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EU ORGANIC AGRICULTURE - AN OVERVIEW OF LATEST LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

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Abstract: *For the next decade, one of the objectives of the recently released EU's strategy "Farm to Fork" is to reach a target of 25% in organic food and farming in the EU agriculture. For this target to be accomplished, the overall EU organic area should be increased, by complying with the regulations in force. This paper is an overview of the new set of regulations that will come into force by the beginning of the next year. Starting with 01 January 2022 new organic regulation will apply to all EU states. The latest European Union (EU) rules on organic production and labelling of organic products was adopted on 30 May 2018, by the European Parliament and the Council (2018). The future framework for organic farming is expected to harmonize and simplify the standards for all EU and non-EU farmers marketing their products across Europe. In the same time, it will prevent unfair trade practices while consumer trust in organic production will increase. The entire supply chain will have to comply with the organic measures and a wider list of products are covered. The certification process was also taken into account, enhancing an easier process for the small farmers.*

Keywords: *farm to fork, organic agriculture, regulations*

JEL classification: *L50, Q01, O13*

INTRODUCTION

Organic crop production uses cropping practices and crops that improve soil stability and biodiversity, increase or maintain the amount of organic matter in the soil, and prevent compaction and erosion. "Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects" (IFOAM). The objectives of organic agriculture are reached by employing agronomic, biological, and mechanical methods instead of synthetic materials (FAO).

Unlike practices used in conventional agriculture, which are often based on targeted short-term solutions (eg. application of a soluble fertilizer or herbicide), organic systems use a different strategic approach, which is based on long-term solutions (preventive, rather than reactive) at the systems level (Watson et al. 2002).

Organic farming has progressively developed from a rather outlying and isolated concept to a central social matter. It is also a movement: A response to society's health and environmental expectations, a proposal for changes for the intensification of agriculture.

The present European and worldwide strategies for agriculture demonstrate that organic agriculture is the best approach for protecting the environment, maintaining biodiversity, assure animal welfare and providing healthy and nutritive food.

Since the first initiative toward organic farming, in early 1920 by Rudolf Steiner, organic agriculture has evolved from biodynamic principles to new streams of initiatives based on ethical and ecological principles, being initiated an alternative mode of agricultural production and a commitment for future generations health.

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Starting from farm until it reaches the fork, the goal of organic farmers is to employ inputs (feedstuffs, fertilizers, plant protection products) and apply processing methods to safeguard the nutritional qualities present in raw materials throughout all stages of production.

GENERAL CONTEXT

The cornerstone of regulatory framework for European organic agriculture originates back in 1991, starting with EU Reg No. 2092/91, revised in 1999. Later on, in 2004, The European Commission adopted the first Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming and continued with EC Reg 834/2007 and 889/2008 regarding organic production.

Organic production means complying with the rules of organic farming. These rules are designed to promote environmental protection, maintain Europe's biodiversity and build consumer confidence in organic products.

Certified organic products are recognizable by the "Eurofeuille" logo, for European level, and specific national logo, developed by each country (Figure 1.). This label guarantees consumers compliance with the specifications throughout the supply chain.



a)



b)

Figure 1. a) The European logo for certified organic products. b) Romanian logo for ecological products

Framing EU organic production is established by a number of rules and regulations governing the production, distribution and marketing of organic food.

Given the experience gained for the application of Regulation (EC) no. 834/2007 by Regulation 889/2008 and the analysis of the industrialized agriculture Regulation (EC) no. 834 will be repealed and replaced from 1 January 2022 by the new Regulation (EC) no. 2018/848.

Regulation (EU) 2018/848 of 30 May 2018 on organic production and labeling of organic products was officially released on 14 June 2018. Therefore, initially, organic farmers will have had a couple of years to comply with the new legislation. Meanwhile the coming into force of the regulation has been postponed to 2022, giving the organic producers an extra 12 months for compliance. However, products produced in accordance with the current organic Regulation (EC) No. 834/2007 before 1 January 2022 may be placed on the market after that date until stocks are exhausted.

THE MAIN CHANGES COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS LEGISLATION

Application area

With regard to the new regulation, there are three categories of products that can be certified organic (Figure 2).

