

Dear Friends,

The festive season has begun. There has been mounting pressure to finalise all the autumn's work by the end of the year. In Brussels, the European Commission was trying to do just this with two pieces of legislation covering aquaculture (including seaweed) and yeast to add to the implementing rules of the new organic regulation.

As ever, we have argued that quality is more important than speed and that the Commission imposing self-induced time constraints on these important developments is not in the long term interests of the organic sector. It also puts huge pressure on our limited resources and our ability to consult widely enough in formulating our responses.

Our aquaculture task force and our specialist group on processing have been working intensively on these two issues to make sure they reflect best organic practice. Sometimes it has been a very uphill struggle, as conventional interests have exerted their lobbying power to influence the Commission.

The New Year marks the start of the new organic regulation. Whilst this was intended to be mainly a restructuring and tidying up operation, it has inevitably been much more than that. How much more it is sometimes difficult to say and we will have to see how it all shakes down in practice. However, we do know two things:

- first, the new regulation contains plenty of areas which are not clear and are open to interpretation (although some of this may be positive as it allows for necessary national variation); and
- second, there still are plenty of areas that the new regulation doesn't address at all and therefore still need attention.

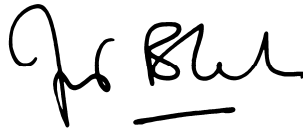
The IFOAM EU Group is working on both these issues and will be publishing our analysis at BioFach.

The day before BioFach, the IFOAM EU Group will hold its three-yearly general assembly. Our Brussels office is already starting to prepare for this and will be sending out information next month.

This general assembly will be my last as president, as I have decided to step down. I have had the privilege of leading the IFOAM EU

Group since the beginning and it has been an extraordinary journey in which I am proud to have played my part. But now I feel it is time to hand over the reins of this important and growing organisation to fresh leadership. In the meantime, there is still plenty of work to do...

With best organic wishes for the New Year!



Francis Blake
President



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1. Activities of the IFOAM EU Group

1.1 Implementing Rules to the new Organic Regulation

The 1st of January 2009 is around the corner and so is the coming into force of the new Organic Regulation 834/2007. The implementing rules to the regulation have either been finalised or the work on them has come to its final stages. At the meeting of the [Standing Committee for Organic Farming on November 11th and 12th](#) the rules for organic yeast were passed.

The [Implementing Rules for Imports](#) were also finalised and the decision does not diverge much from the expectations. The new import regime sets out two possible tracks for imports: one where the importing country's regulation must comply with the EU regulation and one that accepts regulations, equivalent to the EU regulation. Parallel with the import regulation the Commission is working on a guideline document for importers and has produced a [draft document](#).

The process for the Implementing Rules for Aquaculture is still ongoing. This part of the rules will not be ready for Jan 1st, but will follow later in the first half of 2009. This allows for a more thorough work. In the beginning of December a [3rd revision](#) of this document was made available. The IFOAM EU Group already contributed to this process (see IFOAM EU [position](#) on the 2nd revision of the Commission's working document) and is currently reviewing the new Commission document .

The work on the Implementing Rules for Wine will also be initiated in 2009 (for more, please see 1.4 Research – ORWINE).

Links:

- [Implementing Rules 889/2008 to Council Regulation \(EC\) No 834/2007](#)
- [Organic Regulation 834/2007](#)
- IFOAM EU Group's [Revision Info page](#).

► **Regulation Dossier to inform about the new Organic Regulation will be lanced by IFOAM EU Group** in February, during BioFach 2009 in Nuremberg. The dossier will be presented and launched together with the Czech presidency and the EU Commissioner for Agriculture Marian Fischer Boel on Thursday, February 19. In its main, master version the dossier will be available in English, German and French; national versions in a number of other languages are also under preparation.

1.2 Research Technology Platform 'Organics' was launched

EU and global agriculture face major challenges like climate change, loss of biodiversity, food security and depopulation of rural areas. In the believe that organic farming is a good part of the answer to these challenges, upon the initiative of IFOAM EU Group and ISO FAR, thirty (so far) organisations

from the organic food and farming sector and the civil society have formed the [research Technology Platform 'Organics'](#). TP Organics is to advocate for more EU and national funding in the area of organic research – as a way to come to sustainable solutions.



