



International Federation of
Organic Agriculture Movements –
EU Regional Group

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Working for organic farming in Europe

Commissioner Fischer Boel
Directorate General for Agriculture
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels
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Brussels, 7th of May 2007

Dear Commissioner,

National/regional Rural Development programmes

I am writing to draw to your attention a number of concerns that the IFOAM EU Group has identified regarding the national and regional Rural Development programmes which are in the process of notification by the European Commission.

I note the main problems we have identified below.

- ⇒ Lack of consideration of the Community strategic guidelines for Rural Development programmes, 3.2. (iv) "consolidating the contribution of organic farming" and the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming, Action 6, which called upon the Member States to support the organic sector through their Rural Development plans.
- ⇒ Agro-environment measures too weak to improve environmental quality.
- ⇒ High share of budget used for axis 1 and mainly for intensification.
- ⇒ Participation process not satisfactory – e.g. lack of participation of the organic sector in most countries.

The following comments – that apply to several, if not most, national plans - illustrate our concerns in detail.

Support for Axis 1 / investments

In a significant number of plans, Rural Development funds would largely be used for intensification of agriculture – at the expense of diversification and environmentally sound forms of agriculture.



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Many of the Rural Development programmes emphasize support for investment, which is necessary for modernisation and innovation, but should not be used to intensify agriculture in a way that contradicts the aims of agri-environmental programmes. For example, support for purchase of machines and large-scale irrigation systems that both promote intensive, environmentally questionable production methods should not be part of Rural Development plans.

Share of budget for agro-environmental programmes / organic measures

Another, very critical issue is the use of agri-environmental programmes. Some of the programmes are reduced to the absolute minimum and, additionally, do not provide enough budget for organic farming measures. As you well know, there is need to further develop the organic sector, and the most important tool are Rural Development programmes, especially agri-environmental schemes that facilitate support for organic farmers.

A constraint to the expansion of organic farming is the level of the organic support compared to other measures (which have lower requirements). The greater the difference, the greater is the incentive for farmers to convert to organic farming, because the higher costs for organic production cannot be borne by product prices only.

Maximum per farm limits for organic farming support can prevent (larger) farms from converting to organic farming, because the financial incentive is too low. These limits should either be set at a higher level, and could be modulated depending on the farm size, but in any case, should apply to any participant of agri-environmental schemes and not only to organic farms.

Participatory process

The rules for the development of the national (regional) programmes require a participatory process, but this constructive involvement of stakeholders has not been sufficient in most member states. We see that the main focus of the resulting programmes reflects this lack of involvement – and also the interests of the participating parties.

Commissioner, we know that the reasonable and sensible use of the very important Rural Development funds is in your interest. In the past, Rural Development programmes have helped to value the importance of the agricultural sector together with rural areas and to develop European agriculture in a more sustainable and viable direction. For example, due to



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the agri-environmental support for organic farms, as well as support for processing and marketing, organic agriculture has developed very positively in most European countries. The increase in supply of organic products corresponds perfectly with the increase in demand all over Europe.

Our considerations concerning the new programmes may seem rather general, but we are ready to provide specific evidence related to the RD programmes we have studied. Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can be of any further assistance.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francis Blake". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Francis Blake
President