

European action plan for organic food and farming

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Marie-Hélène AUBERT (Greens/EFA, FR) on the European action plan for organic food and farming. MEPs welcomed the Commission's recognition of the important role of this type of farming in the context of achieving the objectives of the new CAP. They noted, however, that the Commission did not consider it necessary to provide human or financial resources from the EU budget. The report stressed that more needed to be done, given that organic farming makes a major contribution to the multipurpose role of European agriculture, as well as reducing pollution, protecting biodiversity and farmland and, not least, preserving or even creating jobs. These latter factors meant that the Commission should pay particular attention to the situation of organic farming in the new Member States.

MEPs insisted on the need to encourage state aid to organic farming and related industries, with quality systems being promoted. They regretted the Commission's failure to present concrete proposals on sectoral organisation, and called for support (especially financial) for the organisation of production and for processing and marketing. They also suggested that campaigns to promote organic food products should focus on public canteens, especially school canteens.

On the issue of standards and inspections, the report welcomed more advanced animal welfare standards but stressed that they should be accompanied by support for investment, as they often required costly conversions or the building of new structures. The committee was also concerned that the system of accreditation for inspection bodies should remain under the control of the Commission and the Member States. MEPs also asked the Commission what line it intended to take on coexistence between GMOs and organic crops and said that, in cases of contamination, the financial responsibility must lie entirely with those who market GMOs illegally, and certainly not with the farming industry as a whole. With regard to GMOs, they wanted the same rules to apply to Community products and imports. The report deplored the failure of the action plan to contain any specific measures to promote research, and proposed that the EU's framework programme for research should prioritise organic farming and the coexistence of organic crops with conventional crops and GMOs.

Lastly, the committee wanted the action plan to include a recommendation that development aid and fair trade should promote the production of and trade in organic products.