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New EU Regulation *Will it be simpler?*

On 21 December 2005, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a new regulation on organic production. The new rules are intended to be simpler, and to allow a certain amount of flexibility that will take account of regional differences in climate and conditions. The import regime will now be amended to allow certification bodies outside the EU to be recognised by the Commission.

The current EU Regulation 2092/91 has been amended many times, resulting in a text that has become somewhat convoluted. It has recently been subjected to a complete review, leading to a proposal for a new regulation. On presenting the proposal, Mariann Fischer Boel, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, said: 'It will become much easier now for consumers to recognise organic products and understand their environmental and animal welfare benefits. The current rules will be replaced by simpler, more transparent ones. They will define objectives and principles for organic production, clarify labelling rules and regulate imports, to guarantee that consumers know what they are buying and that farmers know precisely what rules to follow.'

It is proposed that the new regulation will apply from 1 January 2009, but that the new rules on imports will

come into force on 1 January 2007. The proposal will go through the normal consultative procedures and possible revisions before adoption by the Council. The process, which will include the EU Parliament making a report on it, will be concluded when the Council makes its decision, probably within 6-12 months.

A lot simpler – but the devil is in the details

The proposed new regulation is a framework document and does not contain the type of detail found in the current regulation. For instance, there are no lists of approved inputs and, except for wild products, there are no specific conversion periods (these will be set later on). Although there are requirements for the use of organic feed and seeds, a whole chapter (chapter 4), is devoted to 'flexibility', and it states that exceptions can be made to the feed and seed requirements. Other

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