

PRESS RELEASE - Brussels, 21 November 2017

European producers and consumers call for the strict compliance of imports of organic products.

The French Federation of Fruit and Vegetable Cooperatives (FELCOOP), the National Federation of Farmers' Unions (FNSEA), organic producers and consumers within Nature & Progrès Belgium, the banana producers of Guadeloupe and Martinique (UGPBAN), the European beet growers (PDB), the French vegetable producers (Légumes de France), and the sugar union of Reunion Island, regret the extremely dangerous distortion of competition for European organic and conventional producers and the risk of losing consumer confidence due to the new text adopted in Council on November 20th.

At a conference organised by MEP Angélique Delahaye in the European Parliament on Tuesday 21 November under the "Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development" Intergroup, the debates raised a number of questions regarding trade with third countries and the consequent lack of coherence between the rules applicable to European producers and those applicable to producers in third countries, who use the same organic label regardless of the import regime.

Imports of organic products in the EU can be made via two regimes: firstly, the equivalence regime which makes it possible to achieve the same objectives as the organic regulation but with different means "by applying rules which ensure the same level of assurance of conformity", and secondly, the compliance regime, which lays down strict rules to be respected by European producers, but to which producers in third countries may derogate via trade agreements.

These trade agreements, such as those signed with Chile and Switzerland, create an irreversible situation: from now on, productions from third countries can circumvent the obligation of compliance through the conclusion of trade agreements based on the principle of equivalence.

International commercial law takes from now on precedence over European agricultural policy.

The European Commission has never examined the impacts that the equivalence system could have on European producers. Yet, equivalence introduces a laxity in the rules of production and encourages the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and production techniques prohibited in Europe, leading to much higher yields for third country productions, especially in tropical humid zones.

This phenomenon, associated with the loosening of the pressure of controls allowed by the new regulation, endangers the management of the organic label.

The Collective for Compliance, which brings together some fifty European producer organisations, unions, research centres, etc. considers that a separate organic label for equivalent products on the one hand, and strictly compliant products on the other, is the only way to respond to the distortion of competition suffered by European producers and to the expectations of the consumer, who will henceforth be able to clearly read the label.

The vote on the compromise text will take place in the EP Agriculture Committee on 22 November and in plenary in January 2018, endorsing the new organic regulation which will enter into force in July 2020.

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Collective for Compliance: <http://oui-au-bio-strictement-conforme.eu/>