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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Action Plan for the future of Organic Production in the European Union

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1. INTRODUCTION

Organic production is an overall system of farm management and food production that combines best environmental practices, a high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources and the application of high animal welfare standards, and a production method in line with the preference of certain consumer for products using a natural substances and processes.

In recent years the organic market in the EU, driven by steadily increasing demand, has developed significantly (19.7 billion euro with a 9% growth rate in 2011¹). In parallel, during the last decade, the number of organic producers as well as the surface under organic production have grown at a fast pace. Each year, 500.000 hectares of agricultural land convert to organic in the Union. In the period 2000-2012, the total organic area² has increased by 6.7% yearly on average, to reach an estimated 9.6 million ha, which is 5.4% of the total utilised agricultural area in the EU. Organic aquaculture production is also growing fast, following the introduction of EU rules in 2009.

The sector encompasses producers in the agricultural and aquaculture sectors, as well their suppliers, food manufacturers and distributors who all comply with strict rules.

The overall challenge faced by the organic sector is to ensure a steady growth of supply and demand, while maintaining consumers' trust. It is essential to guarantee the credibility of the scheme and the added value in a long term perspective.

The ambition of the Action Plan is to support the growth of the sector, together with the forthcoming changes to the legislative framework in particular by exploring new medium and long term avenues for solutions to the challenges of supply and demand.

This Action Plan also offers a contribution to the objectives set out in the Europe 2020³ Strategy, and the reviewed Common Agricultural Policy. Taking into account that environmental protection is an overarching objective of organic production, the Action Plan also contributes to the objectives of the 7th Environment Action Programme to 2020⁴.

The Action plan will engage further partnerships and mobilise actors involved in its implementation, in particular Member States and stakeholders.

¹ Estimate by FiBL.

² Total organic land area (ha) (certified and in-conversion area) - total area, including Arable land crops, Permanent grassland (pastures and meadows), Permanent crops, Fallow land as part of crop rotation

³ Com(2010)2020: 'Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'.

⁴ Decision No 1386/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 'Living well, within the limits of our planet'

2. BACKGROUND

In 2004, the Commission adopted its first European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming⁵, to promote and strengthen the organic sector. The majority of the 21 actions of the 2004 Plan have been achieved in particular the creation of the new organic production logo of the European Union (hereinafter the EU organic logo).

Since 2004, the Council has reviewed the legislation on organic farming in 2007, and now the Commission has adopted a proposal for a new Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on organic production and labelling of organic products, repealing Regulation (EC) No 834/2007⁶.

The new Action Plan for the future of Organic Production in the European Union addresses some of the problems identified during the impact assessment analysis conducted for the review of the EU organic policy⁷. The analysis was based on extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders. European citizens have shown a keen interest in the subject, by participating in an online consultation (January to April 2013), which received close to 45.000 answers.

During the consultation stakeholders suggested to the Commission to issue a new Action Plan. Since 2004, 15 Member States (MS) have established action plans for the development of organic farming at national or regional level⁸.

3. THE POLICY CHALLENGES: PROGRAMME OF ACTION IN SPECIFIC PRIORITY DOMAINS

This Action Plan presents the European Commission strategy for organic production, controls and trade for the forthcoming decade. The Action Plan also intends to contribute to the smooth shift to the new legal framework to be implemented by the end of the decade.

The European organic production and controls scheme was created in 1991 for a niche market characterised by a limited number of consumers and producers. The recent developments in supply and demand indicate that it is time to adapt and improve the Union's scheme on organic food and farming. The public consultation has shown that European consumers expect high standards for organic farming production and control rules.

A major challenge is to expand and respond to demand without putting at risk consumers' confidence in the principles of organic farming and in the quality of organic products. In that respect, too many exceptions to the rules, some of which have become obsolete in the context of changed market conditions, risk undermining the integrity of organic farming. Organic food and farming respond to societal demands with respect to protection of the environment, quality of food, in particular as regards the non-use of synthetic chemical substances and GMOs all through the production chain⁹. When looking for responses to the increase in demand, special attention has to be taken with regard to complicated rules that make it

⁵ COM(2004)415 final

⁶ Reference to the proposal.

