



The Greens | European Free Alliance
in the European Parliament

Organic Regulation: Greens/EFA briefing

On Thursday 19 April, the European Parliament will vote on the outcome of the trilogue negotiations on a new organic regulation.

*Greens/EFA MEP **Martin Häusling** was the parliament's rapporteur, steering negotiations for nearly four years until the final agreement on 20 November 2017.*

The new regulation will result in clear rules, giving consumers a better idea of what lies behind the organic label. It will also bring the regulation up to date to support the continued development of the organic sector.

Why was the revision needed?

The existing regulation was out of date. A new regulation was needed to provide:

- improved controls and certification, especially for imports
- a reduction in the number of derogations
- improved and more specific production rules
- precautionary measures against contamination of organic produce with pesticides

What are the key achievements of the new regulation?

Seed diversity

Important factors such as maintaining genetic diversity and increasing resistance to disease will be taken into account when defining criteria for organic seeds. This will allow traditional seeds and farmers' own varieties, which are more adapted to organic farming requirements, to be placed on the market. Due to the lack of availability of such seeds on the legal market, farmers have previously had little choice but to use non-organic and genetically poor varieties for their production.

Higher import standards: a level playing field for EU producers

Thanks to the new rules, imports from countries outside the EU will have to comply with EU standards. This will make things simpler, and help put European producers on an equal footing with foreign producers.

Around 50% of organic products sold in the EU are currently imported from third countries, with a wide range of different standards. Over the next few years, the old rules will be phased out, meaning that imports of products not fully compliant with EU standards will be possible only under exceptional circumstances.

Food grown in healthy soil

Good taste comes from healthy, living soil. The new rules mean that organic production must be "soil bound". Some countries with highly intensive greenhouse production pushed for food grown in pesticide-free artificial substitutes rather than soil to be classified as organic. An exception has been accepted for Nordic states (Finland, Sweden, Denmark) for climatic conditions, so that investment already made in these countries can be realised, but this will be phased out within the next 10 years.

Precautionary measures to avoid contamination

Despite precautions, residues of chemical pesticides can sometimes be found in organic food. There can be a number of reasons for this, from fraud to accidental contamination from non-organic farms located in the vicinity.

The Commission proposed the application of specific thresholds for residues of pesticides in organic food. According to the Commission proposal, products would lose organic status once they passed this threshold (a practice already in place in Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria and Slovakia). Some in the organic sector argued that organic farmers should not be penalized for accidental contamination stemming from neighbouring conventional farms.

In response, the Parliament suggested the inclusion of precautionary measures against contaminations and compensation for organic farmers in the case of accidental contamination. Member States wishing to maintain the application of a threshold keep the possibility of doing so. The Commission will also be charged with investigating the precise reasons for contaminations, and may propose further changes after this investigation. In the meantime, this is a good transitional compromise.

Further improvements

- Improved controls, to reduce the risk of fraud and irregularities
- Creation of "groups of producers" to improve cooperation between producers and help them reduce certification costs
- Improved animal welfare rules

Next steps

If both the Parliament and Council confirm the deal, various Implementing Acts and Delegated Acts will have to be enacted before the regulation can come into force, due to happen on 1 January 2021.

Any further questions?

Please contact the Greens/EFA press team or the office of Martin Häusling.

Pia Kohorst (DE): +49 177 815 5131 / pia.kohorst@europarl.europa.eu

Guendolina De Sario (FR): +32 486 48 47 64 / guendolina.desario@europarl.europa.eu

David Weir (EN): +32 489 609 318 / David.Weir@europarl.europa.eu

Martin Häusling: +32 228 45820 / martin.haeusling@europarl.europa.eu