Representatives of civil society organisations – founding members of the Technology Platform for organic research (TP Organics) called for more and better targeted EU funding for organic research. At the picture from left to right: Anamarija Slabe - European Environmental Bureau, Eric Gall – Foundations Sciences Citoyennes, Rosita Zilli – EuroCoop, Otto Schmid – FiBL Switzerland (moderator of the public presentation which launched the platform).

[TP Organics](#) and its first major publication – [Vision for Organic Food and Farming 2025](#), were launched on 2nd of December with a public presentation under the auspices of the Czech Agriculture Vice Minister Jiri Urban at the permanent representation of the Czech Republic (soon to take up the EU Presidency) in Brussels. (For more about the launch and background information for the establishment of TP Organics, please go to <http://www.tporganics.eu/index.php/press-area.html>). The speakers, between which high-level representatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament, underlined the added value of TP Organics and acknowledged the importance of the Vision document.

The platform partners are now working on concrete research proposals and ideas in order to form a “Strategic Research Agenda” for the future organic research. As part of this process, a **“call for experts”** is currently open. Further to that, it has been agreed to meet with DG Research of the European Commission to investigate how to cooperate best and how TP Organics can feed into the process of developing research calls.

1.3 Policy

► **CAP Health Check:** the IFOAM EU Group criticised in its [press release](#) the decisions of the EU Agriculture Council from November 19, pointing that they mark a missed opportunity to let the CAP Health Check work for a sustainable European agriculture. The EU farm ministers took a set of decisions which water down the Commission's proposals within the so called CAP Health Check – the EU review of the Common Agriculture Policy, and 'along the way' undermine the potential of organic farming for the delivery of the aims of CAP.

► **Green paper on agricultural products quality** has been published by the Commission in an attempt to improve the EU policy on agricultural product quality. As part of it, a [public consultation](#) has been opened and expects stakeholder input by the end of the year. The IFOAM EU Group is to submit an answer by Dec 31. A conference of the Czech Presidency in March 2009 in Prague will further discuss the issue. For more, please follow the link: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/policy/index_en.htm

► **Nutrition (traffic light) labelling:** the European Commission's proposal for a [new EU regulation on nutrition labelling](#) is in its parliamentary discussion stage. The report of the Parliamentary rapporteur Renate Sommer on the proposal was published in end November. The German MEP Sommer had made 143 amendments including removing the possibility that national schemes "on the provision of food information to consumers" co-exist with an EU-wide scheme.

The report follows the Commission's proposal to substitute the present voluntary criteria for [nutritional labelling](#) with a mandatory nutritional labelling, namely with the so called 'traffic light system' (mandatory declaration at the front of the product pack of the levels of energy, fat, saturates, sugar and salt expressed in a simple colour-coded way). The IFOAM EU Group opposes the 'traffic light' proposal. The Group gave arguments for this position in a [letter to DG SANCO](#) in mid November.

► **Ecolabelling:** IFOAM EU Group has expressed its position on the Commission's proposal for an EU Ecolabelling scheme, which includes processed food, in a [letter to DG Environment](#). The letter points to and backs with arguments the concerns of the organic sector that if the scheme is accepted, there is a great deal of risk that the consumers will wrongly presume that products bearing 'Ecolabel' are organic. The Ecolabelling proposal is back to the discussion table since the summer of 2008 when DG Environment of the Commission sent to the European Parliament and the Council a [Proposal for a Regulation on a Community Ecolabel scheme \(COM \(2008\) 401/3\)](#). A summary of the Commission's views on the Ecolabel can be found [here](#).

► **Rural Development:** policy-making should be based on better information about the typology and specificities of different rural areas, about the demographic, socio-economic and environmental changes in rural and peri-urban areas, about the factors that shaped the enormous diversity of rural areas - some associated with success and some with failure.

