

# THE ORGANIC STANDARD

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## More information on oversight of organic certifiers, operations and products

The US National Organic Program (NOP) has recently updated its fact sheet describing its oversight of organic products. The fact sheet now includes updated background information on:

- The USDA organic regulations.
- Allowed and prohibited substances.
- The certification process.
- Compliance and enforcement.
- NOP's history and regulatory authority.
- USDA's Organic Literacy Initiative.

To continue efforts to increase its transparency, the NOP has now posted new certifying agents' corrective action reports along with their accreditation certificates.

NOP accredited certifying agents are responsible for ensuring that certified organic operations comply with the USDA organic regulations.

USDA officials conduct an on-site assessment of accredited certifying agents about once every two and a half years. This multi-day assessment includes on-farm witness inspections and thorough documentation reviews. Throughout this process, USDA auditors identify any non-compliances. The NOP then reviews the noncompliances and requests corrective actions from the certifying agent.

The corrective action reports submitted by the certifying agents, along with their accreditation certificates, are now linked from all three lists of certifying agents (sorted by certifying agent name and those serving specific US states and foreign countries) and accessible through the NOP website: Lists of NOP-Accredited Certifying Agents. ■

*Source: NOP Organic Insider (email newsletter), November 21, 2012*

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## Scaling down to scale up

Last year ISEAL launched a new scheme called the 'Scaling Up Strategy'. The thinking behind the Strategy was how to promote growth and efficiency in environmental standards and labelling systems while eliminating hindrance to growth.

As far as the organic sector is concerned there are at least two sides to 'Scaling Up', and this is probably true for other organisations as well. On the one hand, strong growth and great success is good – more organic land, more farmers, more products – clearly, this is what is wanted. On the other hand, such growth brings the risk of losing the organic soul to big business, making systems less sustainable, damaging small farmers, while streamlining production could diminish the development dynamics of the organic production methods.

I have always had mixed feelings on the concept of scaling up. There is no denying, it is a useful tool. But it is not just about scaling up, it also concerns scaling down, a path that is often more difficult to follow. For now I will just consider the effect of scaling up or down within the organic certification system, and will not go into the discussion of farm size, even though this is also a burning political issue.

Meeting an old friend some weeks ago I learnt that in the nuclear power industry when decisions are made on technical details concerning the construction, the security of the materials is, of course, key. There is, first of all, a thick and necessary layer of legislation. But if I understood correctly, the final decisions on technical details to fulfil the legal specifications were developed in collaboration between governmental institutions and private sector organisations and companies.

The reason for this was that the best results are achieved when the wider private groups with all their extra knowledge are involved.

This way of using and respecting the knowledge and experience of the private sector within the nuclear power plant sector seems very different to how the organic legislative system for organic sector has been developed in Europe. It would be good if confidence in the organic private sector competence to handle the organic system was scaled up. Clearly organic production does not involve any risk as in the nuclear industry, that is obvious for anyone. But when looking into the level of legislation for organic production I sometimes get the feeling there is a little bit of a nuclear power plant hidden inside organic production. Otherwise, why would an environmental food production system attract and be attracted to such levels of legislative text? The difference in scale of risk between nuclear power and an environmentally friendly farming system is enormous. Maybe it is time to scale down the detail of legislation in the organic sector?

In fact, the current development of the EU legislation is going into even further details. There is a proposal for new legislation on certification. This is to meet the requests of the European Court of auditors, which criticised the dealings between the Commission and Member States, but is more about supervision of certification bodies. Take just one detail as an example: the new proposal suggests that producers with a sanction affecting the organic status of a product are requested to inform their competent authority. There is a huge risk that many sanctioned producers will not

do so. This requirement shouldn't be scaled down, it should be removed.

The on-going evaluations of the EU Regulation will lead to the identification of several more weaknesses. However, there is a risk that when a weakness is identified, instead of creating a simpler straightforward system, an even more detailed and complex rule will be added. It is time to make an impact assessment on what proposed actions will lead to, and to try to scale down details so that they will not be a hindrance to the growth of organic production. A first step could be to make a EU Regulation that actually can be understood by more than a few percent of the certified operators. It is time to scale down the text so that it is readable! This scale down is needed to get the organic sector to scale up.

The problem is not just with legislation. Looking at broader political decisions, such as accepting trade between the US and the EU system, it is the private sector that has had problems of scaling up, as illustrated by how the parties have got stuck on the details of the differences between the two countries' systems. It is the EU Commission and the National Organic Program in the US that have seen the possibilities of scaling up the organic business. The same situation occurs with the acceptance of certification bodies working in equivalence with the EU Regulation; it is the Commission that is scaling down on details while scaling up on the range of recognised certification bodies. The outcome of these decisions will absolutely be scaling up for organic production.

Maybe you, as a reader, find these discussions boring. But consider what the next decision regarding the organic sector will be. What will be the result, scaling up or scaling down? ■

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# Brazil's hopes and plans

## *Where governmental and social control go hand in hand*

*Earlier this year TOS spent a few days in the company of Mr Rogério Pereira Dias, the Agroecology Coordinator for the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture. This circumstance presented the opportunity to chat about the Brazilian Government's hopes, plans and intentions for its organic sector. During the conversations he expressed his enthusiasm for organic production and for the decisive support that the Brazilian Government is providing to this sector through its policies, developed in coordination with other stakeholders.*

The first point to attract attention when examining Brazilian organic policies is that the Government uses the word 'agroecology' when referring to organic production. Thus Rogério Pereira is the 'Agroecology Coordinator', and the recent policy approved by the Government (see page 12) is called the 'National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production'.

Their actions and use of terminology illustrates how the Brazilian Government views the organic sector, not only as a productive sector that it is necessary to support and regulate, but also as a more holistic concept that involves the people and the environment.

The first law to be passed on organic production in Brazil was Law No. 10.831 in 2003. This law covered general principles. The legislation was developed through different decrees and INs (Normative Instructions) in the following years. In May 2009 IN no. 19 on control mechanisms was launched, which was the start of the official organic regulations in Brazil becoming obligatory. In January 2010

producers were obliged to start the adaptation process to comply with regulations and from January 2011 it became obligatory.

### **Standards**

The scope of the organic standards in Brazil is covered by several INs (Normative Instructions) launched since 2008: crop and livestock production (2008) – amended by a new IN in 2011; wild harvesting (2009); processing, storage and transport (2009); and the last ones issued in 2011 and 2012 that cover aquaculture, textile products coming from organic cotton, mushroom production, seed and propagation material and registration of phytosanitary inputs.

The standards are adapted to Brazilian conditions and to different production systems, and include issues, such as social responsibility, biodiversity and environmental care issues. 'If we care about animal welfare, how could we not care about people welfare?' Rogério Pereira said. According to Mr Pereira, environmental legislation in Brazil is already quite complex and concerns all kinds of agriculture

and agro-industry operators, but organic producers are subject to further control with some additional points to check.

### **How the control system is organised in Brazil**

The control system in Brazil is organised into two different branches: there is social control for organic products that are not certified and there is an official control system called SisOrg, which is organised in a similar way to other countries' control regulations: there is a competent authority to approve certification bodies and supervise the certification process, and an official accreditation system, etc. The particularity of the Brazilian system is that certified operators can opt for certification with a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) as well as certification by a third party agency.

The head of the control system is COAGRE (Agroecology Coordination), which is where Mr Pereira works. COAGRE divides its functions into two different areas:

- Development of the organic sector (through standards development, coordination between the different parties, promotion, education and coordination of different programmes such as the supply of organic food to school canteens, etc.).
- Competent authority for the application of the control system (SisOrg).

