



REVIEW OF EU POLICY ON ORGANIC AGRICULTURE LEGISLATION AND ACTION PLAN

These are the responses submitted by the Soil Association, together with guidance notes which you may find useful when completing the online questionnaire.

1. ABOUT YOU

1.1 You are based in the following country (For international or European organisations, please choose "international"):

* (compulsory)

UK

1.2 In what capacity are you completing this questionnaire?

* (compulsory)

- As a citizen of the European Union - to be linked with questions 2.1 to 2.5
- On behalf of a public authority
- On behalf of an industry association or a non-governmental organisation (NGO)
- On behalf of a company
- On behalf of a public authority in a non-EU country
- Other

1.3 Is your association/organisation registered in the European Commission transparency register? * (compulsory)

Yes

No

1.4 What is the name of your company, organisation or authority?

* (compulsory)

Soil Association

1.5 Please specify which interests your organisation represents * (compulsory)

- Consumer
- Private control body
- Farmer
- Processor
- Trader

- Retailer
- Public competent authority, public control authority, accreditation body
- National association
- Public authority in a non-EU country
- Advisory service
- Research
- Other

note: this is a multi-answer question, but in some browsers only one option is possible

2. ORGANIC CONSUMPTION

If you are replying as a private consumer, please reply to the questions in the following section:

2.1 How 'organic' is your food consumption?

** (compulsory)*

- I try to buy organic as much as possible
- I am a regular consumer of organic products
- I am an occasional consumer of organic products
- I never consume organic products
- Other
- Would rather not say

2.2 I consume organic products because (several answers possible)

** (compulsory)*

- I'm concerned about the environment
- Organic farming is more sustainable than conventional farming
- I want GMO-free products
- I avoid food containing pesticide residues or residues of other synthetic substances
- Organic products are healthier
- Organic products taste better
- Organic products are higher quality
- I want to consume seasonal and local products
- Organic production respects animal welfare

- For other personal beliefs
- I don't buy organic products
- Other
- Would rather not say

2.3 Where do you buy organic food? (several answers possible)(optional)

- In specialised shops
- In supermarkets
- Directly from (an) organic farmer(s)
- From a farmer cooperative
- On a local market
- On the internet
- I buy organic baskets from an association that markets local products
- Other
- Would rather not say
- In specialised shops
- In supermarkets
- Directly from (an) organic farmer(s)
- From a farmer cooperative

2.4 As a consumer, are you prepared to pay more for organic food than conventional food? * (*compulsory*)

- Yes No Would rather not say

2.5 If yes, how much? (optional)

- Less than 10% 10-25% 25-50% 50-75% 75-100% More than 100% No opinion

3. SMALL FIRMS

3.1 Does the "harmonisation" (alignment) of rules and control requirements at European level help the development of organic production by small firms in the EU? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

*This is not a question that can be answered satisfactorily with a simple 'yes' or 'no' response: Our view is that 'yes', it helps with sourcing ingredients, helping to both improve integrity and reduce administrative costs, but 'no' it must not conflict with or override the needs of small (or larger) firms to respond to the needs and aspirations of their local markets and their consumers.
NB .'Control' means the work done by an organic inspection and certification body.*

4. ORGANIC STANDARD

4.1 Should the current European standard for organic products be strengthened? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

The principles and objectives of organic farming are well set out in Council Regulation 834/2007, but these are not always accurately reflected in the detailed implementing rules (or standards) in Commission Regulation 889/2008. Many of the implementing rules were transferred from the earlier version of the regulation (2092/1991) without any revision to ensure that they are appropriate to or compatible with the objectives set out in 834/2007.

4.2 If yes, how? (several answers possible) (optional)

- By making the rules stricter
- By removing all flexibility
- By introducing sanctions (penalties)
- Other opinion

*There are some areas where the current standards need improvement as the rules are underdeveloped, or need to set a more clearly defined outcomes for the relevant sector, e.g. glasshouses, poultry, food processing, aquaculture. We would characterise this as a need for better rather than simply 'stricter' rules. A degree of flexibility is important to allow the organic sector to develop, to take account of the different state of development in the countries of the EU and to allow for the vast range of geographical constraints that apply across the continent.
Control (inspection and certification) arrangements also require some strengthening, but not through just introducing stricter sanctions or more regular inspections. A more urgent need is to ensure that Competent Authorities do their job competently and consistently. NB. The Competent Authority, generally the central or regional ministry of agriculture in each member state, is responsible for direct application of the Organic Regulations or oversight of private inspection bodies. They play a key role in influencing the effective application of the organic regulations.*

