

PRESS RELEASE

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Controversial Overhaul of EU Organic Regulation Raises Red Flags

The revision of the import section of the EU organic regulation proposed by the Commission imposes absolute compliance by developing countries and inhibits European consumers' choice of organic products.

On 24 March 2014, the EU Commission released a proposal for a complete overhaul of the EU organic regulation. Regarding imports, the proposal foresees to replace the approach of equivalence with requirements of absolute compliance with all details of the EU regulation. 'Equivalence', under which organic products currently enter the EU, determines that imported products must comply with equally reliable organic standards, but accepts that the details of the standards may vary to account for different local conditions. Absolute compliance does not consider regional specificities, which invites absurd situations affecting imports into the EU: Under proposed rules requiring full farm conversion, an African organic mango farmer who feeds household waste to a pig on his/ her farm or buys a non-organic young goat for milk production may, under the new rules, no longer be able to export his/ her produce to the EU as this would not comply with the foreseen regulation.

European organic agriculture associations represented by IFOAM EU condemn this initiative. Referring to the revision of the regulation, BÖLW, the umbrella organization of producers, processors and traders of organic food in Germany, cautions: *"The EU Commission wants to strengthen organic in Europe, yet it creates new hurdles."*

The concern demonstrated previously by the EU Commission in ensuring European consumers' access to a wide range of organic products, including non-EU products like coffee or cocoa, seems to have been discarded. The Commission had made significant progress in implementing the recommendations of [the International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture](#), lead by IFOAM, the United Nations Food (FAO) and Agriculture Organization, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The shift towards compliance is a step backwards in the efforts to include developing country producers in value chains. This change goes against the recommendations of the International Task Force and the spirit of the international Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade.

The current proposal exempts but a few highly developed countries from full compliance and is, according to Markus Arbenz, IFOAM Executive Director, *"a backward approach, imposing EU rule, even where it makes no sense. And absurd situations will inevitably lead to non-compliance."*

Criticism to the new legislative proposal by the international organic sector and by some Member States went unheeded, and in a surprise move the Commission has now decided to push through the proposal in a more urgent revision to the current organic regulation. The move from equivalence to compliance will strangle:

- European consumers' access to affordable and trustworthy organic products, particularly tropical products;
- European organic processors' access to imported organic ingredients;
- Developing Countries' ability to grow their organic sector to meet the demand of European consumers.

The compliance approach the Commission is proposing will harm the entire organic sector, from producers to consumers, inside and outside of the EU. Member States are urgently called upon to voice their objections and put a stop to this proposal.

More information about the organic regulation review and the positions of IFOAM EU can be found [here](#).

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About IFOAM

IFOAM is the international umbrella organization of the organic world dedicated to taking organic agriculture to the mainstream. IFOAM unites, leads and assists the organic movement in its full diversity, while providing a common voice on relevant organic issues. IFOAM implements the will of its broad-based constituency, with 800 Affiliates in more than 114 countries and is governed by a World Board originating from all continents.