The accreditation of the certification bodies (CBs) that apply to certify according to the Brazilian organic legislation is granted and then supervised by the competent authority (SisOrg) and by the accreditation body INMETRO, which accredits the CBs according to the ISO 65.

CBs are audited on a continual basis. They can be visited at any time of the year when the approval has to be re-

newed, and may have an unannounced visit any time.

The accreditation and renewal controls are performed by INMETRO and the Ministry (COAGRE) together. The CBs receive visits from agriculture experts from the Ministry, who examine inspection reports and do spot check on farms, as well as from INMETRO, who are the experts in ISO 65 and focus their assessment on the CBs' quality system and manuals.

For a CB to apply to become an organic certifier, it first has to apply to INMETRO to get the ISO 65 accreditation and then apply to the Ministry (COAGRE). PGS are not INMETRO accredited, these schemes only have to have approval from the Ministry, which then supervise them. In any case, before a CB or organisation can be approved, the opinion of the CPONG of the region where the CB is located has to be taken into account. However, once approved a CB can work in all the Brazilian territory, not just in the region where they are based.

Each of the 27 Brazilian states has an Organic Production Commission (Comissões da Produção Orgânica or CPONG). These are composed of representatives from the Government (Agriculture and Environment Ministries) and other stakeholders, such as CBs, producers, consumers, universities and others.

The CPONGs are consulted on all issues related to organic farming, including the standards and how the different conditions of the regions are reflected in the standards. The CPONGs also exert their influence on the SisOrg.

The names of all the members of the 27 Commissions, and the organisations they represent, are listed on the Ministry of Agriculture website<sup>1</sup>.

## The third way

In addition to third party certification and PGS, Brazil has a third system, which Rogério Pereira calls 'the third way'. This system permits producers to sell their organic products without certification, but does not allow them to display the Brazilian logo for organic production on the products.

The system is known as Organic Social Control (OCS) and is designed for smallholders' direct sales, i.e. there are no other stakeholders involved in the trading chain, the produce is sold directly from the producers to the end user. For example, produce can be sold in farmers markets, box schemes and to canteens of public institutions such as public schools.

In order to be allowed to sell their products as organic under the scheme, farmers must take part in an OCS, which are organisations registered by the Government. These organisations can be a cooperative, an association or a farmers' group that have to commit to produce according to the Brazilian

organic legislation.

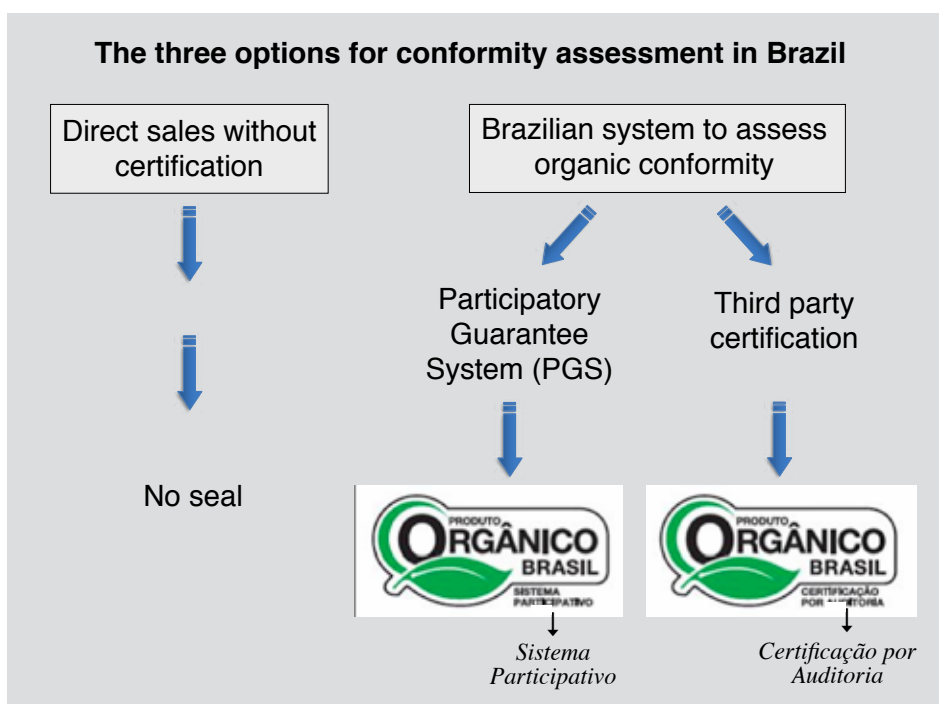
According to Mr Pereira, OCS gives opportunities to farmers and consumers that otherwise would not have the chance to, respectively produce or consume organic products. For some farmers involved in OCS this is a way to get experience with organic standards and a control system. In practice, some OCS became PGS, others are comfortable with this arrangement and remain as an OCS.

The establishment of this 'third way' solves two of the problems often associated with the organic market:

- Smallholders located in rural areas having trouble getting their products to the main markets – national markets in far away cities and for export.
- Consumers cannot access organic food as they are not wealthy enough or live in remote areas.

The OCS method connects these producers with the disadvantaged consumers, to the benefit of both.

An OCS scheme has to apply to





## ■ news shorts...

### BOOST FOR ORGANIC FARMING IN SAUDI ARABIA

Fahd Balghunaim, the Saudi Arabian Minister of Agriculture, has announced that the Ministry recently banned 30 different agricultural pesticides after research pointed to the dangers that these harmful chemicals pose to public health. Despite intense objections and pressure from the manufacturers and importers of these toxic compounds, the Ministry has remained steadfast in its decision to ban their use as pesticides on crops intended for human consumption.

The Ministry of Agriculture has established a centre with a total expenditure of SR70 million (14m euros) to promote organic agricultural methods throughout the Kingdom. Alternative organic farming methods will replace the conventional farming methods that rely heavily on chemical fertilisers and artificial pesticides, which have been linked to many types of cancers, neurological disorders, and hormone disruptions.

Funds will be directed toward breeding beneficial and farmer friendly insects and using them on crops to combat and kill pests that destroy crops, but in a natural, safe and non-toxic way. Natural methods of pest control are actually less expensive than buying potent pesticides, and it is safer for the crops, human health, wildlife and the environment. ■

*Source: Saudi Gazette, 21 November 2012*

the Ministry to be registered and officially recognised. One of the requirements is that there must be at least one person in the group who knows how to read and write and will be responsible for informing the other producers. They sign a commitment to follow the rules and have to accept other conditions, such as permitting consumers to visit their farms (social control). The Ministry's register of an OCS includes the name and contact address of all the members.

Although OCS members cannot display the organic seal on their products, they receive a document from the Ministry stating they are registered, which they can show to their customers.

The Government can also play a client role when sourcing food to supply public school canteens or to distribute in emergencies such as floods or severe droughts.

### Working from all the different angles

The Brazilian Government pursues a combination of activities involving all available options to ensure its support of organic production is successful and makes a real difference. For example, in the case of public procurement for schools, which is one of the pillars of the Brazilian Government's support of the organic sector, it has the specific aim of ensuring at least 30% of food consumed is local, preferably organic (including OCS in this denomination). Rogério Pereira explained the importance of this policy, besides the benefits for the producers and for the health and nutrition of the consuming children, there is a strong educational effect – the children become used to consuming organic food which will probably make them organic consumers in the future. In addition, the parents and school staff are educated in the value

of organic food; as schools generally buy semi-prepared food to just finish the cooking process in their kitchen, and the provision of organic food forces them to change their habits to prepare more fresh food.

