

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products’

COM(2010) 759 final — 2010/0364 (COD)

(2011/C 218/24)

Rapporteur: **Richard ADAMS**

On 27 January 2011, the Council and, on 18 January 2011, the European Parliament decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 43 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products

COM(2010) 759 final — 2010/0364(COD).

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development, Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 6 April 2011.

At its 471st plenary session, held on 4 and 5 May 2011 (meeting of 4 May 2011), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 156 votes to 6 with 10 abstentions.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The EESC welcomes the fact that the Commission is taking advantage of the revision of those regulations affected by the Lisbon Treaty in order to include simplifying measures. Nevertheless, these simplification points mainly concern administration whereas there remains a need to make regulations in general simpler for organic farmers and producers.

1.2 The Committee notes that it has presented detailed comments relating to the implications of aligning Commission delegated and implementing powers in its recent Opinion CESE 357/2011 on *Support for rural development by the EAFRD* and in this proposal endorses the approach to these powers as outlined by the Commission.

1.3 The Committee believes that the role of groups advising the Commission in implementing acts, particularly the input of NGOs and stakeholders, should be maintained.

1.4 The Committee suggests that the new EU organic logo, when indicating organic products of origin outside the EU, should be differentiated through a colour variation.

2. Background to the opinion

2.1 This Opinion considers COM(2010) 759, a proposal for a Regulation amending Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products. The purpose of this Regulation is to align the Commission implementing powers in Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on the same subject to the differentiation between delegated and

implementing powers of the Commission introduced by Articles 290 and 291 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

2.2 Articles 290 and 291 of the TFEU provide for amendments to the decision-making procedures between the European Commission, the Council and the European Parliament regarding conditions for implementing EU legislative acts.

2.3 The larger part of the regulation deals with minor amendments to the previous regulation on organic labelling and particularly introduces referencing to seven new Articles (38a-g). These lay down ‘specific definitions related to scope’ under delegated power.

2.4 Specific items covered are production rules such as requirements for the operators and the authorisation of products and substances; the EU organic logo; and issues concerning control systems, e.g. audit of control bodies and authorities.

3. Specific comments

3.1 Although this regulation is of limited scope and largely technical in nature, an understanding of the present position of organic production as a component of the CAP requires a brief explanation. The definition of ‘organic’ farming only developed as modern farming methods began to largely replace traditional systems. It is now regarded as a form of agriculture primarily using crop rotation, green manure, compost and biological pest control to maintain soil productivity and control pests. It either

excludes or strictly limits the use of manufactured fertilisers, pesticides (which include herbicides, insecticides and fungicides), plant growth regulators such as hormones, livestock antibiotics, food additives, and genetically modified organisms.

3.2 Organic production models were rooted in ecological principles, local, regional and national traditions and, to some extent, philosophical values. As a result many different approaches developed across Europe. In the early 1970s, in response to 'Europeanisation' and increasing interest and demand, the numerous national, voluntary, organic control organisations began to seek common ground. In the 1980s, responding to demands from consumers, growers, processors and retailers, the Commission began work on harmonising rules for organic production within the CAP. This led to regulation on plants (1991) ⁽¹⁾ and livestock (1999) ⁽²⁾.

3.3 Nevertheless, the degree of continuing variation in organic philosophy and approach, together with the entrance of global producers, has required constant adjustment, modification and development of the EU regulations ⁽³⁾. The most recent example of such a development was the adoption in 2010 of a new European organic logo and supporting regulation ⁽⁴⁾.

3.4 At present the organic production regulations provide a uniform, baseline standard for all operators. With nearly 5 % of agricultural land in the EU under organic production and sales of EUR 18 billion of products with organic certification ⁽⁵⁾, this is an important part of the market. The established private labels of recognised national control bodies may be displayed

alongside the EU label and these can indicate to consumers that additional criteria have been applied. The Committee notes that the present regulation proposes amendments aiming at the simplification of legislation, which are of limited scope and of a technical nature.

3.5 The Committee has expressed its detailed views on the wider implications of Articles 290 and 291 in its recent Opinion CESE 357/2011 on *Support for rural development by the EAFRD*.

3.6 In this instance, and as part of the continuing process of seeking to consolidate organic regulation, the Committee endorses the approach to delegated and implementing powers as outlined by the Commission in the proposed regulation. Nevertheless, the Committee wishes to make the following observations.

3.7 The role of groups advising the Commission in implementing acts, particularly the input of NGOs and stakeholders, should be maintained. Organic production and marketing continues to be a complex area which will benefit from wide representation of interests.

3.8 The new EU organic logo becomes compulsory to use next year. The proposal to extend its use to products from third countries under controlled conditions should be reviewed and the possibility of differentiating the logo, perhaps by a variation in colour, to indicate that the product comes from a non-EU country, should be considered.

Brussels, 4 May 2011.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Staffan NILSSON

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91.

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EEC) No. 1804/99.

⁽³⁾ The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) lists more than 750 members in 115 countries.

⁽⁴⁾ Commission Regulation (EU) 271/2010.

⁽⁵⁾ Figures for 2009.