4.3 Testing all organic products for pesticide residues would increase production costs so make them dearer for consumers. Should this nevertheless be made compulsory? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

The testing of all products is not a sensible, reasonable or necessary proposal. Organic farming is a whole system approach and organic products are not defined just by an absence of pesticide residues. We expect organic producers to do all that they can to avoid contamination by pesticides, but unfortunately in a polluted world occasional contamination can occur. Our view remains that testing for pesticides is a very useful tool within the control (inspection and certification) toolbox and that it should be used at the discretion of the control body on the basis of a formal risk assessment of the products involved.

It is also difficult to envisage the parameters for testing all products. Would it be applied just at the farm level, at each processing step, for each consignment, and with what quantity limit and for which pesticides? It would be completely impractical and prohibitively expensive to test all organic products.

4.4 Should the level of pesticide residues for organic products be set at a lower level than for conventional products? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

The meaning of this question is not clear. Does the question relate to a maximum residue limit that would lead to decertification or a trigger limit below the legal maximum residue limit that would automatically trigger an investigation of the source of the residue?

Organic farming aims to avoid the use of pesticides and so it is to be expected that products should contain no or very low levels of residues. Organic producers and certification bodies are required to investigate any pesticide residue. The current arrangement that allows an investigation of all of the contributing factors should continue. It should not be replaced by a decertification threshold.

GMOs

Genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) and products produced from or by them are considered incompatible with the concept of organic production. They cannot be used in organic farming or in the processing of organic products.

4.5 Is the fact that 'organic', by definition, means 'GMO-free' an important reason why you buy organic? * (compulsory)

- Yes

- No
- Would rather not say

Because organic systems are not isolated from the general production chain (cultivation, harvest, transport, storage, processing), the accidental presence of GM crops in organic farming systems can't be completely ruled out. Under the current laws, there is no need to mention the possible presence of GMOs on the label of any food product where the GMO is likely to account for less than 0.9% of the product content. However, lower/stricter labelling requirements are likely to increase costs for consumers.

4.6 Were you aware of this GMO labelling limit? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- Would rather not say

This is an incorrect and misleading question. Presence of GMOs must be labelled according to EU law below 0.9% even if that presence is 'adventitious or technically unavoidable'. If this were applied properly to non-organic products, then the costs of excluding GMOs from organic products would reduce. In any event, it is iniquitous that excluding GMOs from organic products should put any cost onto the organic market – the GM industry should be bearing the cost of the contamination it causes.

4.7 Should organic products be subject to the same labelling rules as conventional products, as regards the accidental or unavoidable presence of GMO? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

Yes, but not the present rules which, as is clear from the wording of question 4.6, even the Commission does not properly interpret and apply. It is no answer to make different rules for organic. The rules should be stricter for all, so that those who wish to avoid GMOs can do so. The limit should be set at the reliable limit of detection: 0.1%.

4.8 If no, should the amount (labelling threshold for accidental presence) of GMOs that must be mentioned on the label of organic products be lower than for conventional products? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

It should be the same, and lower for both, so there is no unfair burden on organic products.

4.9 As a consumer, are you prepared to pay higher prices for organic products if this were the result of a lower GMO labelling limit? (optional)

- Yes No Would rather not say

It should not be the responsibility of consumers of organic products to pay more for excluding the pollution and contamination caused by GMOs.

Exceptions to the rules

4.10 Do you think European organic farmers and other operators ought to be bound by identical rules in all EU countries? * (compulsory)

- Yes
 No
 No opinion

It is difficult to answer this question as written. If the intention is that all organic products should be produced in exactly the same way throughout the EU then our answer is no.

Organic farming is based on fulfilling principles, it is location, and indeed site-specific. The rules (Regulation 889/2008) should be written at a level of detail that allows outcomes which meet the principles (as stated in Regulation 834/2007) to be achieved and independently verified by inspection. This will inevitably, and rightly, result in some appropriate variation (flexibility) between practices in the different countries and regions of the EU. The Competent Authority in each member state should have a clear responsibility for issuing guidance on appropriate implementation where a reasonable doubt exists.

Today organic farmers and other operators can – in specific circumstances listed in the European legislation – be exempted from production rules and still have their produce certified organic. For instance, when organic seeds are not available on the market, farmers are allowed to use conventional, non-treated seeds. Other exemptions allow them to use non-organic animals.