Rogério Pereira explained to TOS that it is necessary to create conditions where everybody can contribute and play their role. The Government realises it cannot do everything, and that it is important that all kinds of stakeholders are also involved.

However, at the same time there are certain activities – such as promoting food procurement of school canteens, recognising OCS and other groups, and encouraging connections between actors – which all depend upon a government to organise.

Brazil has an organic plan, from 2012 to 2015, that involves eight different ministries and the implementation of more than 30 actions. It is intended that the plan will contribute to strengthen organic farming and agroecology.

Currently, Brazil implements a number of public policies that are intended to support organic production. These are:

- Financial measures, such as specific credit for organic farmers, with low interest rates and financial procedures adapted to the needs of organic production.
- Different educational programmes, from the school to specific university courses in organic farming and agroecology.
- Creation of the resources necessary to produce organically, such as community seed banks, an official register for phytosanitary products, publication of technical information for farmers, etc.
- Incentives to organise and strengthen the organic production network, such as providing support to cooper-

atives, the creation of the CPONGs, etc.

- Promotion of organic farming and consumer information: such as the Government's measures to help purchases and support direct sales, plus specific campaigns to promote organic food and to inform consumers. For example, the Government has published a brochure called 'Olho do consumidor' (Consumer's eye) that explains organic systems and the different guarantee systems that exist in Brazil to ensure the integrity of organic food.<sup>2</sup>

## Market, imports and equivalency

It seems likely that the diverse, co-ordinated and implemented actions of the Government are bearing their fruits. Brazil is becoming a country that is not only producing organic food, but also consuming and importing, and therefore it has become a point of interest for organic producers and exporters from other countries.

A good example of how deeply organic consumption habits have been established in Brazil is the wide assortment of organic products offered by Pão de Açúcar, a well known supermarket chain that is found across the whole of Brazil. Not only does the chain sell a wide range of organic products, it also has its own brand and an on-line shop<sup>3</sup>.

Since the implementation of its own regulation, no other organic regulations are recognised by Brazil as equivalent, and imported products have to be certified according to the Brazilian regulations by CBs accredited by Brazil. It is permitted that the accredited CBs work with other organisations to perform the inspections on their behalf. See NOTA TÉCNICA COAGRE Nº 006/2011 in IBD Certificações website<sup>4</sup>.

Equivalence and mutual recogni-

tion agreements are contemplated as a possible way to facilitate trade but there are no agreements achieved so far.

Mr Pereira explained that they prefer to strengthen the organic sector and its control system in Brazil before launching into a course of negotiations with other countries. The Government feels it is better to reinforce the organic programme at home rather than setting standards for exports only and then, later on adapting them to the country's specific conditions, as it has happened before in other countries.

The Government wants to focus on developing demand in the domestic market, consolidating the organic industry to produce final processed products and to gain experience in the application of their assessment system, and in making sure that everybody involved in the organic sector in Brazil knows the system perfectly well. They want to do all this before receiving visits from other countries and to assigning staff to perform these visits in other countries.

Mr Pereira declared that in any case, they work according to the demands of the society, represented by the CPONG regional commissions, which indicate the priorities for the organic sector. They have to listen to these commissions before taking any new action.

Despite this, Brazil has started talks with some other countries. Mutual recognition is the preferred option, or at least agreements with a list of possible exceptions such as the agreement between the USA and Canada. Negotiations with the EU are in a very initial stage, but some talks have already taken place. Brazil has also started to talk with their neighbours; Brazil is a very important market for Argentinean organic products and the Argentinean organic sector is

very interested to get an agreement with Brazil. Brazil would like to obtain agreements with institutions that represent several countries at the same time, such as the EU or Mercosur in Latin America. Mr Pereira commented that the Government would be interested, for example, in CO-AGRE and its Argentinean equivalent, SENASA, developing an arrangement where they exchange experiences and compare their assessment methods. In addition, it would be considered a good arrangement if INMETRO and the Argentinean accreditation body work to recognise each other's accreditations.

The future will bring new developments for Brazil's international and national markets; what is clear after the launch this summer of the National Policy on Agroecology and Organic Production, is that the Brazilian Government continues in its firm support for organic production. ■

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## Sources:

*Conversations with Mr Rogério Pereira Dias, Agroecology Coordinator of the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture. Presentation by Mr Rogério Pereira Dias in the GOMA Conference, BioFach Nuremberg 2012 [www.goma-organic.org/conference/download-documents](http://www.goma-organic.org/conference/download-documents) Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture's website: [www.agricultura.gov.br/desenvolvimento-sustentavel/organicos](http://www.agricultura.gov.br/desenvolvimento-sustentavel/organicos)*

*A website where the Brazilian legislation is very clearly explained is the IBD Certificações website: [www.ibd.com.br/pt/DiretrizesLegislacao.aspx](http://www.ibd.com.br/pt/DiretrizesLegislacao.aspx)*

## Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> [www.agricultura.gov.br/desenvolvimento-sustentavel/organicos/comissoes-da-producao-organica](http://www.agricultura.gov.br/desenvolvimento-sustentavel/organicos/comissoes-da-producao-organica)
- <sup>2</sup> [www.alames.org/documentos/organicobra.pdf](http://www.alames.org/documentos/organicobra.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> [www.paodeacucar.com.br/secoes/C975/organicos](http://www.paodeacucar.com.br/secoes/C975/organicos)
- <sup>4</sup> [www.ibd.com.br/Media/arquivo\\_digital/961a39b5-efd0-471a-836c-ce1fda719049.pdf](http://www.ibd.com.br/Media/arquivo_digital/961a39b5-efd0-471a-836c-ce1fda719049.pdf)

## ■ news shorts...

### RUSSIA STANDING STRONG IN ORGANICS

Russia may be one of the few large countries that does not have an official regulation for organic production yet. It is also a country that is not used to producing much news on organic standards and certification. All this may be about to change.

In spite of not being officially regulated, it seems that organic production in Russia has increased in the last decade. However, because of the very high prices of organic food only about 10% of production is consumed at home and only about 5% of Russian citizens can afford to eat any environmentally-friendly products.

After its recent entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), Russia is seriously considering whether to take up the role of a supplier of organic products within the scope of the WTO. With this in mind Russian lawmakers are working on the bill to regulate the production of organic agricultural products.

As expected, the bill will be handed over to the Minselkhoz, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation in December of this year. The law may come into force in 2015. ■

#### Sources:

Pravda.Ru ([http://english.pravda.ru/russia/economics/29-11-2012/122976-organic\\_food-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/russia/economics/29-11-2012/122976-organic_food-0/))  
Organic-market.info, 29 October 2012, taken from *The Voice of Russia*

## Alnatura in Switzerland

### *Opportunity or risk for Swiss organic standards?*

*This summer Alnatura, a German organic retail chain, opened its first store in Zurich, the biggest Swiss city, with the clear ambition to set up a chain of Alnatura stores in Switzerland. What effect will this development have on the Swiss organic market, and on the dominating label organisation Bio Suisse and the importance of its label, the 'Bud'?*

The German organic retail chain, Alnatura, is already well known to many Swiss consumers living near the Swiss-German border. With Switzerland being a 'high price island' within the EU, the Swiss have learnt to profit from 'shopping tourism' by travelling across the border and taking advantage of the retailer's lower prices.

