

# The difference between certified organic seed and “untreated” conventional seed

## Problems

Many organic farmers do not know the difference between certified organic seed and “untreated” conventional seed. Therefore they are not motivated to buy organic seed, which is usually more expensive.

## Solutions

### Organic seed production

Organic seeds are multiplied in an organic environment. This is very challenging, especially for biennial crops such as carrot or leek (see figure) that need to overwinter in the open field. Disease and weed pressure in combination with lower yields, make organic seed production more expensive, than conventional seed production. Climate change is increasingly leading to crop failures and makes some of the classic seed growing areas unsuitable. Dry organic production areas with good ventilation (wind) are most suitable but scarce.

### Certified organic seed

Certified organic seeds are produced according to the European Union's organic production rules. The multiplication period depends on the crop and can vary from 4 months for annual crops like spinach up to a year and a half for biennial crops like onion and cabbage. The quality standards for certified organic seed are the same as for conventional seed. Seeds that meet both requirements can be registered in one of the national organic seed databases.<sup>1</sup>

### Untreated conventional seed

Untreated conventional seeds are multiplied in a conventional environment. During the production chemical substances and fertilisers are used. “Untreated” means only that the seed is not treated with chemical substances after the harvest of the seed.



*Figure: organic leek seed production in Italy (Photo: Vitalis)*

## Practical recommendations

Organic farmers should be educated about the advantages of organic seed<sup>2</sup>:

- Produced in an organic environment
- No chemical treatments during production
- Lower risk of residues

## Further information

1. Link to all the EU organic seed databases: <https://www.liveseed.eu/tools-for-practitioners/eu-organic-seed-databases/>
2. PA#22 Values and benefits of organic seeds and vegetative propagating material
3. Video of organic cucumber seed production: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rb33u9HV0gc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rb33u9HV0gc)

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**Publisher:** ÖMKi Hungarian Research Institute of Organic Agriculture

**Date:** May 2020

**LIVESEED:** Boosting organic seed and plant breeding across Europe. LIVESEED is based on the concept that cultivars adapted to organic systems are key for realising the full potential of organic agriculture in Europe. Research project 2017-2021.

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