

ORGANIC REVISION – Research to support the revision of the EU Regulation on organic agriculture (www.organic-revision.org)

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Summary:

The FP6 project, EEC 2092/91 (ORGANIC) REVISION www.organic-revision.org has delivered important inputs for the ongoing revision of the Council Regulation (EEC) 2092/91. The project has identified basic ethical values and value differences in organic agriculture and developed a procedure for balancing and integrating these basic values in the revision of the (EEC) 2092/91. It has also established an organic standards database www.organicrules.org on differences of 35 national standards from 14 European countries and the USA and 3 international organic standards compared with the (EEC) 2092/91. as a basis for identifying areas of the (EEC) 2092/91 where harmonisation, simplification or regionalisation could be recommended. The project has also analysed organic feed availability in relation to dietary requirements of pigs and poultry and provided specific recommendations on the criteria for approval of feed inputs. Further, the availability of organic seeds and propagation materials has been assessed, and recommendations on information exchange and decision criteria for the seed derogation regime have been developed. The EEC 2092/91 (Organic) Revision project has contributed to the ongoing revision of the (EEC) 2092/91 by delivering background information for the negotiation process on several issues, such as the integration of objectives and principles based on values in the new Council Regulation (EC) 834/2007 and criteria for the approval of conventional feed ingredients.

Keywords: organic values, organic principles, organic standards, (EEC) 2092/91, (EC 834/2007, organic feed regulation, organic seed regulation, organic agriculture

Introduction

Since 1991, organic farming in the EU has been governed by the Council Regulation (EEC) 2092/91¹, which sets out the rules for production, processing, certification, control and labelling of food products as "organic". This regulation was a response to growing consumer demands for certified organic food products. The organic sector has continued to grow resulting in increased international trade and setting up of a large number of national governmental and private standards, labels and certification bodies in the EU and associated countries. Many of the national standards, and especially the private standards, are more detailed and/or more restrictive than the (EEC) 2092/91, which raise concern about risk of unfair competition and barriers to the free trade of organic products within the EU. The European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming² of 10 June 2004 called for a review of the legal framework on organic production. This was the basis for the total revision of the (EEC) 2092/91, which started in 2005, and which until now has resulted in the adoption of the new Council Regulation on organic production and labelling, (EC) No. 834/2007³ of 28 June 2007.

¹ Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 of 24 June 1991 on organic production of agricultural products and indications referring thereto on agricultural products and foodstuffs. Official Journal of the European Communities **L198**(22.7.91): 1-15.

² EC COM (2004) 415 final. European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming. Communication from the Commission [COM(2004) 415 final] of 10 June 2004. Brussels, Commission of the European Communities.

³ Council Regulation (EC) NO. 834/2007 of 28 June 2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91. "Official Journal of the European Union **L189** (20.7.2007):1-23.

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'ORGANIC REVISION – summary for Proceedings'

The FP6 research project, (EEC) 2092/91 (Organic) Revision, which started in March 2004 and lasted until April 2007, was set up to support this revision of the (EEC) 2092/91, and it involved partners from 8 countries (AT, CH, DE, DK, IT, NL, SE and UK) plus the IFOAM EU regional group. The specific objectives of the project were:

- to identifying basic ethical values and value differences of organic agriculture in Europe and to develop a procedure for balancing and integrating the basic values in the development of the EU regulation;
- to compare the organic standards from national governmental and private certifiers in Europe with the EU regulation in order to give recommendations on possibilities for harmonisation, simplification or regionalisation of the EU regulation;
- to provide more knowledge on how to achieve 100 % organic rations in the diets for livestock;
- To produce more knowledge on how to reduce the use of seed and vegetative propagation materials from conventional sources in organic farming.

Integrating basic ethical values

In relation to identifying basic ethical values of organic agriculture the project recommended that standard setting bodies and governments should aim for harmonisation of the values behind standards on the basis of the four principles of organic agriculture of *Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care (IFOAM 2005)*, which the project assisted in formulating. The new Council Regulation (EC) 834/2007 makes reference to value elements from all four principles, and the clear statements on objectives and principles of organic production in (EC) 834/2007 allow for harmonising of the detailed implementing rules. Therefore some changes to the current rules in the Annexes of the (EEC) 2092/91 should be considered, in particular in relation to the use of external inputs aiming to impose some restrictions on the intensification of organic agriculture. Because there is no single unambiguous interpretation for many of the organic core values, standards setting and regulatory bodies are recommended to aim for a transparent and open deliberative decision-making process to safeguard a coherent interpretation of the core values. The rules and procedures for stakeholder participation and the outcome of any consultation should be communicated clearly. This corresponds with procedural ethics, stressing the importance of the process (the ideal procedure) as well as moral values to arrive at a "morally" right answer.