The opening of the first Swiss Alnatura store has aroused great interest within the organic scene and beyond. Adding fuel to this interest is a cooperative agreement Alnatura has made with Migros, the biggest retailer in Switzerland, which includes a reciprocal arrangement that has helped Migros increase its presence in the German market. In addition, in its quest to get into Germany, Migros has also arranged a cooperative agreement with another German supermarket chain, tegut.

Migros is not new to the organic sector. The biggest Swiss retailer has sold organic products since the 1990s, with its private label 'Migros Bio'. Like its main competitor, Coop, Migros is organised in the legal form of a cooperative with a large proportion of the Swiss population as members. The two 'orange giants' (the colour of both firms' logos) have an ongoing rivalry spanning many decades.

### **Established standard of Swiss organic agriculture**

In Switzerland, the traditional competition between Coop and Migros also plays a part in the different organic and sustainability strategies. Migros was a leading actor in the development of 'integrated production' in Switzerland, but a late runner into the organic market. Coop started its programme 'Coop Naturaplan' as far back as 1993, causing Swiss organic production to increase dramatically. Today, all Coop Naturaplan products are certified organic and cobranded with the Bio Suisse label, the 'bud'.

The launching of 'Migros Bio' several years later did not change the important position of Bio Suisse as the main Swiss organic Standard. Bio Suisse remains the established standard of Swiss organic agriculture.

Imported Migros Bio products are certified according to the EU Regulation (there is a mutual equivalence between the Swiss and EU Regulations). Unprocessed organic foods produced in Switzerland are required under the Migros Bio scheme to have followed the Bio Suisse guidelines as well as being certified to an established organic standard. This is also the case with most of the other private organic labels of various retailers – as



## ■ news shorts...

### LESS RESISTANCE TO CISGENES

European consumers are well known for their resistance to GMOs. A Danish PhD study has investigated consumer opinion on 'cisgenesis'. This is a system that uses the same technique as genetic modification, but the genes used are from the same species or variety, or if they are from a different species it is one that can cross-breed in nature. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of the people asked said that the technique was acceptable. On the specific question of bread, 56% stated they would buy a loaf made out of grain that was modified with genes from a closely related species, while only 19% would buy bread made from conventionally genetically modified grain. ■

### ORGANIC WINE IN THE US AND EU

NOP has issued a fact sheet on organic wine, labelling and trade. It clarifies certification of wine production in the US including when the two statements 'organic wine' and 'made with organic grapes' can be used. The import and export requirements for trade and sales of wine between the EU and the US is also described. ■

See: [www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateF&navID=FactSheetslinkNOPAboutUs&rightNav1=FactSheetslinkNOPAboutUs&toPNav=&leftNav=NationalOrganicProgram&page=NOPFactSheets&resultType=&acct=noppub](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateF&navID=FactSheetslinkNOPAboutUs&rightNav1=FactSheetslinkNOPAboutUs&toPNav=&leftNav=NationalOrganicProgram&page=NOPFactSheets&resultType=&acct=noppub)

all of them are considerably smaller than the Coop and Migros schemes.

Thus, the majority of unprocessed Swiss organic products are produced according to Bio Suisse guidelines even if they are not marketed with the Bio Suisse label, the 'bud'.

### Alnatura – at home in Switzerland

Unlike in conventional stores the organic label on a product is less important in organic stores, since the whole product range is organic. In an organic store consumers expect a larger product range of the best organic products, allowing a 'organic one stop shop' for their daily needs. If there are questions about the various organic labels and standards they expect to receive clear and competent advice from the sales staff.

How will Alnatura be positioned regarding the Swiss organic standards, especially Bio Suisse? 'We want to really integrate and feel at home in Switzerland', states Alnatura founder, Götz Rehn. Alnatura wants to offer a 'broad and serious product range with organic quality and fair prices'.

Both Migros and Alnatura have emphasised the importance of their cooperative agreement on the level of organic agriculture, processing and trading. The first store offers about 5,000 products with fruit, vegetables, eggs, bread and other fresh products being sourced from local farmers and bakeries in Switzerland within the Zurich area.

Cooperation with organic traders in both Switzerland and Germany will be of utmost importance to Alnatura if it is to be able to source the full product range and not just the classic Alnatura products. 'We will also export organic Swiss product, especially dairy items to Germany', states Götz Rehn.

### Bio Suisse welcomes Alnatura

Everything in harmony then? The response to the new cooperation Alnatura-Migros was surprisingly positive from the Swiss organic sector. Of course, the situation does also create certain tensions, and nobody really knows about the long term consequences.

Responding to Alnatura's announcement, Daniel Bärtschi, head of the Bio Suisse office, stated 'Bio Suisse welcomes the cooperation of Migros and Alnatura in the organic market. Already the media presence caused by the opening of the first store increases public awareness for the organic scene. Migros knows the Swiss market and can profit from Alnatura's competence regarding organic retail markets.'

He continued, 'If Alnatura opens up new export opportunities for Bio Suisse producers and processors with their high quality products, this is of course very much in our interest'. He made it clear that Bio Suisse expects Alnatura to sell as many Bio Suisse labelled products as possible in the Swiss stores.

'As an organisation of the Swiss organic farmers we will observe the developments', summed up Bärtschi. What proportion of the products sold will be Swiss, particularly with the Bio Suisse label, in the various product categories of Alnatura Switzerland? For Bio Suisse this issue will be important for the long term consequences of Alnatura's activities in Switzerland. ■

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[www.bionetz.ch/nachrichten/berichte/alnatura-jetzt-nicht-nur-ante-portas-interview-zum-schweizer-markteinstieg.html](http://www.bionetz.ch/nachrichten/berichte/alnatura-jetzt-nicht-nur-ante-portas-interview-zum-schweizer-markteinstieg.html)



## ■ news shorts...

### HOW MANY COWS CAN BE TETHERED AFTER 2013?

The EU Regulation for organic production has an allowance for tethered cows provided that they can graze during the grazing season and for the rest of the year can go out at least twice a week. This allowance expires at the end of 2013. However, for small farms the allowance for tethering has been kept with similar conditions.

The actual conditions vary between countries. For example, in Denmark farms with up to 70 tethered cows can be accepted on an individual basis based on factors such as farm structure and financial situation. The housing has to have been established before the middle of 2010. In Sweden the herd size is 45 cows. ■

*Please report on what is required in your country to [eva@grolink.org](mailto:eva@grolink.org). Answers will be reported in a future TOS.*

## Adapting to the EU wine Regulation

### *From the Spanish point of view*

The EU Regulation 203/ 2012 that established rules on organic wine came into force on 1 August 2012, which means it concerns wines from the 2012 harvest. Those wines produced in previous years that can demonstrate they comply with the Regulation even before it existed, can also be labelled using the term 'organic wine' and using the EU logo. Formerly, wines could not use the EU organic leaf logo and had to be labelled as 'wine made from organic grapes'. Wines from previous years that do not fully comply with the new Regulation will have to be labelled in the same way as before.

To learn how the EU organic wine sector is adapting to the long anticipated organic wine rules TOS got in touch with two of the control authorities in Spain, a country where organic wine production is very important<sup>1</sup>. The authorities contacted were from the Autonomous Communities, La Rioja and Murcia, two of the Spanish regions where organic wine production is particularly prominent.

The response from both authorities was that the implementation has run smoothly and without major difficulties. The fact that Spain had national guidelines for wine production that both regions used significantly contributed to making the transition to the Regulation easier. The guidelines 'Directrices para la elaboración de vino de uvas de agricultura ecológica' were prepared by the Regions (Autonomous Communities) and the Ministry of Agriculture in 2006, and were

used until the implementation of the EU wine Regulation last summer. The requirements of the guidelines were, in general, similar to those in the EU Regulation.

