

Organic congress concludes with new political agenda

Brussels (05/12/2007) – Over 300 participants at the European Organic Congress (1) in Brussels developed clear political recommendations for the future of EU agriculture policy. The high level event, opened by Agricultural Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel, identified the future challenges the organic sector is facing, how these can be solved, and how policy makers can ensure that society benefits from the various advantages of organic production.

Speakers from the Commission's DG Environment and DG agriculture as well as from environmental NGOs recognised the contribution that organic farming can make to addressing climate change, biodiversity protection and water management, all key environmental issues identified as priorities in the current review of the Common Agricultural Policy.

"This is not rocket science", said Francis Blake, president of the IFOAM EU Group (2), "organic farming's foundations in common sense, in the precautionary principle, justify the investment in the only farming system that delivers all the objectives of the CAP and meets the aspirations of EU citizens. We call on the Commission to revise and update the European organic action plan, in order to provide a consistent policy throughout all agri-policy fields that properly promotes this important production system. The current debate about the future of the CAP offers a great opportunity to take serious action."

During the event, which was oversubscribed, the organic sector demonstrated its strength and maturity, and proved that organic food and farming has reached the centre of agriculture policy debate. The presence of a large number of representatives from the Commission was an indication of the seriousness with which organic farming is now being taken by EU policy makers.

The conclusions from the congress identified the following necessary steps:

- (1) To make organic farming a specific focus of the environmental measures to be developed as part of the CAP Health Check
- (2) To ensure that some of the proposed increase in rural development funding is targeted at organic farming, in particular in regions and member states that have so far given a low priority to organic farming support.
- (3) To support the development of a dedicated organic research vision and ideas forum to act as a focus for identifying priorities in research and development and knowledge.
- (4) Improve the involvement of stakeholders in the process of reforming the EU regulation defining organic food and farming
- (5) Maintain the integrity of organic food with reference to core values to protect against devaluing the concept as the market expands.
- (6) Continue to campaign for GMO policies that protect the GM free status of organic products and ensure that liability for contamination is consistent with the polluter pays principle



- (7) Recognise the urgency for rapid adoption of organic production due to rapidly increasing oil prices and the prospect of oil shortages in the foreseeable future.

“The Commission’s organic action plan in 2004 was a good start but major policy areas are insufficiently implemented or are left out”, added Marco Schlüter, Director of the IFOAM EU Group. “In particular, the question of how to safeguard GM-free farming is not addressed, and EU policies on research and on rural development in support of organic farming need significant development.

“The congress has given concrete recommendations for policy makers. It is now time that the EU and member states take serious action.”

For more information about the congress, please see:

<http://www.organic-congress-ifoameu.org>

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More information:

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Notes

- (1) The Congress “The future of organic food and farming within the reformed CAP – Reviewing the European Organic Action plan and future perspectives” is being held in Brussels, December 4-5, 2007. The congress is co-financed by the European Community, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development.
- (2) The IFOAM EU Group represents the 330 member organisations of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) in the EU-27, EFTA and the accession countries. Member organisations include: consumer, farmer and processor associations; research, education and advisory organisations; certification bodies and commercial organic companies.