⁷ The impact assessment report is available at :
http://ec.europa.eu/governance/impact/ia_carried_out/cia_2013_en.htm

⁸ See EU research funded project: ORGAP, available at:
<http://www.orgap.org/>

⁹ See report on the results of the public consultation on the review of the EU policy on organic agriculture (15 January – 10 April 2013), available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic/files/eu-policy/of_public_consultation_final_report_en.pdf

difficult for small operators to access the organic scheme. Furthermore, the harmonisation of the organic rules has to aim for ambitious and strict rules while taking into account the reality of the production sector.

Another element to be considered is the pressure of demand that also increases the risk of fraudulent behaviours or other intentional violations. Not only do they harm consumers' interest and cause economic damages distorting competition, but they can also negatively impact on reputation of organic operators that are complying with the rules.

Imported products play an important role in the supply of organic products. In that respect the related rules need to guarantee the development of trade of organic products while preventing the watering down of organic principles or the weakening of the control system.

Organic production has to maintain its innovative role, in influencing non-organic production with its rules and the techniques applied.

To respond to the challenges presented above, the Commission has paid particular attention to possible synergies between EU policies and instruments, to innovative ideas arising from consultations, to linkage with research initiatives, and to the need to improve consumer confidence and awareness as well as to trade with third countries;

Therefore, the Action Plan, for the period up to 2020 will be focusing on three priority domains. The first one is to increase competitiveness of European Union organic producers, by:

- increasing awareness of and synergies with EU instruments targeting organic production,
- addressing technical gaps in organic production, with research, innovation, and their dissemination,
- increasing information on the organic production sector, as well as on the market and trade.

The second priority domain is consolidating and increasing consumer confidence in the European scheme for organic food and farming, as well as trust on the organic products imported, in particular as to the control measures.

The third priority domain is to reinforce the external dimension of the EU organic production scheme.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN ORGANIC SECTOR

4.1. Increase awareness and synergies of EU instruments

The reformed CAP applying from 2014 onwards includes new or revised support measures which can be applied to organic producers.

First of all, the CAP recognizes organic farmers as "green by definition" in the sense of the direct payments support scheme, as they are de facto entitled to the green payment

In addition, the new rural development framework¹⁰ proposes a new specific measure to support organic farming, both for conversion to and maintenance of organic farming practices. Member States in their Rural Development Programmes may also consider the implementation and adequate use of the large list of measures relevant also to organic farmers or operators. These include cooperation between different actors of the food chain on, among

¹⁰ Regulation(EU) No 1305/2013.

others, the development of innovative products, processes, practices and technologies; the support for investments in physical assets, including non-productive investments being purely for environmental purpose, the support for quality schemes for agricultural products or agri-environmental climate measures targeted to organic farms which do not overlap with the requirements of organic farming.

An increased efficiency in the use of the available support measures in rural development programmes can be achieved by taking account of the analysis of the current situation of the organic farming sector and market potential in the given Member State or region¹¹. Such an analysis should constitute the basis for the selection of relevant rural development measures followed by a proper allocation of resources.

Organic production can also be promoted through thematic sub-programmes of rural development programmes. The most relevant thematic sub-programme, in terms of content and financing, would be the one on climate change mitigation and adaptation and biodiversity. However, also other thematic sub-programmes such as the ones on small farms and short supply chains may also, to some extent be relevant for organic farming.

Furthermore, the obligation for Member States to foresee a minimum spending of 30% of the total contribution from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development to each rural development programme on measures dealing with environmental and climate-related issues, including organic farming measure, can play a very positive role in encouraging the financial support and by way of consequence the development of organic farming and providing it with financial support.

As part of the renewed focus on aquaculture promotion within the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) will also provide support for organic aquaculture practices

The Commission recommends Member States to use the opportunities and tools to support organic farming available in the new legal framework for rural development, in blue growth and in the Common Fisheries Policy.

Taking into account the important recent changes in the CAP, it is advisable to rapidly increase awareness among farmers and rural actors on the available support measures for organic farming in relevant instruments proposed in the new CAP and CFP (Actions 1 and 2).

The positive effects of Organic farming on the environment contribute to the achievements of the objectives of the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy¹², the Green Infrastructure Communication¹³, the Soil Thematic Strategy¹⁴ and environmental legislation such as the Birds¹⁵ and Habitats Directives¹⁶, the Nitrates Directive¹⁷, the Water Framework Directive¹⁸, the National Emission Ceiling Directive¹⁹).

¹¹ See study "Use and Efficiency of Public Support Measures addressing Organic Farming", November 2011, available at :

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/external-studies/organic-farming-support_en.htm

¹² COM(2011) 244 final 'Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020'.