4.11 Do you think these exemptions should continue? * (compulsory)

- Yes No No opinion

This question presents the issue too starkly. The headline production rules should be met wherever possible, but there are good reasons for allowing some exemptions on a time limited basis. Organic farming is still very small and undeveloped and this inevitably constrains the availability of such things as seed and livestock. Other exemptions reflect a need for research, technological advancement and/or market development to overcome a current limitation or constraint. However, it is important to ensure progress is made and those who invest in overcoming constraints should find a ready market for their products. We believe that a timetable of transitional arrangements to end exemptions should always be in place. This must include clear responsibility for the Competent Authority (usually the ministry of agriculture) in each member state to supervise the transition and to report progress and any difficulties to the Commission. Exemptions should only be available where the transitional arrangements are in being adequately monitored and reported.

4.12 Should these exemptions from production rules granted to farmers and other operators always be limited in time? * (compulsory)

Yes

No

No opinion

Yes, we support limiting the time for all exemptions, however, time limits should not be arbitrary; rather they should include the need for formal reporting and review of progress and a clear requirement for Competent Authorities to be accountable to the Commission for the transitional arrangements in their country.

Local origin of feed

Under organic livestock production rules, animals should be fed with organic feed primarily obtained from the farm where the animals are kept or from other organic farms in the same region. For herbivores like cows, sheep and goats, at least 60% of the feed must come from the same farm (or, if not possible, the same region). For pigs and poultry, this minimum is 20%.

4.13 Do you think organic livestock should be fed with:

(optional)

- Feed from any location, as long as it's organic?
- A minimum percentage of feed from the farm or region?
- 100% feed from the farm or region?
- 100% feed from the farm?
- No opinion

The organic principles make it clear that feed should be from the farm or region, but this cannot be required yet as organic farming is still relatively small scale and undeveloped. It can only happen according to a timetable that allows the necessary research to support the growing of a wider range of crops – mainly high protein crops- and market development, with an obligation on member states and the Commission to implement, support and monitor such a transition.

To ensure a healthy, balanced and complete diet for farm animals, their feed ration must include sufficient quantities of proteins. As Europe does not produce enough organic protein-feed supplies, it has to import organic soya or other organic protein-rich feed.

4.14 Do you think that (several answers possible) (optional)

- The organic sector should be allowed to continue to rely on these imports if needed?
- EU legislation should give incentives to boost European production of organic protein crops?
- A specific organic protein-crop production strategy should be developed to address this issue?
- Synthetic amino acids (currently not allowed in Europe) should be authorised to supplement organic animals' feed rations, as is the case in the United States?
- No opinion

This is a better question that addresses the right issues – rules cannot be made in isolation, but must take into account the state of development of the sector and must be linked to the support mechanisms needed to achieve the desired objective. The ideal would be to eliminate all imported feeds, but this is not yet possible. The comparison with the United States in allowing synthetic amino acids is somewhat misleading as a restricted range of synthetic amino acids are permitted in poultry production only and the allowance for these is subject to step down with a view to removing this practice.

4.15 Animal welfare

Which of the following statements do you agree with? (several answers possible)(optional)

- Animal welfare standards should be (i) high and (ii) the same, whatever the type of agricultural production.
- There should not be specific rules for animal welfare in organic production.
- There should be specific rules for animal welfare in organic farming.
- Animal welfare standards in organic farming should systematically be higher than in conventional farming.
- Animal welfare standards for all types of farming should be strengthened.
- Animal welfare standards for organic farming should be strengthened.
- The current rules for animal welfare in organic farming are sufficient.
- No opinion

1 – Our aim is for all systems of farming to deliver the highest level of animal welfare. This is characterised as a 'good life' by the Farm Animal Welfare Council. However, we believe that some methods of farming cannot fulfil many of the needs of farmed animals and consequently have a 'cap' in the level of welfare that can be attained. To avoid systems with limited welfare potential would impose constraints on the 'types of agricultural' production that could be used if consistently high welfare is to be achievable.

3 – As systems with limited the welfare potential continue to be allowed, it is sensible to retain and develop the requirements for delivering higher welfare (a 'good life') in organic systems.

4 – Yes, by definition of the system of farming there should be fewest limitations on welfare potential and this should be underpinned by a focus on welfare outcomes assessed by observation of the animals. Our current welfare outcomes work AssureWel (www.assureWel.org) champions and pioneers this approach.

