

Biols Seminar-workshop at BioFach Congress, Friday 14-2, 10.00-11.30, NCC Ost Room St. Petersburg

Challenge for organic growth: harmonization of residue handling in EU and beyond

The next decade are the years of the break-through of organic food farming. Since the new EU Commission has presented the 'Green Deal', it is clear that organic production will be in the center of the food and farming policy of the EU. The aim is to 'INCREASE ORGANIC FARMING' as one of the main goals for the coming decade. This support for organic will further strengthen the growth of the organic food market. But... there are still some important challenges to tackle. One of them is the way residue cases are handled at the moment in the EU.

A big threat for the fast-growing organic market is the disharmonized situation of residue handling by inspection bodies and authorities, varying from 'zero tolerance' to a 'case by case approach' and different approaches in between. Therefore, the Organic Trade and Processing Organization (OPTA) took the initiative to start an common project together with the research institute FiBL that evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches. The first outcomes of this project are presented by FiBL. Bernhard Speiser, project-leader: "We will present the first outcomes of this project. Our aim is to present cornerstones for a harmonized approach, that is in the scope of the new regulation in 2024."

International market players, represented by Karst Kooistra from Tradin Organic, experience a lot uncertainty and growing risks in the market, when it comes to residue findings in organic. "What is considered as proper organic in one EU country can be decertified in another EU country, because of a different interpretation of the same regulation. This kind of uncertainty could be a real showstopper for organic developments. We have to solve this if we want to make sure that ambitions of the EU Commission with organic can be fulfilled."

The techniques for residue analysis are constantly becoming more and more sensitive. Meanwhile, it is technically possible to detect residues of chemicals below the level of one part per billion. Eurofins will present the technical development of the labs. But does this help the organic sector? What does it mean when traces of such substances are found? Is it contamination, caused by conventional production which is allowed to use these substances? Or is it fraud? Jochen Neuendorff, member of the AntiFraudInitiative, has a clear message: "It could be, but there are many other and more effective ways to cheat."

Johanna Mirenda (OTA) will contribute with perspectives from the US market. "We struggle with the same subject and even in the more harmonized approach we face many difficulties. For the perspective of the global growth of organic harmonization between EU and US would make sense as well." Bavo van den Idsert (Bionext) concludes in name of the whole organic sector: "For organic farming, trade and processing it feels pretty unfair that they have to deal with the chemical pollution from conventional farming. The current focus on residues should become more balanced and better to handle. At the end, organic shows that proper production without synthetic substances is possible and that is the ambition of the Commission for all agriculture in EU."

Biols organizes on the BioFach 2020, in cooperation with many stakeholders of the organic sector, a seminar-workshop on one of the main challenges for the organic sector: harmonization of residue handling.