



Unigrains – In Brief

The new EU regulation on organic farming

After more than four years of discussions, the various bodies of the European Commission have reached a compromise on updating the European regulation on organic farming. The draft regulation was passed last November and will come into force in January 2021.

What is changing?

Purpose	Former regulation	New regulation	Positive effects	Negative effects
Frequency of inspections	Every 12 months without possible derogation	Every 12 months In the event no irregularity is observed during 3 consecutive years, possible derogation every 24 months	Lightens administrative and financial burden	Goes back on one of the founding principles of organic farming Delayed detection of potential irregularity
Link to the soil	Founding principle of organic farming, but exemptions in some Northern European countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland)	Hydroponic crops banned by default in all countries Derogation limited to 10 years for crops already certified	Reaffirms link to the soil	Hinders development of some production technologies
Imports from third party countries	64 countries benefit from the principle of equivalence between their organic farming certification and EU certification	Principle of conformity: third party countries must comply with EU regulations	Fairer competition conditions between operators in the EU and those in third party countries	Supply disruption for a number of raw materials
Organic certifiable foods		Addition of salt, cork, essential oils, beeswax Possibility to add other foods subsequently	Expanded range of organic certified products	Additional burden for manufacturers who use these raw materials, which will now have to be organic
Organic seeds	Possibility to use non-organic seeds in organic farming where organic seeds are not available	Development of organic seed offering Target: 100% organic seeds by 2035	Maintain biodiversity Monitor and control entire food chain	Additional constraint for producers
Livestock feed	Increase proportion of organically-produced food intended for farm animals that must be produced on the farm Cattle, sheep, goats, deer: 60% to 70% Pigs: 20% to 30%		Relocation of food production for livestock Improved traceability	Additional constraint for producers
Nanomaterials	No incompatibility between organic farming and nanomaterials	Nanoparticles prohibited in bio-certified products	Enhanced consumer safety	Given the dispersion of nanomaterials, difficult for producers to ensure total absence in their products

Author: Lucie Arribard – Tel.: +33 1 44 31 16 35 – larribard@unigrains.fr – Date of Publication: February 2018

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What isn't changing?

Ultimately, the hotly-debated idea of subjecting producers to a performance obligation by setting pesticide thresholds not to be exceeded in foods was not adopted. Some countries (Italy, Belgium, the Czech Republic) already apply these thresholds and will be able to keep them in place for at least four years and until the submission of a European Commission report on a possible harmonisation of these thresholds across all countries, as well as pesticide detection techniques and rules.

The idea of banning mixed operations (i.e. having plots with conventionally-grown crops and plots with organically-grown crops on the same holding) at the end of the transition period was also turned down.

What happens next?

The existing organic farming regulation remains in force until 1st January 2021. Delays have been negotiated for most of the changes, allowing organic stakeholders to adapt gradually.

Some professional organisations are not fully satisfied with this compromise, particularly with regard to the continuation of derogations. The French National Federation for Organic Farming (FNAB) has notably suggested changing the French label by submitting it to more demanding terms and specifications, the idea being to create a French label complementing the European label for companies interested in the concept.

Unigrains' opinion

The new EU regulation on organic farming further clarifies a number of issues that have arisen with the development of new technologies and the intensification of international trade. In this sense, it provides a very necessary update.

With its ambitious targets (100% certified seed, greater proportion of organically-produced food in livestock operations), the new regulation reinvigorates European organic farming and reaffirms its original values, running counter to the "less stringent organic" approach that sector players were concerned about.

While some pioneer players legitimately want to press on with their efforts to constantly improve organic farming, notably by implementing stricter rules corresponding to their ethical and social values, having a multitude of different labels is not desirable as it would risk confusing consumers, who could then lose faith in the entire organic certification system.