5 – We agree that the welfare standards for all farming should be strengthened, and that systems with limited welfare potential should be avoided or clearly identified and labelled so that all consumers can make an informed choice.

6 – We support the continuing development of organic standards in light of new research and the experience gained by pioneering organic farmers. The current resource based standards (space, access to the outdoors, provision of bedding etc) should continue to be developed and a new focus on welfare outcomes should be adopted to ensure that organic always fulfils its potential.

4.16 Procedure for authorising substances

Please rate the following categories of substance according to how much authorisation you think should be required for their use in organic farming and production – from 1 (very strict – no substances allowed) to 4 (all substances possible are allowed).(optional)

	1	2	3	4
Fertilisers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pesticides	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feed materials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Products for cleaning & disinfection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Processing aids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

This question is not easy to understand. It appears to be about the degree of justification that producers should provide when using certain non-organic inputs. The reasons why they materials are restricted and what the need to use them says about the success or otherwise of the organic management of the farm or food processing business varies widely. The individual conditions of use for each substance should make the degree of justification required clear – it is simple too crude to apply the broad brush approach implied by the question

In attempting to answer the question as asked, we have taken the following approach - pesticides are poisons and therefore 1, fertilisers can adversely affect the soil life, but are generally not poisons, similarly, feed materials for animals and additives and processing aids for humans. Products for cleaning and disinfection only have an indirect effect on health.

4.17 Environmental performance

European legislation requires organic producers and traders to respect nature's systems and cycles; ensure the health of soil, water, plants and animals; contribute to a high level of biodiversity and make responsible use of energy and natural resources, such as water, soil, organic matter and air. Do you think that, in addition to these requirements, producers and traders should be required to implement an environmental management system to measure and evaluate their environmental performance and impacts? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

Organic farming must perform well in these areas and we support the evaluation of environmental performance and impacts. However, any new requirements should be proportionate to the size of the business and magnitude of the environmental impact.

5. LABELLING LOGO

5.1 Do you know the European organic logo? *(compulsory)

- Yes
- No
- Would rather not say

5.2 How do you recognise organic products? (several answers possible)

* (compulsory)

- The word "organic" on the label
- The European organic logo on the label
- A national organic logo on the label
- (A) private logo(s) on the label
- (A) private brand(s) on the label
- An indication of the place of origin
- I buy directly from an organic producer and the product is sold without packaging or labels
- Other
- Would rather not say

There are many indications that a product is organic. All serve their purpose but buying direct from the producer, the word organic and the private logos are the most important (the last for additional standards and the innovation these stimulate).

6. PROMOTION - INFORMATION

6.1 Do you think consumers need more information on organic products?

(optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

6.2 What's your opinion of the European *Commission website on organic farming*? Do you find the information you need? (optional)

- Yes always,
- Often
- Sometimes,
- Never
- I don't know this site
- I don't use this site
- No opinion

7. CONTROLS

Controls on operators

European organic legislation requires EU governments to set up a system of controls, run by one or more national authorities. These authorities may delegate monitoring tasks to private control bodies, under specific conditions. This possibility is widely used in Europe.

7.1 Do you trust products certified as "organic"? * (compulsory)

- Yes
- No
- Would rather not say

Generally, the system works and having a local and accessible organisation doing the control tasks enhances confidence, especially if they have roots in the organic sector.

7.2 Did you know that all European organic operators are inspected at least once a year? * (compulsory)

- Yes
- No

7.3 Would you agree that organic operators with a proven track record of abiding by the rules could be inspected less often, for instance every 2 or 3 years? * (compulsory)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

It is important to continue with annual inspections, but how comprehensive and intensive these are should be determined as part of the normal risk assessment carried out by the certification body. This will allow certification bodies to concentrate their surveillance on areas that pose the greatest risk to organic integrity.

7.4 Even if the cost of organic food were to go up as a result, do you think the control system of organic products sold in Europe should be improved?

* (compulsory)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

We believe that the control system can be improved without the need to increase costs.

