

Recommendations to the formulation of EU regulation 2092/91 on livestock production

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Abstract – Within the SAFO network, the workpackage on standard development has focussed on the topic, on how and to what degree the EU-Regulations contribute to the objective of a high status of animal health and food safety in organic livestock production. Results and conclusions from the discussions at 5 SAFO workshops are presented.¹

INTRODUCTION

The EU-Regulation (EEC-1804/1999) was introduced to harmonise the rules of organic livestock production across member states and to make all organic systems across EU members subject to minimum standards. Within the EU network 'Sustaining animal health and food safety in organic farming' (SAFO), the work package on standard development has focussed on the topic, on how and to what degree the EU-Regulations contribute to the objective of a high status of animal health and food safety in organic livestock production. The detailed objectives of the work package were:

- to contribute to a harmonization of organic standard development, to identify problem areas caused by the diversity in different regions of Europe, to collate and formulate recommendations for the development of organic livestock standards, to communicate these recommendations to policy makers and certification bodies.

CHALLENGES

Organic livestock production is not as well developed as crop production both in relation to farm practice and research. This partly explains why the implementation of the standards has not reached the same level in all European countries. The implementation of the standards has, among others, to face a huge diversity in the availability of resources (feedstuffs, litter, outdoor area etc.) between regions of Europe. Furthermore, the results of a questionnaire within the European countries showed a huge variability with regard to the perception of problems and to the expertise to deal with these problems. Therefore, it is reasonable that the prevalence of diseases varies considerably between organic farms. Meta-analysis of the literature showed that in general animal health status in organic farming is not different from conventional production

Difficulties to improve the level of animal health and food safety have been identified in different areas. With regard to the farming practices deficits in training and education of farmers on preventive health

management are obvious. Also veterinarians, consultants and inspectors often lack training and education on preventive health management and organic principles. Conversion plans often do not cover the organic livestock enterprises.

Problems and challenges associated with the diversity of regional and local conditions are related to a huge difference in the outdoor access in difficult climatic conditions, in the lack of straw, organic feedstuffs or home market etc.. Correspondingly, there is a need for a solution when climatic conditions and local resources constrain the fulfilment of organic rules and principles.

The implementation of a high animal health status often requires additional efforts and the use of additional resources (labour time, investments etc.). Therefore, new marketing strategies are required to cover the additional costs by premium prices.

CONCLUSIONS

Standards per se do not assure a high level of animal health and food safety in organic livestock production. The most important source of variation in relation to animal health and food safety is the farm management and not the degree in which the standards are implemented. Farmers are faced with conflicting aims and therefore animal health does not always have the highest priority.

Strong principle of animal health should be included in the EU Regulation. In addition, there is a need to focus on health output in organic livestock production. The standards should prescribe that each organic livestock farm has to develop an animal health plan, which identifies risk factors and strategies to improve or maintain a good health status. Details should be worked out by the national authorities which are familiar with the specific situations on the different levels.

A regular monitoring system should be established by the certification bodies that includes animal health data. In the longer term producers failing to meet certain health standards should face consequences (e.g. improvements scheme, loss of product certification, etc.).

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