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Towards an EU organic Action Plan

Report on an EU hearing

On 22 January 2004 the European Commission held a 'European Hearing on Organic Food and Farming – Towards a European Action Plan' in Brussels. The main purpose of this hearing was to create an opportunity where the Commission could listen to the views of the stakeholders.

In his concluding speech Franz Fischler, EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, addressed three issues that are crucial for the future: the market, the role of public support and organic standards. Fischler said that a first possible action to increase promotion of organic products would be a common European logo for organic products to 'help consumers all over Europe and indeed all over the world to recognise organic products'. However, he also admitted 'that many people are concerned about making an EU logo obligatory'. In regard to the EU Regulation on organic agriculture Fischler said it would be necessary to update the regulation continuously,

'because organic farming in its very nature is a dynamic sector, one that must respond quickly to changes in consumer demand, and one that must react to new scientific and technical developments'. According to Fischler the inspection system has a vital role to play in building consumer confidence and suggested the introduction of risk analysis tools to optimise the coordination between all the actors involved, and to harmonise the accreditation of inspection bodies.

Following this public hearing, the Commission is preparing an Action Plan in the form of a Communication to the European Council and Parliament, including a list of possible actions to boost organic farming. Over a hundred stakeholder organisations, Agricultural Ministers from Member States, acceding and candidate countries and the press participated in this conference.

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Further information: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/events/organic/index_en.htm

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Why an Action Plan is needed

According to the IFOAM EU Regional Group (EURG) organic farming is stepping out of its niche role to become the spearhead of sustainable systems in Europe. However, its success depends on being recog-

nised as an independent and important tool in European agricultural policy, and therefore has to be supported proportionate to its potential, rather than to its current size.

For efficient implementation of the