These open issues were discussed during the conference “Europe's rural areas in action: Facing the challenges of tomorrow”, organised by the European Commission in Cyprus on October 16-17. More on the conference: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/events/cyprus2008/index_en.htm



IFOAM EU director and German board member Marco Schlüter (second row, center) and Thomas Dosch (second row, right) visiting members of the organisation in Cyprus. On the picture: in front of the organic shop of Savas Mouzakis and his wife, owners of the company Green Marketing. There are currently 7 organic shops in Cyprus.

The IFOAM EU Group was presented through the participation of Marco Schlüter, director of the Group, and Thomas Dosch, the Group's board member representing Germany. The two also used the opportunity to visit Cyprus members of the IFOAM EU Group and agreed on the election of the first official IFOAM EU board member from Cyprus.

► **Labelling threshold for non-GM seed:** The IFOAM EU Group has been lobbying since more than 5 years for a labelling threshold for non-GM seed at the detection limit. The Environment Council approved in December its GMO Conclusions agreeing that there is a need for “one or more labelling thresholds for the adventitious presence of authorised GMOs in conventional seeds”. The thresholds are to reflect “the lowest practicable, proportionate & functional levels for all economic operators”. Find out more in the [Council's press release](#) (page 29).

The IFOAM EU Group urges the EU that only a threshold at the detection limit tells the whole truth and will limit the burden on the GM-free sector, but welcomes the fact that the Council decided to examine for the first time the socio-economic implications of the placing on the market of GMOs.

1.4 Research

► **ORWINE presented research results** in the beginning of December: the ORWINE project coordinator Cristina Micheloni delivered a [presentation](#) before the member states representatives in the Standing Committee on Organic Farming (SCOF) and the EU Commission, summarising the results from seven reports conducted within the project.

ORWINE (www.orwine.org) started in 2006 and will end in March 2009 in order to provide scientific background for the development of the EU legislative framework for the production of organic wine. In the forthcoming months the EU Commission will start discussions on the regulation of organic wine production as the implementing rules for this area are still to be developed. The project team has analysed extensively the organic wine sector and has collected and explored stakeholder opinions on many subjects within the consumers, producers and market studies (a [questionnaire](#) within the project's "regulatory survey" is still open for comments) in order to present credible policy recommendations to the EU Commission.

1.5 IFOAM EU Group/office in Brussels & internal structure

► **The 4th General Assembly of the IFOAM EU Group** will be held on 18th of February 2009 in Nuremberg from 2 to 6 pm (the time spot has been changed; the exact venue of the event will have to be announced additionally). The IFOAM EU Group members are kindly invited to register by 3rd of February. For details and all necessary documents, please contact info@ifoam-eu.org. All IFOAM members in the EU and EFTA countries have voting rights in the General Assembly of the IFOAM EU Group and have been notified on that on November 17, 2008.

► **The last board meeting of IFOAM EU Group** took place in Brussels from December 3 to 6. The board members took decisions within the strategy process which is to define the framework for the future work of the Group, approved new budget 2009-2011 which is to be proposed to the General Assembly in February, and discussed issues of efficiency and structure. The meeting was a big step to make the Group fit for the years to come.

► **The IFOAM EU Group's Brussels office** welcomed in October a new trainee - Tomas Milar from the Czech Republic. The office currently works with seven staff members (including two trainees).

2. Decisions/Reports concerning organic farming

2.1 Standing Committee on Organic Farming - short reports from the meetings of SCOF:

- [79th meeting on 11-12/11/2008](#)
- [78th meeting on 21-22/11/2008](#)
- [77th meeting on 26-27/05/2008](#)

2.2 Conference reports and other links

▶ Report and executive summary from the "Soil and Climate Change" conference: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/conf_en.htm

▶ Conference report: "What role for pesticides in sustainable agriculture?"
<http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/events/what-role-for-pesticides-in-sustainable-agriculture-/61772.aspx>

▶ Study on EU spending and conference on budget reform:
http://ec.europa.eu/budget/reform/library/issue_paper/study_EUspending_en.pdf, http://ec.europa.eu/budget/reform/conference/index_en.htm

▶ Trailer of the documentary "Our children will accuse us":
<http://nosenfantsnousaccuseront-lefilm.com/bande-annonce.html>

