organic farming rules

Commission proposals need fine-tuning

The European Commission today presented long-awaited proposals to revise EU legislation on organic farming. Commenting on the proposals, Green agriculture spokesperson **Martin Häusling** said:

"The broad thrust of today's proposals goes in right direction, but certain aspects will have to be fine-tuned to meet the needs of organic producers, especially those in emerging organic markets. Organic agriculture is and should continue to be the flagship of best practice in farming. To guarantee this, consumers need to be confident that, when they buy an EU organic-labelled product, farmers have not used damaging pesticides and that the product is free from contamination. EU rules need to guarantee this, whilst not suffocating smaller, local producers who are the essence of the organic system.

"It is not fair that organic farmers who have been contaminated bear the costs of loss of earnings and also of repeated testing for pesticides in their products. So it is important that the provisions on pesticide contamination strike the right balance. Clearly, consumers buying organic food want non-toxic, pesticide-free products. However, with pesticides ubiquitous in conventional food production, it is difficult for farmers to prevent residues ending up in their product even if they have followed all the rules and applied no pesticides themselves.

"The costs should be covered by those causing the contamination, according to the polluter pays principle. Whether this will be effectively solved through obligatory precautionary measures on conventional farms or through some form of insurance system remains to be decided. However, there is a need to ensure a practical solution that does not punish farmers who work hard to supply healthy and sustainable food.

"There is also a need to adapt the proposals to ensure there are allowances for farmers in those member states or regions where there is not a ready supply of organically-bred seeds. Their products should be allowed to qualify for 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 the regulation needs to make space for seeds adapted to local conditions."

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Martin Häusling

Member

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