¹³ SWD(2013) 155 final 'Green Infrastructure (GI) — Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital'

¹⁴ COM(2006)231 final 'Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection'

¹⁵ Directive 2009/147/EC

¹⁶ Directive 43/92/EEC

¹⁷ Directive 91/676/EEC

¹⁸ Directive 2000/60/EC

¹⁹ Directive 2001/81/EC

Action 1: The Commission will publish an informative document in 2014 intended for organic farmers, processors and retailers, presenting the rules applicable to organic production, processing and trade, including the rules applying to conversion as well as support measures in the CAP.

Action 2: The Commission will include organic farming as a specific theme in the forthcoming call for proposals for support for information measures intended for farmers and producers relating to the common agricultural policy (CAP). As part of the guidance on EMFF funding, the opportunities for organic aquaculture will also be highlighted.

4.2. Ensure awareness of EU organic scheme including the EU organic logo

Actions on information and promotion of organic products can play an important role in increasing market opportunities for organic producers. In that sense the European policy on information and promotion activities of agricultural products on the internal market and in third countries offers funding possibilities to operators for campaigns which aim to increase consumer awareness on the main features of the organic production scheme, on specific products produced according to the EU organic production rules, the EU system of control and on the EU organic logo (Action 3).

For consumers the presence of the EU organic logo on food labels is the main means of identifying organic products. Created in 2010, the use of the EU logo is compulsory since 2012 in the packaging of all the pre-packaged organic food produced in the EU. In November 2013, 25% of respondents signalled awareness of the EU organic logo on average in the 28 Member States²⁰. In parallel to the EU logo, information about organic production seems well communicated to consumers in general – 69% of EU consumers stated that they have seen a logo or a statement indicating that the food product has been organically produced²¹. Monitoring consumer knowledge of the EU organic logo and trust in organic products would bring reliable information to better target areas for improvement in relation to information and promotion in the EU and Third country markets (Action 4).

If in the mid to long term the level of consumer awareness of the EU organic logo in the EU or Member State does not increase or in cases where consumer confidence in the organic scheme can be considered at risk, the Commission could consider, in the context of the new information and promotion policy of European agricultural products²², increasing information on the EU organic scheme and logo with an EU financed campaign. Information or promotion campaigns can also be considered to address consumers' awareness and knowledge of EU organic logo and/or the main characteristics of the EU organic scheme in one or more non-EU countries. These campaigns could follow reciprocal arrangements or agreements signed by the EU (i.e. with the US, Switzerland), or initiatives to protect the EU organic logo conducted in some Third countries.

Information targeted towards young consumers and children can also be an important tool to increase awareness and confidence in the organic production scheme. In that sense national

²⁰ Special Eurobarometer 410 – Wave EB80.2 - TNS Opinion & Social, survey made in November 2013.

²¹ Consumer market study on the functioning of voluntary food labelling schemes for consumers in the European Union (January 2014), available at:
[Link to be provided]

²² Following the Commission proposal COM(2013)812final, available at:
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0812:FIN:EN:PDF>

initiatives under the school fruit and vegetable and school milk schemes permit to support information activities in the schools on the characteristics of organic production method, under the educational aspect of the scheme. The review of the CAP school schemes²³ provides for an opportunity to reinforce the link with the organic production by encouraging the sourcing of organic products and the integration of organic-related topics under the supporting educational measures.

Organic production features prominently in the EU green public procurement (GPP) criteria for food and catering services available since 2008 (minimum percentage of food which must be organically produced) which are recommendations for voluntary use by public authorities throughout Europe. There is potential for Member States and public procurers to further increase the use of organic farming requirements in public procurement, in relation to food and catering services. The Commission will develop specific information material to increase awareness among public authorities of the possibility to include more sustainability aspects in their contracts for food and catering including organic production criteria (Action 5).

Action 3: The Commission will continue to raise awareness on the possibilities offered by the regulation on information and promotion activities in favour of agricultural products in internal market and third countries, in particular on the promotion policy objectives and the rules and procedures to apply by presenting the instrument to organic sector public, Member States (Standing Committee on organic Farming), stakeholders (Advisory Group on Organic farming), or organic farming specialised events like BioFach.

Action 4: The Commission will conduct:

- Periodical surveys on consumers' awareness of the EU organic logo.
- A specific survey on consumers' awareness, confidence in and understanding of the EU organic farming scheme.

