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ORGAP Project – Evaluation toolbox for the evaluation of action plans for organic food and farming

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Summary: The 3-year EU funded research project ORGAP ("Evaluation of the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming"), implemented by 10 partners from 9 countries (CH, UK, DE, IT, DK, SI, CZ, NL, ES) and the umbrella organisation of the organic agricultural movements in Europe (IFOAM EU Regional group), has developed an evaluation toolbox for the evaluation of the European and/or national action plans based on analysis of national action plans and expert/stakeholder consultation.

Key words: organic action plan, stakeholder's participation, evaluation tools

Introduction

The European Commission released in June 2004 the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming (EUOAP). In May 2005 the 3-year, EU funded research project ORGAP ("Evaluation of the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming") started. 10 partners from 9 countries (CH, UK, DE, IT, DK, SI, CZ, NL, ES) and the umbrella organisation of the organic agricultural movements in Europe (IFOAM EU Regional group) are participating in the project.

Materials and methods:

The overall objective of this project is to give scientific support to the implementation and evaluation of the EUOAP. This was achieved by the identification of a set of suitable indicators and concepts as a basis for the development of an integrated evaluation tool to assess the long-term and short-term effects of the implementation of the EUOAP.

Results

Comparison of national organic action plans

A comparative documentation about national action plans for organic agriculture describes in terms of a desk-top study the current status quo of eight national and regional action plans for organic food and farming. The case study action plans vary with regard to their development process, targets and objectives, and emphasis of measures on certain areas. These differences are due to quite different political/socio-economic framework conditions for organic farming in these countries at the time when these plans were established (Stolz, Stolze, Schmid, 2006).

Meta-evaluation of evaluations of national organic action plans

This was one important step to get an insight into already conducted evaluation studies in the field of organic action plans in Europe. Results contributed to a methodological learning process, helped to optimize the ORGAPET toolbox and provided information on the content level about the success and failure of organic action plans in general (Dabbert & Eichert, 2007).

ORGAPET development

The development of the Organic Action Plan Evaluation Toolbox (ORGAPET) is the central part of the ORGAP project. During the project, ORGAPET has been developed in an iterative process with several versions regularly updated and further enhanced. ORGAPET has been developed as an electronic toolbox for use on-line (www.orgap.org) or as a CD-ROM, with key documents incorporated in the toolbox and hyperlinks between the different elements designed to make navigation easy. The structure of ORGAPET is presented in the following table.

Tab. 1 ORGATPET Contents

Part A: Background and context

A1 Introduction to ORGAP and action plans

A2 Nature of policy evaluation and organic action plan evaluation

A3 Influences on the development of organic farming - programme theory and results of previous research

A4 Working with stakeholders – participatory and partnership approaches.

A5 Planning an Evaluation

Part B: Evaluating programme design and implementation

B1 Describing programmes and their management

B2 Evaluating stakeholder involvement

B3 Conflict and synergies

Part C: Evaluating programme effects

C1 Defining objectives

C2 Defining indicators

C3 Key indicators

C4 Using expert judgement

Part D: Synthesis

D1 Integrating and interpreting results

D2 Examples of existing evaluations

The ORGAPET is a collection of different evaluation tools, including participative techniques, quantitative assessments and methods to identify relevant indicators, which could be used selectively to meet the needs of a particular assessment of national or EU action plans. The toolbox is structured around 'compartments' or sections containing 'tools' fulfilling different functions. Each section contains an overview paper and a series of Annexes detailing a range of methodological approaches (including written materials, relevant software and other items) and examples of how these have been applied in specific cases.

ORGAPET testing and assessment by stakeholders and evaluation experts

Comments on the ORGAPET toolbox were collected via a comprehensive testing process in all ORGAP participant countries, in order to get feedback under the different needs and circumstances in the countries involved. Suggestions for structural and general changes from the experts were taken into account for the revision of ORGAPET (Dabbert and Eichert, 2007).

Focus group discussions on the national implementation of the EUOAP

Focus group discussions with stakeholders were held in 8 EU member states. The main conclusion was that the level of implementation success of the EUOAP in any member state is a matter of national balances between positive and negative aspects of the three main properties associated with all stakeholders involved in implementation: stakeholder willingness, capability and comprehension (Vedung 1997). Seven focus groups discussed the scope of the new EU regulation. Six groups discussed a suggested threshold of GMO content in organic produce and all agreed that a threshold should be very low if it was to be allowed at all. All other issues were specific to the national context. On a more general level, the analysis revealed a deep scepticism about the market orientated basis of the EUOAP, which in itself may cause implementation problems since it counters one of the main ideas of the EUOAP (Michelsen and Tyrol Beck, 2007).

Reports: All reports can be downloaded from the Project website: www.orgap.ch

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