

ORGANIC INPUTS EVALUATION

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www.organicinputs.org

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Summary

The «organic regulation» 2092/91 EEC establishes the regulatory framework for organic farming in the European Union. Annex II A of this regulation lists the products which are allowed for use as fertilizers and soil conditioners (F&SC), while Annex II B lists the allowed plant protection products (PPP). Article 7 contains the criteria for amendments to the Annexes. The ORGANIC INPUTS EVALUATION project has made an inventory of the current implementation of these regulations in various EU Member States and elaborated proposals for improvements of Article 7, and procedures for their implementation.

Current regulation of PPP: Most of the products listed in Annex II B are available for use only in some EU countries. The requirements for pesticide registration often pose insurmountable hurdles for these products, because these are less effective than conventional PPP, or because their market is too small to justify the costs of dossier preparation. On the other hand, several countries have established simplified procedures for certain low-risk products, but these are very different in each case. Many of the PPP allowed for organic farming are currently (March 2006) subject to re-evaluation under directive 91/414. If this is successfully completed, their availability may become more homogenous across the EU. However, there is also a danger that they may not complete re-evaluation, particularly for the financial reasons outlined above. One major discussion point are copper fungicides, which are perceived as undesirable in organic farming. As a corollary, producers in some countries fear that they might be deprived of copper fungicides before efficient alternatives are available. Another discussion point are inert ingredients of PPP. Many organizations believe that these should also comply with organic farming regulations. However, there are no generally accepted evaluation criteria for inerts at present.

Current regulation of F&SC: Nutrient supply is highly correlated with the stocking rate, which tends to be lower in southern European countries than in countries of northern Europe. The range of products available for use is more homogeneous than in PPP. The only exception are fertilizers made from slaughterhouse residues, which are prohibited or severely restricted in many countries since the BSE crisis. One major discussion point is the impact of the «nitrate directive» (Dir. 91/676) for the protection of vulnerable zones, which has been interpreted as being relevant for all organically managed land. Another discussion point is the lack of an official definition of factory farming. A further discussion point is whether the composition of substrates should be regulated. Finally, concerns were frequently expressed that fertilizers such as manure and composts might be contaminated with GMO in the future.

The following changes to Article 7 are proposed: (i) To replace the current evaluation criteria [section 1(a) and (b)] by a more complete set of criteria covering all aspects relevant for organic farming. Some of these criteria are new in Reg. 2092/91, but consistent with other regulations on organic farming. (ii) To restrict the «non-contact clause» [section 1(a)], which currently applies to all new PPP, to synthetic products which come into contact with edible crop parts. (iii) To allow the use of products of microbial origin, provided that they fulfil the evaluation criteria. (iv) To expand the scope of the evaluation criteria and Annex II to cover also products used for «other purposes related to crop production», such as plant strengtheners, for which there is no common definition or regulation in the EU. This will help to close gaps and prevent disparities

between countries. (v) To remove the «traditional use clause» from Article 7 [section 1a.], and to consider traditional use together with other criteria during evaluation.

To put the new evaluation criteria into practice, the project has developed a «criteria matrix». The criteria matrix contains detailed questions relating to each of the criteria in Article 7, and provides guidance for applicants and evaluators. Factual information has to be provided on the application form. This is then evaluated against organic farming principles on the evaluation form.

As case studies, hydrolized proteins (nitrogen fertilizers) and spinosad (an insecticide) were evaluated with the criteria matrix. The case studies illustrate how to use the matrix. They are also interesting because there is a public debate on both of these products concerning whether they should be allowed in organic farming.

The project proposes that an expert panel assists in the evaluation process. This expert panel is, or is part of, the «independent expert panel for technical advice» cited in action 11 of the EU Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming. It is further proposed that Member States establish similar, national panels to ensure stakeholder involvement.

The following procedures are proposed: (i) Application: The Commission tables requests for amendments of Annex II. A request is generally submitted by a Member State (hereafter called 'applicant') which needs to provide all information required to evaluate the application. It is recommended that the Member State discusses the request with its national consultation group before application. (ii) Review: The expert panel reviews the application for correctness. In case of major disagreement with the applicant, it should discuss the issue with the applicant. The aim is to reach a high degree of consensus regarding the facts underlying the application. Whenever an application is likely to meet strong opposition during Member State evaluation, the expert panel should consider whether appropriate specifications/restrictions might alleviate the opposition. When the application is reviewed, the expert panel makes a provisional evaluation. (iii) Evaluation: Member States evaluate the reviewed application, using such national consultation and expertise as they think fit. (iv) Final recommendation: The expert panel reviews all Member States' evaluations with special emphasis on key areas of difference. In the event of a wide discrepancy of national evaluations, the Commission may decide to return the summarised evaluations to all Member States for their further evaluation, with the aim of arriving at more consistent national evaluations. Based on the national evaluations, the expert panel makes a final recommendation to the Commission. (v) Final Decision: The Commission Services table the request for amendment with the expert panel's final recommendation at the Standing Committee on Organic Farming (SCOF). The SCOF assists the Commission in making a final decision.

The project identified a need for further research and actions in the following areas: (i) Closer co-operation with general (non-organic) regulation, in particular the 4th stage of PPP re-evaluation. (ii) Evaluation of commercial products, which includes evaluation of inert ingredients. (iii) Transparent communication of decisions concerning inputs for organic farming. (iv) Improvement of the «need recognized» restriction. (v) Regulation of products used against pests of stored products. (vi) Review of the PPP and F&SC currently listed. (vii) Regulation of the use of the term «organic» in labelling of PPP and F&SC. (viii) Regulation of on-farm trials on organic farms.