

## **European Organic Agriculture contributes to growth, jobs and sustainability**

**Brussels, 23/10/2006** –The main outcome of the meeting of European experts at the CAP Seminar "Organic Farming and the Lisbon Strategy" is the recognition of the role of organic agriculture contributing to the targets of the Lisbon Strategy!" 'Organic farming delivers the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy', said Francis Blake, president of the IFOAM EU Group. 'We call on the Commission to use organic farming to its maximum advantage.'

About thirty-five experts of the organic sector discussed for two days about the role of organic agriculture in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy. The Rural Development regulation, together with the Strategic Guidelines, is a central tool to implement the Lisbon Strategy in European agriculture. From the point of view of the targets "Growth, Jobs and Sustainability", the participants discussed, together with experts from the European Commission and researchers, the positions and experiences made with Rural Development programmes in the Member States.

Rural Development programmes provide the most important tool to realize the Lisbon Strategy in the field of agriculture. The participants agreed that organic farming is an important factor to make the Lisbon Strategy successful and appreciated that the important role of organic farming is recognised in the Rural Development programme, as well as in the Strategic Guidelines.

The reports from the Member States about practical experiences and scientific evidence showed that, depending on the regional situation, organic farming can provide more employment - on the farm, in processing, tourism and marketing. The average age of organic farmers is lower in many countries; organic farmers are more engaged in on-farm-processing and direct sales and are highly innovative. This creates added value, consumer confidence, and viable rural regions. In this context, the experts criticized the fact that the implementation of organic farming measures throughout national Rural Development programmes is not obligatory.

The positive relationship of the Lisbon Strategy and organic farming seems to be affected by several threats: There is still no recognition of the need to protect organic production against GMO contamination. As long as coexistence measures are not consequently designed to avoid all contamination, the further development of organic farming is limited for the future.

Another restriction can be seen in insufficient funding for research for organic agriculture – the potential of innovation and development not only in organic production, but in rural development and viability of rural areas should be supported and not neglected.

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## Press Release

International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements – EU Regional Group

More information:

IFOAM EU Group office Brussels, Marco Schlueter, [info@ifoam-eu.org](mailto:info@ifoam-eu.org), 0032 –2–7352797



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