The main differences between the Spanish guidelines and the new EU Regulation are in Article 29d, titled 'Oenological practices and restrictions'; the guidelines did not include the prohibitions stated in that section. Of the prohibited practices, those that may have had the greatest affect on all Spanish wineries, not just those in the two polled regions, are:

- The partial elimination of sulphur dioxide (concerns the processing of concentrated musts).
- The treatment with cation exchangers to ensure the tartaric stabilisation of the wine, which is something more and more often used in conventional wine making.
- The partial dealcoholisation of wine, which has stopped some projects that tried to make organic wine with low alcohol content.

In addition, in certain cases the limit on the size of pores for centrifuging and filtration has been an issue of non compliance.

The most controversial points of the EU wine Regulation – the limit to the quantity of sulphur dioxide used in the winemaking process – generally speaking has not been difficult to apply in Spain. This is because the Spanish guidelines also had limits that, though a bit higher than the Regulation for white and some types of rosé wines,

## news shorts...

### US GETS REPORT ON COEXISTENCE

Charged by the Secretary of Agriculture with addressing appropriate compensation for farmers who have economic losses due to unintended presence of genetically engineered materials, the Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture released a 61-page final report after over a year of meetings. Although all but one member of the committee joined the consensus, some in the organic community did so with strong reservations. The consensus report recommended crop insurance as a mechanism of compensation, along with additional research, education and outreach, fostering good stewardship, and working to protect the seed supply as key measures to strengthen coexistence between GE and other types of farming. The report includes comments from committee members. ■

The report is available at: [www.usda.gov/documents/ac21\\_report-enhancing-coexistence.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/documents/ac21_report-enhancing-coexistence.pdf)

#### Source:

*News & Policy Updates for the Organic Industry, email newsletter from Wolf, DiMatteo + Associates, December, 2012.*

were basically very similar.

There is one type of wine, not produced in these two regions but in others areas of Spain, known as 'vino generoso'<sup>3</sup>, that may be affected by the new rules. This is a fortified wine that uses the additives sorbic acid and potassium sorbate, which were permitted by the guidelines but not by the new EU Regulation.

### New and old wine with the new labelling

With regard to wines produced in former years, there are many that already comply with the new Regulation. In the Murcia region, for example, practically all the wines comply. Another question is whether a winery must apply for retroactive recognition or not; in La Rioja for example, many have not applied, even though they could fulfill the rules.

The reasons why some applicants have not got retroactive approval is because of the possible use of some now prohibited techniques, such as cation exchangers or the use of bigger pores for filtration than those now allowed. Some other wineries have had difficulties showing sufficient documentation to fully demonstrate their compliance in previous years. Examples of paperwork that is required are invoices of all ingredients and processing aids used, and internal control documents that registered all practices applied.

Before the Regulation came into force, the regions that have organic wine production informed the wineries about the new Regulation. For example, in La Rioja, winemakers were invited to attend an informative meeting. When a winery applies for ret-

roactive approval to display the new label on their previous years' wines, the application is sent to the certification committee after the control body has checked that the traceability can be guaranteed. If the required sulphur dioxide analysis shows that they are within the permitted levels, plus if the winery has issued new labels designs that can be examined, the approval is given. Wineries also have to send all new label designs to their Protected Designation of Origin (PDOs) entities, for the approval of the labels before they can be released to the market.

The first of the wines from the 2012 are expected to be in the market around December. These will be the first wines made under the Regulation on the shop shelves, and there are already previous years' wine displaying the new label. At the same time the older wines that did not comply with the Regulation will have 'wine made with organic grapes' labels. ■

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#### Sources:

*Interviews with Esperanza López Ubis, Jefe de Sección de Agricultura Ecológica y Producción Integrada, La Rioja and Pedro José Pérez Saura, Director Técnico CAERM (control authority of the Murcia región). Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 203/2012 and Directrices para la elaboración de vino de uvas de agricultura ecológica, CCAA and MAPA, Spain, 2006.*

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> There are 511 organic certified wineries in Spain, according to the 2011 Ministry of Agriculture statistics)

<sup>2</sup> [www.magrama.gob.es/es/alimentacion/temas/la-agricultura-ecologica/INFORME\\_NACIONAL\\_2011\\_190912\\_tcm7-220494.pdf](http://www.magrama.gob.es/es/alimentacion/temas/la-agricultura-ecologica/INFORME_NACIONAL_2011_190912_tcm7-220494.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Written in Spanish in the English version of the Regulation EU 203/2012. In English it can be called fortified wine, full-bodied wine or liqueur wine.

There are many wines produced in previous years that already comply with the new Regulation. ■

## ■ news shorts...

### **NOP ORGANIC LITERACY INITIATIVE GUIDES NOW AVAILABLE**

When considering organic certification, one of the main questions farms and businesses ask is, what would I need to change to become organic? In order to help answer that question, USDA launched its Organic Literacy Initiative<sup>1</sup>. This effort includes self-paced training modules, outreach materials, and a guide to organic and organic-related USDA programmes.

The initial Organic Literacy Initiative materials provided an overview designed as a first step in understanding organic certification. To describe the relevant organic requirements, provide best practices, and explain the certification process, the National Organic Program (NOP) partnered with the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) to develop four new detailed guides. The new guides help prospective organic operations take the next step: learning more about their specific type of organic production. ■

*The Guides for Organic Crop Producers, Organic Livestock Producers, Organic Processors, and for Organic Certification of Farms and Businesses Producing Agricultural Products can be downloaded from [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org). Printed version can also be ordered for a small handling fee.*

#### **Sources:**

*NOP Organic Insider email newsletter, December 10, 2012  
Press release from National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), contact: [richm@ncat.org](mailto:richm@ncat.org)*

*1. [www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/OrganicInfo](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/OrganicInfo)*

## Why we cheat

**W**e often talk about fraud or how operators may hide the truth one way or another so that it may have consequences for the integrity of organic production. It is an obsession for competent authorities, certification bodies and inspectors – and also an issue of concern for consumers – to try to unmask fraudsters. It is essential that fraud is avoided as much as possible, and to communicate the cases found to stop them.

But is lying and cheating a natural characteristic we have to live with; something unavoidable related to the human condition?

An article published in *The Wall Street Journal*, in the section ‘The Saturday Essay’ analysed the issue. It starts by stating that ‘nearly everyone cheats a little if given the opportunity’. The article explains the conclusions that Dan Ariely explained in his new book, *The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty*, based on a number of experiments conducted with the collaboration of university students, and on different cases observed from real life.

The main conclusion of these studies is that there are a few heavy cheaters, around 1% of the population, those who will always cheat even if it is too risky or too dishonest. Then there is another 1% who would never cheat under any circumstance; but the vast majority, 98% of us, would cheat a little bit, depending on the circumstances. It is this majority that does the biggest damage to our economy, to prestige, to integrity – in a word, to truth. As the article says, it is the mass small-scale cheating done by the great number of small cheaters, rather than the few scandalous cases that we know from time to time, that is more

corrosive to society.

It is logical to assume that what tempts small cheaters to lie sometimes is the hope to gain some benefit from their actions, to get more money, to get rid of a problem, to hide some wrong-doing, etc. What stops them cheating or lying most of the times is the consequences of being caught – public shame, a fine or to be subject to other legal actions such as being taken to court or even to prison.

Yes, these aspects make us act in one way or another, but it seems the reality is not as simple as that, because there are other psychological features that influence our behaviour. In a variety of experiments, Dan Ariely and his colleague identified many factors that can make people behave in a more or less honest fashion.