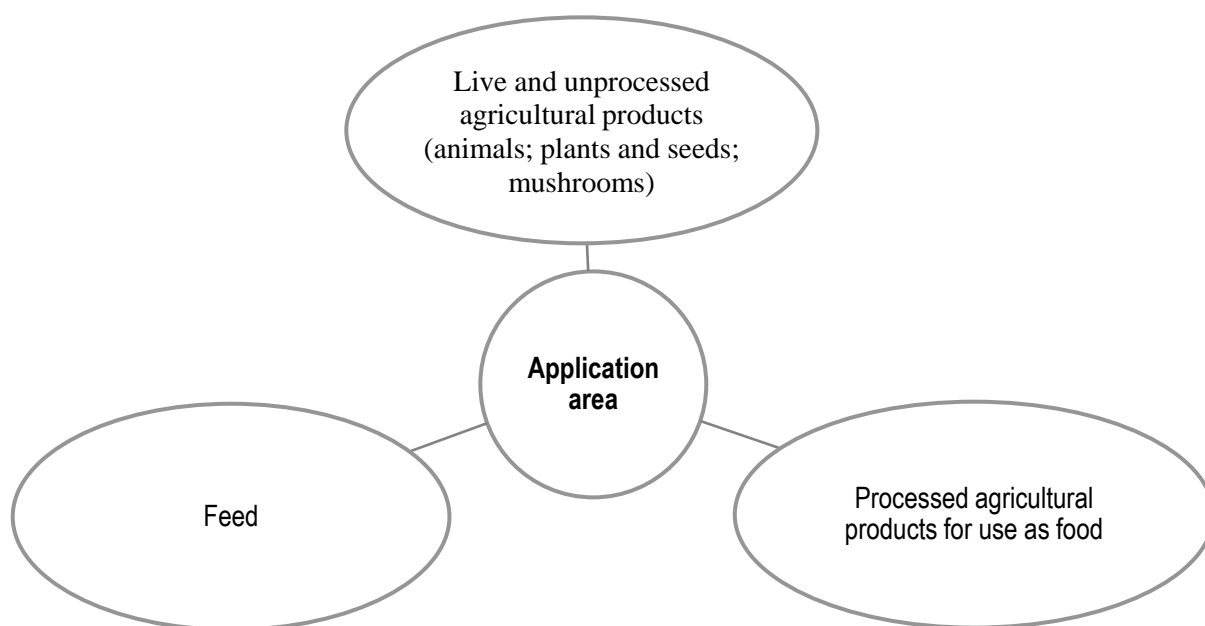


Figure 2. Application area of EC Reg 848/2018

The novelty of this Regulation is the introduction of a list of specific products which are not clearly covered by the three categories specified in the scope, but which can be further certified. New products that are included in the scope of this regulation and will be eligible for the organic agriculture certification are as follows.

- yeast used as food or feed;
- maté, sweet corn, vine leaves, palm kernels, hop buds and other edible parts of plants and products obtained from them;
- sea salt and other types of salt used for food and feed;
- silkworm donuts from which yarns can be removed;
- natural gums and resins;
- beeswax;
- essential oils;
- corks made of natural cork, not crowded and without any binders;
- cotton, not carded and combed;
- wool, not carded and combed;
- raw hides and skins;
- traditional herbal preparations.

Goals and key points

The new EU regulation sets additional targets for organic farming. Protecting the climate, making a significant contribution to a non-toxic environment and promoting local production and short distribution channels are now new goals pursued by organic farming. It should be noted that the objective of producing high quality products has been removed from this new regulation.

Production rules

Details of **production rules are also reinforced** and more accurate definition of soil farming practices is presented. Above-ground cultivation methods are still prohibited and the concept of soil soil-related crop cultivation' is clarified: production is obtained in living soil, in connection with the subsoil and bedrock.

Therefore, the use of demarcated bed is no longer compliant with organic agriculture rules. The Member States in which this practice had been allowed, namely Finland, Denmark and Sweden will have a generous period of time, until 2030, to move towards other methods.

In the same time, hydroponic production, is prohibited.

Regionality of supplies for livestock

The **regionality of feed supplies** was extended. Starting with 1 January 2023 the proportion of food required from the farm itself or other organic farms in the region, in animal feed is being increased as follows: from 20 to 30% for monogastric farms and from 60 to 70% for herbivorous farms.

Group certification

Introduction a group certification for small producers in the EU is a novelty of the regulation. It is setting up the framework for the creation of a group certification system for small farmers. The goal is to enable access in this production system for small producers facing issues on individual certification costs and heavy administrative constraints, by allowing them to pool these costs. The conditions that must be met by each member for being recognized as a group of operators, are as follows:

- ✓ having an individual cost of certification of more than 2% of the turnover or standard output of organic production;
- ✓ having annual turnover of organic production of maximum EUR 25 000 or standard output of organic production of EUR 15 000 per year;
- ✓ having a farm of up to 5 ha, 0,5 ha in case of greenhouse or 15 ha in the case of permanent grasslands,
- ✓ having production activities close to each other.

The rules that apply to the group of operators as a whole are:

- ✓ having a joint commercialization system for final products obtained within the group
- ✓ the group will be established as a common legal law entity.
- ✓ having established a system for internal controls which is performed by observing a documented set of control activities and procedures.

