

## Green light to new European rules on organic farming

On 28 June 2017 the **Maltese presidency** and the **European Parliament** reached a preliminary agreement on an overhaul of the existing EU rules on **organic production** and **labelling of organic products**.

The agreed regulation sets more modern and uniform rules across the EU with the aim of encouraging the sustainable development of organic production in the EU. The new rules also aim to guarantee **fair competition** for farmers and operators, **prevent fraud** and unfair practices and **improve consumer confidence** in organic products.

"People want greener and healthier food on their plates and the demand for organic products in the EU is growing by the day. We are proud to announce an agreement on new rules that will unlock the potential of the organic sector, support farmers and increase the trust of consumers".

Hon. Clint Camilleri, Maltese Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries, and Animal rights and president of the Council

The much anticipated agreement comes after three years of intense negotiations and will have to be formally endorsed by the Council and the Parliament.

**Organic farmland has more than doubled in the last decade** and each year 500 000 hectares of land are converted into organic production. However, the legislative framework has not kept up with such market expansion and still includes different practices and derogations.

The new rules will:

make the life of organic farmers easier by enhancing legal clarity and allowing for further **harmonisation and simplification of production rules**. A number of past exceptions and derogations will be phased out subject to relevant Commission reports. increase consumer confidence by **strengthening the control system**. Preventive and precautionary measures have been clarified and made more robust (e.g. the roles and responsibilities of the different controlling bodies). The new regulation introduces **checks on retailers** and a **risk-based approach to controls**, thus reducing the administrative burden for operators in general and SMEs in particular. Specific controls on organic farming will be complemented by the recently introduced rules on official controls along the agri-food chain.

### [Official controls](#)

make **competition between EU products and imports fairer**. The '**compliance system**' will become the rule as regards the recognition of the private control bodies in third countries. This means that these bodies will have to comply with EU production and control rules when deciding whether a product to be exported to the EU market is organic or not. Furthermore the development of new **trade agreements with third countries** will enable EU operators to find new market opportunities outside of Europe.

**enlarge the scope** of organic rules to cover a **wider list of products** (e.g. salt, cork, beeswax, maté, vine leaves, palm hearts) and **additional production rules** (e.g. deer, rabbits and poultry).

support small farmers by introducing a **new system of group certification**. This will make it easier for small farmers to switch to organic farming by reducing inspection and certification costs, as well as the related administrative burden.

provide a **more uniform approach on pesticides**. The new regulation harmonises **precautionary measures** thereby enhancing legal security. At the same time, it builds flexibility in the case of **measures to be taken in the presence of non-authorised substances** to take account of the different situations of different member states. This means that those countries already having in place national rules establishing thresholds for non-authorised substances will be able to maintain them. Four years after the entry into force of the new rules the Commission will come forward with a report assessing national rules and practices in the field and may also table a legislative proposal to further harmonise rules concerning thresholds for non-authorised substances.

**phase out derogations** for production in **demarcated beds in greenhouses**. Farmers utilising demarcated beds in greenhouses up until 28 June 2017 in Denmark, Sweden and Finland will be able to **maintain this practice for 10 years**. In the meantime the Commission will assess the compatibility of this practice with the principles of organic production and in light of the result of this analysis, it may table a legislative proposal.

## Next steps

Today's agreement still needs to be approved by the Council's Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA). After a thorough legal and technical revision of the text and formal endorsement by the Council, the new legislation will be submitted to the European Parliament for a vote at first reading and to the Council for final adoption.

The new regulation will apply from **1 July 2020**.

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