It would be very useful for ‘professional cheater catchers’, such as inspectors and certification bodies to know what these factors are.

For example, in the experiments with students it was seen that if the benefit for cheating was paid in tokens (which would immediately be traded in for cash, but provided a psychological distance to the concept of money), most students cheat twice as much as those lying directly for money.

Another thing that was observed is that cheating is contagious. When a cheater acting blatantly was introduced into the experiment, many other students also cheated.

There are many other factors, such as the physiological mood of the person at a particular time. For example, if someone thinks they are being treated unfairly, a bit of cheating can make him/her feel better. Likewise,



## ■ news shorts...

### BRAZIL'S NATIONAL POLICY

On 20 August 2012, the President of Brazil, Mrs Dilma Rousseff, approved the National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production (Decree No. 7.794 of 2012). The aim of the Decree is to integrate, articulate and prepare policies, programmes and tasks that support organic production at the national, regional and local levels. Two organisations working towards this goal are the National Commission of Agroecology and Organic Production (Comissão Nacional de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica – CNAPO) and the Interministries Council of Agroecology and Organic Production (Câmara Interministerial de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica – CIAPO).

As well as the promotion of food sovereignty and security, the Policy is concerned with nutrition, sustainable use of natural resources, conservation of natural ecosystems, restoration of ecosystems modified by agricultural production and forest extraction, and increasing participation of rural youth and women. Several tools are employed to achieve its aims, such as the National Plan of Agroecology and Organic Production, rural credit, fiscal and tax measures, research and technical assistance.

The challenge for national and territorial governments is now the implementation of this policy. ■

#### Source:

*Decreto nº 7.794, de 20 de Agosto de 2012, institui a política nacional de agroecologia e produção orgânica.*

if someone is very worried about solving a problem in his/her professional or personal life, not necessarily related to the cheating case, or if they are being a bit dishonest according to his/her concept of honesty in another field, it can make it easier for them to lie in other aspects of their life. In other words, external factors may make people relax their ethical considerations, and once one starts cheating, it is easier to cheat again...

Looking at how many different factors influence our behaviour, those conducting the experiments ask the question: Does the prospect of heavy fines or increased enforcement really make someone less likely to cheat? Probably not. What, then – if anything – pushes people toward greater honesty?

For example, it seems that simply being reminded of moral codes at the right moment has a significant effect, while ethics lectures and training seems to have little to no effect on people. For example, it was observed that when people had to sign a declaration, if they signed at the top of the text, before writing their declaration, they cheated less than if they signed at the end after the lying had been done.

The article concluded, 'All of this means that, although it is obviously important to pay attention to flagrant misbehaviours, it is probably even more important to discourage the small and more ubiquitous forms of dishonesty – the misbehaviour that affects all of us, as both perpetrators and victims. This is especially true given what we know about the contagious nature of cheating and the way that small transgressions can grease the psychological skids to larger ones.

The article did not talk specifically

on cheating within organic production or trade, but it is logical to think that individuals in this field respond to the same physiological principles that we, as human beings, show in any other aspect of life. Therefore, yes, of course it is important to continue making great effort to catch the fraud criminals, the something like 1% of genuine cheaters. However, it is also important – or even more important if we follow the conclusions made in the article – to convince all the other operators and every person involved in the process of organic production and trade and their control that a bit of cheating is not acceptable. They must be made to understand that though a bit of cheating is not likely to be discovered it is also likely to be made by many people at the same time, and the final damage to the organic sector can be greater.

How can this majority of people be convinced? By avoiding contagious situations? By ensuring people are comfortable and satisfied with their organic production, market and certification services? By avoiding requirements by the control bodies or competent authorities that they may find too rigid, not adapted to their needs or they may not understand? By introducing an ethical reminder at the right time? It would be interesting to explore this further and see ways to avoid the low intensity lies that occur in organic production and control, as well as the big fraud. ■

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Source: 'Why we lie', by Dan Ariely.  
Article published in the USA edition of  
The Wall Street Journal, 26th May 2012

Once one starts cheating, it is easier to cheat again... ■



# ISO 17065 replaces ISO 65

In September 2012 the ISO/IEC Guide 17065 was launched, replacing ISO/IEC Guide 65 from 1996. The revised guide, which was produced after a five-year revision process, covers certification of products, processes and services by third-party certification body. The new guide is likely to come into force in 2015 but the actual date has not yet been confirmed.

However, ISO has made it clear, it does not contain detailed requirements on certification schemes. Guidelines for understanding, developing, establishing, maintaining and comparing certification schemes will be published in the future in a further guide, i.e. ISO/IEC 17067.

ISO 17065 has an expanded list of terms and definitions, and one new word, 'client', replaces the old term, 'supplier'. Other terms that are now defined are consultancy, evaluation, certification requirement, certification scheme, scope of certification, scheme owner and impartiality. The definition of certification body includes a note stating that both non-governmental and governmental (with or without a regulatory authority) are called certification bodies.

The structure and chapters of the document have been changed, which has generally improved it, making it a better organised and well structured text. The titles of the main chapters are:

- General requirements
- Structural requirements
- Resource requirements
- Process requirements
- Management system requirements

Going through the text and comparing it with the old ISO 65 it is

clear that much content is unchanged. However, there are several areas that have been expanded and further developed. The more important changes are listed below:

- The contract between a CB and client now states that observers can participate in the evaluation visit. Clients making copies of certification documents to others are requested to copy the documents in their entirety or as specified by the CB.
- How CBs handle impartiality has been expanded to include several more requirements. In particular, CBs now have to be able to show how they handle impartiality if revealed. Also the text on separation of consultancy and certification has been developed and made stricter.
- The requirements for CBs to accept all applicants now includes the option to reject clients that are involved in illegal activities or have been decertified several times before.
- The requirement covering competency of personnel emphasises the need to demonstrate the competency of personnel and to identify training needs for the different steps in the certification process.
- While different parts of the inspection and certification process can be outsourced from one CB to another CB there are requirements that the CB taking on such activities fulfills international standards, and impartiality requirements. In addition, the

activities must be strictly regulated between the two CBs.

- A CB can subcontract laboratories and other companies. The outsourcing CB has to assure that the activities of the laboratory or organization are managed in a way that provides confidence.
- The regulations covering the outsourcing of clients' organic production have been further developed.
- Recommendations for a certification decision now have to be documented when different people review the inspection documents and take the certification decision. It is also stated that a person who has been involved in the evaluation process should not take the certification decision.
- Certification decisions shall be taken by an employee of the CB, or by someone who is under a contract by the CB or an entity that is under organisational control of the CB.
- The requirements on how a non-conformity is handled, and how a certification is terminated, suspended or reinstated has been considerably expanded.
- Details on how a CB should handle a complaint has been made more elaborate.
- There are now two options for a CB's management system. It can either fulfill requirements detailed in ISO 9001 or it can fulfill a range of requirements that are based on the management systems outlined in ISO 65 but with more details on document control, management review, internal audits and corrective actions. ■

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In September 2012 the ISO/IEC Guide 17065 was launched, replacing ISO/IEC Guide 65. ■

# Two pesticide guidelines in the EU

## *Proposals from the sector for a harmonised approach*

*Two guidelines on pesticide residue have recently been launched in Europe. One is the IFOAM EU Group 'Guideline for Pesticide Residue Contamination for International Trade in Organic', and the other one is the EOCC 'Pesticide Residues Guidelines'. TOS has reported on both these guidelines in TOS no. 133 (May 2012) and TOS no. 136 (August 2012), respectively.*

The apparent similarities between the two initiatives are immediately obvious, as is the fact that they were developed in parallel, almost at the same time. However, the two guidelines reflect the concerns of different actors within the organic sector. Though the IFOAM guideline was prepared for everyone, it tackles the issue from processors' and traders' perspectives. The EOCC guidelines specifically focused on harmonisation points during the analysing process when certification bodies investigate residue cases. Now that both guidelines are being finalised, the two organisations feel that the time is right to explore a joint follow up. Consequently, IFOAM EU took the opportunity in an open letter to EOCC to propose establishing a common working group which would establish a harmonised approach of selected topics in 2013.