Action 5: The Commission will revise its Green Public Procurement criteria for Food and Catering Services by the end of 2015 and develop specific information material that would exemplify the use of organic farming requirements in public procurement.

4.3. Research and innovation to overcome challenges in organic rules.

4.3.1. Scope

Organic production has become a highly specialized agricultural system, which requires specific professional education, knowledge and technologies. There are a number of challenges with regard to production of plant and animal products within organically managed systems, for instance because of the limited availability of some inputs in their organic form. Major constraints are related to animal nutrition, more specifically protein and micronutrients supply, and the availability of organic seeds. Those obstacles would need to be addressed and overcome in particular in view of possible phasing out of certain existing exceptions and derogations to the rules..

In addition to those challenges, the Commission suggests further attention to be devoted to concrete sector development issues such as: a) Innovative methods for management of pests, diseases and weeds; b) Alternative to copper products for ecological plant protection; c) Reduction of energy consumption by greenhouses; d) Improved soil fertility; e) Improved energy use; f) Coexistence of organic farming with non-organic agriculture g) Ingredients and

²³ Commission proposal COM(2014) 32 final, 30.1.2014, 2014/0014 (COD).

techniques compatible with organic food processing. The 3rd Foresight report²⁴ of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) also identifies relevant research areas.

The availability of organic protein feed has been analysed by several EU funded research projects on organic and on low-input agriculture²⁵. Nevertheless, research into protein crops has remained limited compared with other production sectors, with the result that protein crop yields have fallen behind in the last decades. Renewed investment in research into protein crop production could help narrow the gap again, leading to greater yield stability and product quality (protein content, digestibility, etc.) so as to make protein crops more profitable for farmers and the entire supply chain.

Research could also lead to improvements in animal nutrition, feed efficiency, breeding and husbandry in organic production if it focusses on increased sustainability, resource efficiency including water and soil protection, biodiversity as well as adaptation to and mitigation of climate change.

Availability of organic seeds, livestock material and juveniles and seed of bivalve molluscs is also an economic and technical challenge for organic producers. Although the situation seems to have slightly improved for organic seed, there is an important use of exceptions allowing the use of conventional non-treated seed. It is important to increase information intended for producers on the availability of organic seeds throughout the EU, with a seed database at European level.

The Commission recommends to the concerned stakeholders, to set up a data base at European level on availability of organic seeds. The Commission encourages stakeholders – in particular in the framework of the Aquaculture Advisory Council – to consider similar initiatives in relation to the availability of organic fish juveniles and organic seed of bivalve shellfish.

To complete that approach it is also necessary to strictly limit the use of derogations to the principle of the obligatory use of organic seeds. It is also necessary to increase research on breeding techniques also looking into the use of local populations and semi-domesticated species to produce organic seeds while ensuring their compatibility with the organic farming principles and objectives. Organic aquaculture producers indicate that the availability of organic juveniles and bivalve mollusc seeds still represents a factor limiting growth of the sector.

4.3.2. Tools

Horizon2020 – the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation can bring about solutions and tools to further improve the performance and uptake of research results. Horizon 2020 includes various mechanisms to promote research and innovation, demonstration, coordination, networking and training as well as supporting infrastructures and innovations, e.g. in SMEs.

Participation of the organic farming sector in the European Innovation Partnership on Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP) will be essential for boosting innovation and improving cooperation between the science, farm, farm advice and industry worlds both at regional, national and European levels.

To respond to the challenges ahead further involvement of farmers is needed to improve the identification of research and innovation needs (Action 6). Under the EIP several formats can

²⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/research/agriculture/scar/pdf/scar_feg3_final_report_01_02_2011.pdf

²⁵ In particular LEGUME-FUTURES, MicroFIX, and INTERCROP.

be used to explore specific issues that are relevant for organic farming and that would invite farmers' active engagement. Member States should consider inter alia the elimination of derogations when establishing innovation priorities in the context of rural development programmes. When defining those priorities, Member States can raise awareness among farmers and researchers, and facilitate the creation of operational groups on those subjects. Between 2000 and 2012, 49 EU funded research projects on low-input and organic agriculture have strengthened the research and innovation capacity of the organic sector²⁶. Strengthening the translation of knowledge gained through research into actual practice in particular on production methods would increase efficiency of research results and improve the sector's performance. Particular measures should be encouraged to capitalise on existing knowledge from research and practice to test potential solutions and translate them into practice.

