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EU LAW ON ORGANIC PRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW

In 2007 the European Council of Agricultural Ministers agreed on a [new Council Regulation](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:189:0001:0023:EN:PDF) (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:189:0001:0023:EN:PDF) (Council Regulation (EC) No. 834/2007) setting out the principles, aims and overarching rules of organic production and defining how organic products were to be labelled.

The regulation set a new course for developing organic farming further, with the following aims:

- sustainable cultivation systems
- a variety of high-quality products.
- greater emphasis on environmental protection
- more attention to biodiversity
- higher standards of animal protection
- consumer confidence
- protecting consumer interests.

Organic production respects natural systems and cycles. Biological and mechanical production processes and land-related production should be used to achieve **sustainability**, without having recourse to genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

In organic farming, **closed cycles** using internal resources and inputs are preferred to open cycles based on external resources. If the latter are used, they should be

- organic materials from other organic farms
- natural substances
- materials obtained naturally, or
- mineral fertilisers with low solubility.

Exceptionally, however, synthetic resources and inputs may be permissible if there are no suitable alternatives. Such products, which must be scrutinised by the Commission and EU countries before authorisation, are listed in the annexes to the **implementing regulation** (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2008.250.01.0001.01.ENG) (Commission Regulation (EC) No. 889/2008).

Labelling organic foods

Foods may be labelled "organic" only if at least 95% of their agricultural ingredients meet the necessary standards. In non-organic foods, any ingredients which meet organic standards can be listed as organic. To ensure credibility, the code number of the certifying organisation must be provided.

Organic production outlaws the use of genetically modified organisms and derived products. However, the [regulation on genetically modified food and feed](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/;ELX_SESSIONID=jdtPj8gLMMgNC9p6DGGkfrw2LSqgVf18vV2G41LjvkGwgJyt20zh1404494154?uri=CELEX:32003R1829) (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/;ELX_SESSIONID=jdtPj8gLMMgNC9p6DGGkfrw2LSqgVf18vV2G41LjvkGwgJyt20zh1404494154?uri=CELEX:32003R1829) lays down a threshold (0.9%) under which a product's GMO content does not have to be indicated. Products with GMO content below this threshold can be labelled organic.

Since 1 July 2010, producers of packaged organic food have been required under EU law to use the EU organic logo. However, this is not a binding requirement for organic foods from non-EU countries. Where the EU organic logo is used, the place where any farmed ingredients were produced must be indicated.

Importing organic products

Organic products from non-EU countries can be distributed on the EU market only if produced and inspected under conditions that are identical or equivalent to those applying to EU organic producers. The rules introduced by the 2007 regulation are more flexible than the previous set-up, under which organic goods could be imported from outside the EU only if they were EU-certified, their production was monitored by the EU countries and an import licence had been issued.

The import licence procedure has been replaced by new import rules. Control bodies (Certifying organisations) operating in non-EU countries are now directly authorised and monitored by the European Commission and EU countries.

This allows the EU Commission to supervise and monitor the import of organic products and the checks carried out on organic guarantees. The new legislation also lays the foundation for EU rules on organic produce including wine, aquaculture products and seaweed.