

European Council endorses new regulations for organic farming

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The council said, "Currently there is a situation where different standards may apply to producers within the same country when there is no equivalence arrangement with the EU just because certification bodies set their own standards."

Conformity to the EU single set of rules will replace the principle of equivalence. It is said to bring important improvements in relation to trade, the main one being that there will be now a level playing field between operators from the EU and from non-EU countries.

The scope of the rules has been extended to cover a range of new products such as salt, cork and essential oils. It will also be possible in the future to add new products to respond to the development of the sector and to consumers' demands, providing additional opportunities for producers.

The EC said, "Regulation brings simplification for farmers. For example, small farmers will be able to choose group certification which will reduce their certification costs and make it easier for them to join the organic scheme."

Welcoming the step towards the final adoption of the regulation, commissioner for agriculture Phil Hogan said: "Today's decision of the council is another milestone for the organic sector, which ensures that this important and rapidly growing sector can continue to expand with clear rules and can be assured of being on an equal footing with producers from non-EU countries who export their organic produce into the EU."

"What everyone agreed on was that the current rules – which are 20 years old now – were not fit for purpose and were likely to hinder rather than help the development of this growing sector which is worth around €27 billion, and has grown by 125% over the last decade. We must support this growth by ensuring that the sector operates with appropriate legislation."