At present, the IFOAM EU guidelines and the draft EOCC guideline reflect differences (defined by IFOAM as minor) mainly in the concept that 'any quantifiable residue leads to a substantiated suspicion'. This was proposed in the first draft of the EOCC guidelines (the September

2012 version), and was linked to the use of an Action Level for investigation, according to Article 91.2 in Regulation EC 889/2008. However, IFOAM EU emphasised that this would create huge costs and heavy bureaucratic burdens. The IFOAM EU Guidelines only, include an action level that allows a grey area where suspicion is alerted, but where operators and CBs have the freedom to act.

IFOAM EU agreed that a certain level of tolerance in relation to the variability of analytical results shown in actual ring tests must be contemplated. Testing methods do not always give the right answer.

Taking the IFOAM EU comments into account along with the more than 84 stakeholder comments, submitted in an online survey on its draft guideline, EOCC responded by revising and clarifying the chapter on Action Level in the final version of its Pesticide Guidelines. The EOCC Pesticide Residues Guideline, version 1.0 will be presented during the EOCC reception on Wednesday, 13 February

at BioFach 2013.

IFOAM EU is clearly taking a position regarding the establishment of a 'critical level', and is against defining a threshold for decertification, because this would mean changing the quality concept of organic standards from a process base to an end product base. In comparison, EOCC is not taking a common position in favour or against a critical level at all, but instead is giving some background information on the present implementing rules in the Member State of the EU (see EOCC Discussion Paper; version September 2012).

IFOAM EU and EOCC are to be congratulated to be able to work together in this important matter. The fact that they may interpret details differently merely enriches the results of their discussion. And as both have a common vision on what organic production is, they both always 'Keep in mind the rationale that organic production is much more than delivering 'pesticide-free products'! As Sabine von Wirén-Lehr, EOCC Representative, explained to TOS, the work that they will develop together will benefit the entire organic sector. ■

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### **Sources:**

IFOAM EU Group comments on EOCC Pesticide Residues Guidelines  
Letter from IFOAM EU Group to EOCC, 31 October 2012  
EOCC Task Force Residues Guideline 'Guidance document for the certification decision making process' (version Sept 2012).  
EOCC Task Force Residues 'Discussion Paper on two issues of concern regarding the interpretation of residue analysis in organic products' (version Sept 2012).  
EOCC Reception registration at [www.eocc.eu](http://www.eocc.eu)

The fact that they may interpret details differently merely enriches the results of their discussion. ■

# An organic sweetener?

## *Why stevia is not permitted as an organic sweetener in the EU*

*The plant Stevia rebaudiana and its extracts, such as steviol glycosides, are becoming very popular throughout the world as a sweetener substitute for sugar in processed food products. Since November 2011 steviol glycosides have been allowed as a natural sweetener in the EU by Regulation (CE) N° 1131/2011. However, steviol glycoside cannot be used in organic food, even if it comes from organically grown plants. This is because the additive steviol glycoside (E940) has not been included in the Annex VIII of Regulation 889/2008 and, therefore, is not permitted in organic food products.*

The decision, or to be more precise, the current lack of decision on this matter, is controversial and there are processors and traders who feel that they are being discriminated against in the market because processors from other countries can use stevia in organic products, and processors of non-organic certified products in the EU can use it as well.

Until now no sweeteners have been allowed in organic products because they were of synthetic origin. However the organic sector seems very interested in producing sugar-free products and the stevia plant looks like the solution as it is the only natural source of sweet taste with zero calories known today. Adding a new natural additive in Annex VIII of the Regulation should not be a major problem, but stevia is not a straightforward question since different considerations have to be taken into account when discussing the issue.

Due to various difficulties on how to extract the product from the stevia leaves, such as the strong taste that

stevia aqueous extracts might have, and other difficulties on how it can be applied, the production of highly purified glycosides seems to be necessary. Unfortunately, the process to obtain the glycosides requires the use of ion exchange resins, which does not fit well with organic principles. Currently, the new EU Regulation 203/2012 for organic wine allows ion exchange resins to be used in the making of rectified concentrated grape, but this is due to be revised in August 2015. In addition, the impact of ion exchange resins on a product depends on the type of ion exchange used. In the case of steviol glycosides, no ions are added to the product, the molecules are only captured and then released.

Another factor that complicates the issue even more is that, if stevia and stevia extracts are seen as a novel food, they must follow the authorisa-

tion procedure according to another EU regulation, that is Regulation (EC) No 258/97. This is a long process and the decision as to whether the stevia plant is a novel food or not has to be made on a national level. Currently, in Germany it is not considered as novel food, therefore it is allowed in conventional food. However, several Member States consider stevia and stevia extracts to be novel foods, automatically making them forbidden in both non-organic and organic food. As a consequence of this policy, in Germany organic Stevia leaves or water extracts (not steviol glycoside) can be used, while similar products containing Stevia cannot be produced in other EU countries.

The stevia case is currently under discussion; it has been discussed in the SCOF (Standing Committee on Organic Farming) and several countries asked the European Commission to put steviol glycosides on the agenda of the Expert Group for Technical Advice on Organic Farming (EGTOP).

There are several possibilities as to what will happen in the end with regard to the approval of stevia as an additive for organic food: it could be approved or not, if it is approved, it could be with or without restrictions. One of the possible options would be authorisation of steviol glycosides in Annex VIII with the specific condition 'only in organic quality', which would encourage the growing of organic stevia crops to supply the organic processing industry. ■

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Unfortunately, the process to obtain the glycosides requires the use of ion exchange resins, which does not fit well to organic principles. ■

## ■ news shorts...

**UNDESIREDCONSEQUENCES  
OF THE USA/  
EU EQUIVALENCY  
AGREEMENT**

The EU-USA Organic Equivalency Agreement has created an unexpected problem. Since fewer EU organic ingredients producers are certifying products to the NOP a shortage of these ingredients is developing. This is making it difficult for processors in third party countries, who intend to export to the USA.

This is one of those unintended consequences of a political decision that only are revealed in practice. Director of R.B. Capricorn International Enterprises, an Israel-based organic raw materials and ingredients supplier declared that 'the main advantages of the new agreement are only for countries in the EU or the USA; and for other countries, it may turn out that there are more problems than advantages, although this is not the intent of the agreement'.

Source: <http://organicwellnessnews.com/en/?p=4948>

## New organic agriculture survey in the US

On the tenth anniversary of implementation of the National Organic Program (NOP), the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has produced a report on its first ever survey of certified organic production in the US. The detailed report analyses acreage, production, and sales data for a variety of certified organic crop and livestock commodities. The survey was sent to all US organic producers on the NOP database. The survey was conducted by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), with support from another USDA agency, the Risk Management Agency (RMA). RMA intends to use the survey results to establish some basis for 'normal' production rates and economic value for various organic crops. In this way, crop insurance can be set up to compensate organic farmers for crop losses based on organic market prices rather than what they might get for equivalent conventional crops.