3. Calendar of events & Other news

3.1 Calendar of events

Time (2009)	Event
January 20-21	Conference on Global Trade and Farm Animal Welfare, Brussels / Belgium http://www.animalwelfareandtrade.com
February 11-13	10th Scientific Conference on Organic Agriculture, Zurich / Switzerland http://www.wissenschaftstagung.de/index_en.html
February 18	IFOAM EU Group – General Assembly, Nuremberg / Germany (<u>for</u> members only) Contact info@ifoam-eu.org
February 19-22	BioFach 2009 Nuremberg / Germany http://www.biofach.de
February 17-18	International Sustainability Conference, Nuremberg / Germany http://www.sustainability-conference.de/en/default.ashx
March 25-27	EcoProcura 2009 (Climate Neutral through Procurement), Reykjavik / Iceland http://www.iclei-europe.org/index.php?id=6337
May 18-20	Nordic Organic Conference, Göteborg / Sweden http://nordicorganic.org/
May 25-26	Organic Marketing Forum, Warsaw / Poland http://www.organic-marketing-forum.org/index.php?lang=english (IFOAM EU Group is patron of the conference)
May 26-28	Conference "Sustainable Development: a challenge for European research", Brussels / Belgium http://ec.europa.eu/research/sd/conference/2009/index_en.cfm?pg=exhibition
June 24 to 26	Bioacademy 2009, Lednice, Czech Republic Webpage will be available soon (IFOAM EU Group is patron of the conference)
July 25 – August 31	SIDA International Training Program: Organic Agriculture Development, Sweden (part II to follow in Thailand 2010) http://www.grolink.se/Projects/OAD/OAD-Training.htm
August 25-28	1st International IFOAM Conference on Animal and Plant Breeding, Santa Fe, New Mexico/USA http://www.ifoam.org/breeding-diversity-conference.html

3.2 Other news

▶ **World Food Day:** This year's theme for World Food Day 'World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy' pointed rightly to man-made crises and global imbalances caused disproportionately by the industrial North but affecting mostly people from the Global South and accelerating food insecurity in these regions. For more, please go to: http://www.ifoam.org/press/press/2008/20081016world_food_day.php

▶ **IFOAM, UNCTAD and FAO launched tools for facilitating organic trade flows:** EquiTool, which facilitates the equivalence of standards for organic production and processing, and IROCB (International Standards for Organic Certification Bodies), which enables the recognition of organic certification bodies worldwide. The tools are outcome of a six years partnership between IFOAM, UNCTAD and FAO within the International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture, which sought solutions for barriers to trade in the organic sector. For more, contact: Diane Bowen - d.bowen@ifoam.org

▶ **Fair trade sales reached record high figure:** a new survey, carried out in 28 European countries plus the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, shows that global fair trade sales in 2007 have reached a record figure of €2.65bn. From modest beginnings in the 1950s, fair trade has now expanded into a worldwide movement, with more than 450 specialised importing organisations, around 125,000 supermarkets stocking fair trade products and approximately 4000 'worldshops'. Find out more in the report "[Fair Trade 1007: new facts and figures from an ongoing success story](#)".

▶ **EU will fail biodiversity target** – The Commission's first progress report on the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Action Plan to halt biodiversity loss concluded that the EU makes only slow progress and that EU will fail to meet its target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010 unless "an enormous effort" is taken. See: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/index_en.htm

▶ **IFOAM ABM Regional Group (Spain) announced an internship vacancy** for an English (preferably native) speaker who is to cover a range of support tasks in the Permanent Secretariat of the Group in Catarroja (near Valencia). The position is unpaid. For details, please contact coordinadorseae@agroecologia.net



This newsletter exists to inform IFOAM members about the work of the IFOAM EU Group and its liaison and coordination office in Brussels. The IFOAM EU Group is the European Regional Group of the worldwide umbrella organisation IFOAM and is responsible for all matters related to organic farming with a Europe-wide scope. Information IFOAM EU Group:

<http://www.ifoam-eu.org>

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Please send any comments on the newsletter to info@ifoam-eu.org. For further information contact your national board member or the office in Brussels.

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