The technology platform for organic food and farming research (TP Organics), would play its role by also providing input into a strategic research and innovation agenda.

There is a potential to further improve the coordination of research funding activities for the organic sector across the European Union. Horizon 2020 provides for support to networks of national funding bodies to undertake joint calls. Possibilities to further use the ERA-Net and/or Joint Programming instruments will be actively promoted, thereby fostering already existing collaborations, e.g. the ERA-Net CORE-Organic Plus.

In the context of Horizon 2020, the work programmes will need to take into account those challenges and lessons learned as regards identification of research needs by the farmers, exchange of research outputs, including from other production sectors, and further coordination of European research works (Action 7).

Action 6: The Commission will organise a conference in 2015 to identify research and innovation priorities for producers in relation to the challenges that may result from the future organic production rules.

Action 7: The Commission will take into account in the relevant Horizon 2020 formats:

- the need to strengthen research, exchange and uptake of research results through specific measures such as research and innovation actions, thematic networks and other types of "Cooperation and Support Actions" that address synergies between, on one hand, research outputs of other production sectors and, on the other hand, conventional and organic research.
- to support ERA-Net or other types of instruments to improve coordination of research among research funding bodies in the EU, in view of presenting joint research calls.

4.4. Monitoring and evaluation

Availability of statistical data is essential for shaping, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Union's policy for organic production, in particular as to knowledge on the production sector, on prices along the organic food supply chain, on trade, on consumer preferences, and specific marketing channels. The European Commission is funding a research project "Data network for better European organic market information - Organic data network" aiming to increase the transparency of the European organic food market through

²⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/research/bioeconomy/agriculture/news-events/news/20120903_en.htm

better availability of market intelligence about the sector²⁷. Further efforts to gather, analyse and disseminate existing data will increase transparency and confidence in the organic sector.

To better evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the EU legislation there is also a need to improve knowledge on how the added value is distributed alongside the chain and to what extent it benefits the agricultural producers (Action 9). The attractiveness of the organic production sector for small holdings and microenterprises, in particular as regards obstacles and attractiveness to enter the organic production scheme is also an important element in relation to the implementation of the new CAP.

A review of the progress of the Action Plan will be conducted in 2020.

Action 8: The Commission will publish regular reports on organic production in the EU, containing in particular information on surfaces, holdings involved in organic production as well as main production sectors.

Action 9: The Commission will :

- Analyse the distribution of added value along the food supply chain.
- Analyse obstacles to join the organic sector through a survey on the attractiveness of the organic scheme, in particular for small farms, and small and medium sized enterprises in the food manufacturing sector.

5. ENSURE CONSUMER CONFIDENCE IN THE EU ORGANIC PRODUCTION SCHEME

The risk of loss of consumer confidence is one of the major challenges of the organic sector.

Following the new framework on accreditation and market surveillance in the European Union²⁸ accreditation has become the key instrument to demonstrate technical competence of conformity assessment bodies, such as control bodies in the organic sector. Accreditation in the EU is now performed by one single national accreditation body that acts under public authority.

A task force has been set up in the European Cooperation for Accreditation to deal specifically with matters regarding accreditation of control bodies operating in the organic sector. Its work, in close cooperation with the Commission, resulted in the adoption of a mandatory document for national accreditation bodies operating in this area applicable as from January 2014²⁹.

In parallel, the Commission through the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) has conducted in 2012 and 2013 10 audits in Member States and 4 audits in Third countries on the organic control system. In the light of the findings as described in FVO's reports, further coordination and cooperation between the competent authorities and national accreditation bodies seem necessary (Action 10) with a view to a more effective and efficient supervision of Control Bodies in the EU.

In relation to imports, it seems also necessary to facilitate the transmission of organic import certificates, as well as to increase information on its use among operators and Members states

²⁷ Initial results show that there is a need of further harmonisation of methodology in data collection.

²⁸ Regulation (EC) No 765/2008.

²⁹ Guidelines on the use of EN 45011 and ISO/EC 17021 for Certification to EN ISO 3834 (published on 3 July 2013): <http://www.european-accreditation.org/publication/ea-6-02-m>.

customs authorities, in particular through TARIC³⁰, the online integrated Community Tariff (Action 11).

It is also necessary to reduce and simplify the administrative burden and increase traceability of organic goods by using an electronic system of certification (Action 12).

Fraudulent behaviours and intentional violations are one of the main factors which can affect consumer confidence. The EU will support Member states and other actors in the food chain to identify actions in order to prevent and address those violations (Action 13).