Following are some interesting facts presented in the report:

- 81% of respondents' sales come from products that go to wholesale markets and become available to shoppers through their local supermarkets.
- Almost a third of all certified growers sell their products directly to consumers.
- Every US state has at least a few organic producers, ranging from just four farms in each of three states to 1,898 farms in California.
- Organic farmers make up less than a half of one percent of all US farmers, and sell more than \$3.5 billion worth of agricultural products.

Carolyn Dimitri, who previously did economic research on organic production for USDA, analysed some of the data on her blog. She compared the numbers to a 2008 organic producer survey, and made the following observation: 'The one sweeping generalisation that I quickly reached is that the number of certified farms with sales declined between 2008 and 2011 for most, but not all of the commodity categories. At the same time, the value of sales increased for most categories, even for those with a decline in the number of farms'.<sup>1</sup>

This information is sure to prove useful in posing additional research questions and guiding policy decisions to support USDA's ambitious goals for increasing US organic production. ■

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**For more information:**

Survey report: <http://usda01.library.cornell.edu/usda/current/OrganicProduction/OrganicProduction-10-04-2012.pdf>

USDA blog: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2012/10/16/organic-agriculture-spreads-its-wings-coast-to-coast/#more-42927>

NASS data release briefing: [www.nass.usda.gov/Newsroom/Executive\\_Briefings/2012/10\\_04\\_2012.pdf](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Newsroom/Executive_Briefings/2012/10_04_2012.pdf)

*NASS and RMA are both agencies within USDA. RMA will use this information to establish some basis for 'normal' production rates and economic value for various organic crops. This way, crop insurance can be set up to compensate organic farmers for crop losses based on organic market prices rather than what they might get for equivalent conventional crops.*

<sup>1</sup> [www.sustainablefoodeconomics.com-entry for 1 December 2012.](http://www.sustainablefoodeconomics.com-entry-for-1-December-2012)



# Animals in agriculture

## *Sane, humane, ecological*

*What is the role of livestock in an organic agroecosystem, and what constitutes humane treatment of farm livestock? Is it ever humane to kill an animal for food? There appears to be a confrontation brewing in the US (and possibly in Europe) between advocates of sustainable farming systems that must necessarily include livestock and livestock products, and an extreme animal rights agenda that denies the possibility of ethical treatment of animals destined for slaughter.*

The confrontation between sustainable farming, which inevitably includes livestock, and extreme animal rights organisations recently got ugly in the US. A small liberal arts college, which prides itself for its commitment to ‘green’ programmes and practices, was the subject of attacks by animal rights activists. Green Mountain College in Poultney, Vermont<sup>1</sup> has been operating its Cerridwen Farm to train students in practical sustainable agriculture methods, conduct research, and supply food to the school cafeteria for about ten years. Until a few months ago they employed animal traction for most farm operations thanks to a team of oxen, named Bill and Lou. One of the animals injured his leg last summer, and inasmuch as the community had grown fond of the highly visible bovines, an open forum was held to decide what to do about them. Those in attendance agreed that the best course was to slaughter both animals to provide hamburger to the school cafeteria. This was in keeping with a decision made at the farm’s inception, when faculty and students – vegetarian and vegan alike – generally agreed that livestock should be integral to the

farm and that these animals should help feed the students, not become pets.

This decision did not sit well with a couple of organisations that espouse veganism, in particular a group calling itself VINE for Veganism Is the Next Evolution. VINE had requested that the animals be sent instead to their farm sanctuary in another town, about an hour away. When their request was refused, the group began circulating on-line petitions, staging protests and issuing press releases. In addition, they inundated the farm management and college administration with angry emails and phone messages. Their attacks went so far as threatening slaughterhouses throughout Vermont and New York with protests, harassment, and potential violence if they agreed to work with the college. Because they could not have the animals processed at a local Animal Welfare approved facility, the college was forced to surreptitiously euthanise and bury the injured ox to prevent further

suffering, and now plans to keep the remaining animal at the farm for the time being.

The controversy attracted national media attention – even the *New York Times*<sup>2</sup> followed the story. An appeal for common cause was issued by Phillip Ackerman-Leist, Director of the Green Mountain College Farm and Food Project, calling for expressions of support in response to such bullying tactics, which threaten ‘the ability of livestock-based businesses and educational farms to function without the threat of harassment or harm from outside special interests, and the possibility for communities to determine the future of their regional food systems’.

So what does this story have to do with organic standards and regulations? Organic agriculture has roots in both ecology and nutrition, and organic consumers may often espouse a vegetarian diet. Many organic companies cater to the market for vegetarian and vegan products, though nobody argues that only vegetarian and vegan products should be organic. The use of livestock manure and the importance of livestock in an organic farming system have been central organic principles from the beginning. Organic standards have also emphasised humane living conditions and management practices for all livestock. The environmental, human health and animal welfare horrors of modern animal factories known as CAFOs (Confined Animal Feeding Operations) are widely recognised, and most organic standards prohibit such travesties as over crowding, confinement to cages

Those in attendance agreed that the best course was to slaughter both animals to provide hamburger to the school cafeteria.

and crates, routine feeding of antibiotics and livestock mutilations. Ruminants must be maintained on pasture and all livestock must have outdoor access. Livestock manure and water access must not compromise soil or water quality. Though Cerridwen Farm is not a certified organic operation, it is designed to model sustainable, compassionate livestock management practices – quite in contrast to the CAFO model.

Although developed countries doubtless consume too much of the wrong kinds of meat and poultry, there is clear evidence that elimination of all animal products from most people's diets would be detrimental. The environmental consequences of eliminating animal agriculture, as advocated by groups such as VINE, would be devastating. This argument is brilliantly developed by Simon Fairlee, former editor of *The Ecologist*, in *Meat: A Benign Extravagance* – a book that has inspired at least one prominent vegetarian to recant his dietary choices.

More to the point, however, organic standard-setting has involved sometimes vigorous debate amongst those who hold differing views about which practices and materials are and are not appropriate to include in an organic production system. The tactics employed by the groups that have harassed Green Mountain College are distressingly similar to those sometimes deployed by groups who seek to impose their concept of 'organic correctness' on the producers who must abide by their notions – notions often born of ignorance of the scientific

and practical constraints faced by farmers and manufacturers genuinely concerned with producing healthy products at a reasonable cost. One example of this is the pressure from at least one consumer group that resulted in the recent National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) decision to deny petitions to add certain manufactured (i.e. synthetic) amino acids, which are widely considered important components in infant formula, to the National List as allowed synthetic 'supplemental nutrients' See 'NOSB takes some tough decisions' in TOS 139, November 2012.

Growing movements for food sovereignty and food justice demand not only widespread access to healthy, culturally appropriate food and food producing resources, but democratic control over these essential resources by those who depend on them. The organic community must, therefore, resist the drum beat of organic consumer driven dogma and stay committed to scientific rigour, rational debate, and transparent process as we continue to lead in addressing critical health and environmental problems in the twenty-first century. ■

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#### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> See [www.greenmtn.edu](http://www.greenmtn.edu) – The author is adjunct faculty in the MA in Sustainable Food Systems program.

<sup>2</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2012/10/29/us/oxens-possible-slaughter-prompts-fight-in-vermont.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/29/us/oxens-possible-slaughter-prompts-fight-in-vermont.html)

<sup>3</sup> Chelsea Green Publishing Company, White River Junction, Vermont, 2011. Originally published in 2010 in the UK by permanent publications. [www.permaculture.co.uk](http://www.permaculture.co.uk)

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