Differences in the implementation of Council Regulation (EEC) 2092/91

For the analysis of standards a database on differences between the (EEC) 2092/91 and national governmental and private standards was developed: www.organicrules.org. 714 expert submissions covering 34 standards from 14 European countries (AT, CH, CZ, DE, DK, FI, FR, IT, NO, PL, SI, SP, SE and UK), USA and 3 international standards (Codex Alimentarius Guidelines, IFOAM Basic Norms and Demeter International) were uploaded. More than 85 % of the differences were related to the Annex I provisions (rules on production) followed by about 10 % related to Annex II (permitted substances). Some standards included rules on areas not yet regulated by the EU, e.g. wine production, specific food processing, aquaculture, non-food production and processing. The analysis of the standards differences showed areas for potential harmonisation of the regulation of organic production at the EU level. The project recommends that harmonisation of the rules should focus on areas that show a high level of differences, which are important to consumers, which may distort trade and/or which may conflict with the organic core values. Many of the national private standards and governmental regulations provide indications on how to handle and reduce derogations and how to set stricter rules, because they have already implemented such requirements successfully. The project also points at areas where simplification may take place, e.g. the rules on the conversion period for land and animals and the whole farm. Besides, simplification may be achieved by reducing the number of derogations or by providing clearer criteria for the derogations. However, regional flexibility based on well documented criteria should be possible.

Reducing non-organic feed and seed inputs

On the basis of a meta-analysis of relevant literature and evaluation criteria for specific feed and feed additives ensuring animal welfare as well as the credibility of organic agriculture, developed in the project, the project concludes that apparently Europe could grow sufficient organic cereals to feed all organic livestock on a 100 % organic diet. The situation in relation to protein supply appears to be more uncertain, especially for the monogastric animals, pigs, and poultry, and even more so, when looking at different regions of Europe. Because of the considerable variation between individual animals and farms in relation to feed intake, genotypes and performance levels it has not been possible to come to general conclusions on how to deal with the limited availability of high quality feed stuffs in the diets of pigs and poultry, but criteria for the approval of feed inputs have been developed. However, it is necessary to have a debate on which types of organic production systems and diets for pigs and poultry represent the best compromise between the different principles of organic farming. The project recommends that the current derogations for the use of conventional feed materials should not be extended beyond 31 December 2011.

Based on a literature review and expert survey with 20 experts in 8 European countries the project assessed the importance of seed borne diseases, methods to control such diseases and differences in threshold values for seed borne diseases in various EU member states. A survey of variety trials and analysis of the requirements for variety selection and breeding for organic farming systems was also conducted. Finally, the national reports from the 12 EU member states on the implementation of the seed derogation regime according to Commission Regulation (EC) 1452/2003⁴ for 2004 and 2005, which were accessible, were analysed. The project showed that the availability of cereal varieties is reasonably good for organic production, whereas varieties for vegetables and fodder crops are less available, and the supply varies considerably between EU member states. The availability of an appropriate variety is a criterion on which decisions concerning the granting of derogations for the use of non-organic seeds are based. As there are no common guidelines for the assessment of the "appropriateness" of varieties among member states, farmers in countries with high rates of authorisations allowing the use of non-organic seeds have a competitive advantage over producers from countries, where fewer derogations are granted. Therefore, harmonisation of the seed derogation policy on the EU-level as well as on the national level should be of high importance for the public authorities.

Final remarks

The EEC 2092/91 (Organic) Revision project has contributed to the ongoing revision of the (EEC) 2092/91 by delivering background information for the negotiation process on several issues, such as the integration of objectives and principles based on values in the new Council Regulation (EC) 834/2007 and criteria for the approval of conventional feed ingredients. The final project report provides a summary of all activities as well as consolidated recommendations that should be considered in the negotiation of the implementing rules (i.e. the Annexes of (EEC) 2092/91). Therefore it may be of relevance for the governmental officials, the policy makers and standards setters as well as for other organic stakeholders. For more information see: www.organic-revision.org and www.organicrules.org.

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⁴ Commission Regulation (EC) No 1452/2003 of 14 August 2003 maintaining the derogation provided for in Article 6(3)(a) of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 with regard to certain species of seed and vegetative propagating material and laying down procedural rules and criteria relating to that derogation. Official Journal of the European Communities **L206** (15.8.03):17-21.