However, the proposed cooperative or producer group in the new regulation is limited to 1000 members, and individual farm size to five hectares.

Targeted control system

Aiming to warrant fair competition for farmers while preventing fraud and maintaining consumer trust, another key point is that **Physical inspection of operators** will be done with an annual frequency. Organic famers and operators will be verified for their compliance verification at least once a year.

However, exceptions to this rule are allowed under certain conditions, on the basis of a risk analysis. If an operator did not reveal a failure of the compliance rules for at least three consecutive years of annual checks and have a low probability of non-compliance based on the risk analysis,

physical control may be put off for a period of up to 24 months. On the other hand, in the case of repeated irregularities, on the spot controls will be intensified.

Import rules

Regarding third countries (outside EU), **transition from the current equivalency recognition to compliance recognition** is set up. This means that producers in third countries will have to comply with the same set of rules as the ones from the EU territory. The import compliance is aimed to monitor and certify imported products.

An exception remains for imported products from third countries with which the European Union has signed a trade agreement that recognizes the equivalence in terms of regulation and control system with the European Union. These include Canada, the United States, Japan, Tunisia and New Zealand.

Objective and principles

Besides the previous objectives and principles set for organic agriculture, a few new issues are being tackled (figure 3).

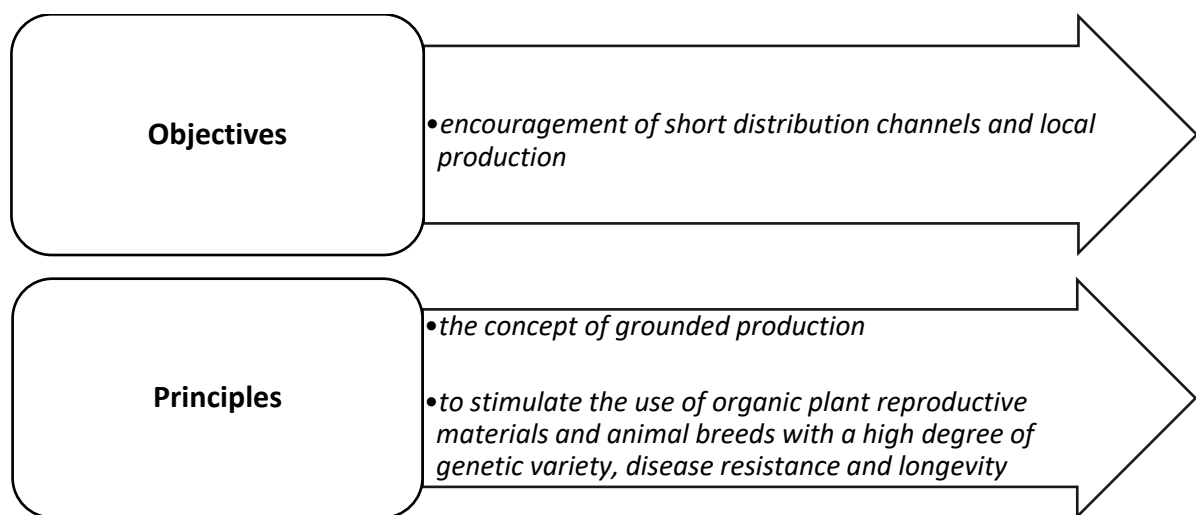


Figure 3. Newly added objectives and principles in the EU organic regulation.

CONCLUSION

Halve the use of plant protection products, promote organic farming, place almost a third of the EU's land and seas under protection: these are the European Commission desiderates for defending biodiversity and quality food.

For the next decade, one of the objectives of the recently released EU's strategy "Farm to Fork" is to reach a target of 25% in organic food and farming in the EU agriculture. According to the latest Eurostat figures, dating back to 2018, only Austria is close to this level, with the EU average being 7.5%. For this quarter target to be accomplished, the overall EU organic area should be increased, by complying with the regulations in force. The farm to fork plan will focus on three main areas:

- ✓ boosting demand for organic products while maintaining consumer confidence;
- ✓ encourage acreage growth in the EU;
- ✓ strengthen the role of organic production in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss.

The main changes expected with the implementation of the new organic regulations:

- ✓ expanding the range of certified organic products;
- ✓ a more targeted control system;
- ✓ robust import rules;
- ✓ clear and reliable labelling: the consumer is informed, with the European logo, of the origin of agricultural raw materials, including the regional case and the identity of the supervisory body;
- ✓ maintaining the link to the soil ground
- ✓ the creation of a "group certification" for helping small producers to achieve certification

The derogations that are permanent under current regulation will be provisional in the new framework. Farmers will have access to non-organic inputs only for a limited timeline, and only if these are not available as organic. The available quantity of organic seed and young animals will be open access published in national databases.

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