Action 10: The Commission will encourage Member States to explore synergies and simplifications between activities by Accreditation Bodies and Competent Authorities.

The Commission will establish further guidance in 2016. The Commission will liaise as appropriate with Accreditation Bodies responsible for the surveillance on Control Bodies in Third Countries.

Action 11: The Commission will propose to the TARIC Committee to integrate the organic production legislation requirements in the TARIC database.

Action 12: The Commission will develop:

- A system of **electronic certification for import**, as a module integrated into the TRACES system (future information Management System for Official Controls – IMSOC) by 2015.
- An **approach for electronic certification for the internal market** to be integrated into the future information Management System for Official Controls (IMSOC).

Action 13: The Commission will assist Member States in developing and implementing an organic fraud prevention policy, through:

- Targeted workshop(s) to share lessons learned and good practices, and
- The development of compendia/casebook of cases.

6. REINFORCE THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF EU ORGANIC PRODUCTION

The EU plays an important role in trade of food in particular for high quality products. With combined imports and exports annually of EUR 196 billion (2010-2012 average data), the EU is the world's foremost trader in agricultural products. The EU's export strength lies in final products that are ready for consumers, both processed and unprocessed, where the EU shows a net trade balance of EUR 6.7 billion (2010-2012 average). These include wines, spirit drinks, cheeses and processed meats that produce significant value added in the chain.

Ensuring that the EU organic producers follow the trend of European food industry, by fully developing their strength, will benefit producers in the EU.

Together with the increased trade, the EU organic regime needs to ensure that the imported products comply with the strict EU definition of organic food and farming. Furthermore, there is an increased need to guarantee to consumers the integrity of control system in Third countries in relation to the use of the organic labelling and logo.

³⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/dds2/taric/taric_consultation.jsp?Lang=en

Developing countries are an important origin for the EU imports of organic products. Special attention shall be given to the impact of the implementation of new control and production rules to ensure smooth continuity of trade from developing countries (Action 14).

Some of the equivalence arrangements concluded by the EU with other leading organic markets in the world provide for reciprocal conditions for EU producers, although their scope varies somewhat. Only the arrangement between the EU and the United States, provide for regulatory and standards co-operation on organic production. By seeking to extend the arrangements with the other leading organic markets to include such regulatory and standards co-operation, the Commission will strive for closer convergence between these markets' organic standards. In line with this, the Commission will explore the possibility of a plurilateral agreement between the leading organic markets (Action 15). Such a plurilateral agreement supported by regulatory co-operation could generate synergies in the supervision and control system thereby greatly facilitating the export-oriented organic production in the main organic producer countries and developing countries alike.

Although no detailed information is available as to the volumes and values of trade flows of organic products, it is important to improve knowledge of trade, to identify for instance existing and potential markets for EU products, and focus the external action on the EU's leading trade partners (Action 16).

Codex Alimentarius (established by FAO and WHO, 185 Member Countries and 1 Member Organization (EU) sets standards that are used as reference in international trade including trade in organic products. With the development of worldwide trade, and the risk of diverging national standards, in particular for emerging sectors, it seems necessary to continue work in updating and completing the existing Codex standard (Action 17).

Protection of the new EU organic logo is achieved by registering it as collective trade mark in the European Office for Harmonisation of the Internal market and in a limited number of neighbourhood countries like Switzerland and Norway. In order to ensure that the EU organic logo is not misused in third countries, trade mark registration should be pursued, taking into account market potential and the risk of misuse of the EU organic logo (Action 18).

Action 14: The Commission will continue to support and cooperate with trade partners in developing countries in the framework of the EU development policy. Consider consultations with stakeholders and representatives of developing countries importing into the EU to ensure trade under EU legislation.

Action 15: The Commission will consider increased convergence of standards among leading organic partners and explore the possibility of a plurilateral agreement.

Action 16: The Commission will explore different possibilities to gather and to analyse statistical data on volume and value of trade with third countries, in order to improve knowledge of potential markets for the EU organic sector. Particular attention shall be given to Developing countries, as current and potentially growing suppliers to the EU markets.

Action 17: As to *Codex Alimentarius*, the Commission will support development of rules on aquaculture, and will explore the feasibility of starting works on organic wine rules.

Action 18: The Commission will increase protection of the EU organic logo in Third countries by registration as a collective trade mark and/or through bilateral agreements.