Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1636 (2003)[1]

Development of organic farming

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recognises that organic farming is particularly well suited to meeting certain criteria that are increasingly present in the framing of agricultural policy and in the minds of European consumers, as it places the onus, inter alia, on environmental protection, food quality, animal welfare and conservation of resources.

2. The Assembly notes that there is growing interest in organic farming throughout Europe, among both consumers and farmers, as demonstrated by the steady growth in the market for organic produce despite higher production costs and purchase prices.

3. This development has prompted the introduction of international regulations, within the Codex Alimentarius (FAO/WHO), and European regulations, at the level of the European Union, but it has to be acknowledged that many Council of Europe member states, particularly those in eastern Europe, have no specific regulations in this area and, where regulations exist, they are not harmonised.

4. The Assembly advocates stronger public authority backing for organic farming in view of its environmental benefits and positive impact as regards competition. At the same time it is necessary to reinforce the regulations governing the certification and labelling of organic produce.

5. National plans of action, such as those already introduced in certain European countries, could be drawn up with a view to planning and co-ordinating the development of organic farming in different spheres, such as information for producers and consumers, the processing and marketing of organic produce or the development of openings on both domestic and export markets.

6. The Assembly believes that, in the interests of both growth of the organic produce market and the necessary promotion of sustainable agricultural development and the need to guarantee improved food security, a European strategy is required to guide the development of organic farming, together with efforts to harmonise national policies in this sphere, not only where the European Union and the acceding states are concerned but also at the broader level of the Council of Europe.

7. It notes that the European Union has initiated preliminary discussion on drawing up a European plan of action for organic farming, but it believes that governmental and parliamentary political action is necessary to determine the place of organic farming alongside the other production systems, particularly within the Common Agricultural Policy, and the support it should be given, particularly in European Union non-member states.

8. The Assembly considers that there are grounds for drawing up a European charter for organic food and farming, which would make it possible, inter alia, to establish a common line of thought and strategy for the development of organic farming for the whole of Europe, a joint approach to regulation - particularly where certification and standardisation are concerned - to contribute to the stability and security of the entire agricultural system and to propose alternative models for agricultural development that are more respectful of the environment.

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 25 November 2003 (see Doc. 9887, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Nazaré Pereira).

9. Consequently, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

9.1. invite the member states, particularly those that are not members of the European Union, to introduce national plans of action for organic farming, aimed in particular at:

a. regulating the place and role of organic farming within national agricultural policy, taking account of issues such as certification, standardisation and labelling;

b. supporting organic farming in the context of multifunctional farming as part of a rural development policy taking into account social and environmental needs;

c. informing consumers and producers of the benefits of organic produce;

d. fostering the development and transparency of domestic markets;

e. supporting the commercialisation of organic farming products by giving preferential treatment to producers that commercialise correctly certified products;

f. strengthening the credibility of organic farming vis-à-vis consumers by promoting the technical competence and proper staffing of bodies responsible for its control and certification;

g. increasing the controls of the certification procedure carried out by the bodies responsible;

h. promoting the development of the food industry sector for organic produce;

i. harmonising their regulations on organic farming and the criteria for certification with other countries in order to develop this branch and facilitate trade at European level;

9.2. draw up a European charter for organic food and farming, which might take the form of a recommendation to the member states, geared to:

a. recognising the potential contribution of organic farming to agricultural policy reform and rural development;

b. strengthening the performance of organic farming where environmental, social and other public assets are concerned;

c. supporting organic producers;

d. strengthening or developing regulatory systems for organic farming;

e. adopting a single European quality label for organic farming products;

f. developing organic produce supply chains;

g. developing specific programmes for European countries that are not members of the European Union;

h. adopting an integrated approach, based on action plans that take account of the dynamic nature of the organic sector and the specific circumstances of individual countries or regions.

10. The Assembly recommends that the European Union support organic farming in the current discussion process and in regular reviews of the Common Agricultural Policy and draw up a European action plan for organic farming.