7.5 If yes, how could this be done? (several answers possible)(optional)

- By developing electronic means to ensure traceability
- With a European database listing all certified organic operators in Europe
- By improving European statistical data on organic products
- By improving controls at all levels of the production chain
- By improving controls on imported organic products
- Other

We believe that the existing control measures are largely satisfactory. Any weakness lies in unsatisfactory or inconsistent application of the current requirements. We believe that the Competent Authority in each country must be more active in supervising private control bodies. The Competent Authority should have sufficient staff and knowledge to supervise the organic sector that they are responsible for, to oversee transitional arrangements and to supply the statistics and information that are currently required in a timely and accurate manner.

Group certification

In several European countries, there are small farmers who apply the principles and rules of organic farming but can't sell their products as organic for various reasons, e.g.:

- they don't have access to certification, since it is too costly, given their small organic production volumes
- they aren't able to manage the documentation and records required by the European control system.

One way of enabling such farmers to access certification and sell their products as organic could be on a joint basis, through farmer groups. Because these groups would have their own internal control systems, it wouldn't be necessary to inspect all farmers in the group, just a sample.

7.6 Do you think that group certification – which is allowed for organic farmers in some non-EU countries, should be allowed in the EU? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

We support the use of group certification to allow small farmers to gain access to organic certification. This model is used elsewhere and has proved to be appropriate for the needs of the producer and to deliver the guarantee that consumers require.

8. TRADE WITH NON-EU COUNTRIES

The EU is a major importer of organic products and one of the two largest markets for organic products. The EU has developed specific agreements or arrangements with countries where organic standards and control systems are recognised as equivalent. This means their standards are capable of meeting the objectives and principles of European organic farming and ensure the same level of product conformity. The EU has also recognised directly some private inspection bodies which apply equivalent standards in non-EU countries. In addition, during a transition period, EU countries can grant import authorisation for organic products.

8.1 The EU market is open to imports of organic products from non-EU countries. Do you agree that non-EU countries exporting to the EU should open their market to organic products produced in EU countries? *(compulsory)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

Yes, there should be mutual trade, provided it is fair and not biased towards the larger EU block and it complements, rather than competes with, the local production.

8.2 When negotiating trade arrangements for organic products with countries outside the EU, which objectives are the most important for the EU? (several answers possible) (optional)

- Helping organic farmers and other operators from developing countries to expand their production and exports of organic products
- Help developing more sustainable and eco-friendly agricultural practices in other countries

- Meeting the demand of European consumers for more and cheaper organic products
- Responding to European food industry demands for more and cheaper organic agricultural raw material
- Ensuring new outlets in non-EU countries for European organic products and helping the development of European organic production
- Ensuring a continuous supply, to avoid disruptions on the European organic market
- Maintaining the trust of European consumers
- Protecting the interests of European organic producers
- No opinion

Trade arrangements should support and enhance local production and market development, not be at their expense.

9. RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

9.1 In which areas are research and innovation most needed in organic farming? (several answers possible) (optional)

- Seeds and plant propagating material adapted to low-input agriculture
- Low-growth strains of animals
- Local production of protein-rich crops
- Co-existence of organic farming with conventional farming and GMOs
- Economic and social dimension of organic farming
- Waste management
- Other areas
- No opinion

Research should be directed at improving the sustainability and self-sufficiency of organic production, and at addressing the limiting factors to better and more organic farming. There is no need for research into GMO co-existence. What is required is a proper and strict regime that ensures a similar level of control, traceability and accountability as the organic system already imposes, so that GMOs do not escape and contaminate non-GM production and the perpetrators can be identified. The specified areas for research rightly focus on applied research to deliver short and medium term benefits to farmers and grower, which will build increased resilience and security into food production. Nonetheless, there is also a need for more fundamental research and within the unspecified 'other areas' should be improved understanding of pests and diseases.

9.2 Do you think there should be a public budget reserved exclusively for research into organic production? (optional)

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

Organic farming is at the leading edge of agriculture (e.g. energy efficiency, carbon sequestration, soil stabilisation, animal welfare, nutrient recycling, pest and disease management) and has strategic importance in delivering the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy. Knowledge, techniques and innovations developed through research into organic systems can also have a significant positive impact on all systems of farming. Therefore, there should be a specific organic research budget and it should be several times more than the proportion of organic land would indicate, for the above reasons. Adoption of ecological principles into organic farming means adaptation to local environmental conditions. The distribution of research budgets should reflect this systems diversity, the understanding of which is fundamental to building resilience into food production.

10. COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

If you have any suggestions about the upcoming revision of the EU organic farming policy, you can email them to AGRI-ORGANIC-CONSULTAION@ec.europa.eu