

Conference on Organic Revision in the European Parliament

Brussels, 27/03/2006 - Today, the Commission's proposal on the Revision of the Organic Regulation(1) will be discussed in the European Parliament at a stakeholder conference entitled 'Organic farming: Ready for the next Decade?' (2). The IFOAM EU Group, which organized the conference together with the responsible rapporteurs from the European Parliament, (3) considers the public discussion to be an important step in addressing the sector's major concerns. The decision on the new Regulation will have a crucial impact on the future development of organic farming, as it will define its new legal framework.

Francis Blake, President of the IFOAM EU Group, stated that "it was agreed upon in the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming to amend the current regulation. However, we are taken aback by the Commission's proposal of a total revision of the current regulation, which potentially changes the character of Organic Agriculture altogether."

The timeline for deciding upon the proposed regulation is extremely tight, and the practical and legal implications of the proposal for the new Regulation largely remain unclear. Therefore, the IFOAM EU Group urges the European Council and the European Parliament to now take sufficient time for meaningful consultation to clarify the legal impact of the proposal and to consider the sector's major concerns.

"It is in the interest of the European Community and the organic movement to ensure the institution of a regulation that allows organic farming to continue its positive and dynamic development. Quality prevails over speed", noted Marco Schlueter, coordinator of the group.

On the occasion of today's conference, the IFOAM EU Group will come up with a list of key questions that need clarification before an assessment of the full impact of the proposal can be undertaken.(4) Additionally, the appraisal of the revision proposal will be presented from the point of view of the organic movement, expressing that 'Several proposed changes fundamentally threaten the core of organic agriculture as a production and processing system originating in, and still developing as a result of, private and 'grass roots', local and national initiatives.'

Major concerns of the organic movement are(5):

- Proper and formal stakeholder involvement is not addressed
- The new inspection & certification framework (under 882/2004) alters the inspection system for organic farming
- The new decision making structure transfers power away from member states and towards the Commission without any means of balancing this with greater democratic or stakeholder involvement
- The contribution and potential to strengthen the self-responsibility of the organic sector at all the levels at which it works (from local to international) is at best ignored, and at worst actively diminished and discriminated against.

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Explanations:

(1) Commission proposal:

The European Commission published on December 21, 2005 its "Proposal for a Council Regulation on organic production and labelling of organic products (21/12/2005)"

http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0671en01.pdf

(2) Programme of the conference:

http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/around_world/eu_group/pdfs/Microsoft_Word_06.03.27_Conference_OrganicRegulation2.pdf

(3) Rapporteurs of the European Parliament

Marie-Hélène Aubert – MEP, rapporteur on the revision of the EU regulation on organic agriculture

F.W. Graefe zu Baringdorf – MEP, rapporteur on labelling and control of organic products

(4) Questions:

Questions on the Commissions proposal sent to the Austrian presidency on March 27, 2006.

http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/around_world/eu_group/pdfs/VIEW_Microsoft_Word_Proposed_questions_for_EU_Reg_revision_27.3.2006_final.pdf

(5) Position paper of the IFOAM EU Group:

http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/around_world/eu_group/pdfs/IFOAMEU_Revision_positionpaper_27.02.2006.pdf