

Opening Address

Dear Participants,


It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the Ecofruit- 17th International Conference on Organic Fruit Growing. IFOAM EU is delighted to be the patron of this conference for sixth consecutive period. We see Ecofruit as an important biennial forum that brings together researchers, consultants and importantly growers to exchange and discuss the latest developments for organic fruit growing now and into the future.

When I had the pleasure to address you back in 2014 the EU organic sector was facing into a crucial time with the imminent publication of a legislative proposal for a new Organic Regulation to replace the current Regulation EC 834/07. I reiterate what I said then, that despite the Commission's intentions to develop organic based on its principles, its proposal, which were still in draft form at the time, would result in major barriers for the sustainable development of the sector. This was due to the emphasis on significant changes to the current system, instead of steady step-by-step and viable changes over time. However, while positions from both European Council and European Parliament move the Commission's proposal in the right direction, by taking up many of the organic movement's demands, many obstacles still remain. Moreover the principle that "*Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed*" applies in the current negotiations between the three EU Institutions which are expected to continue throughout 2016. Most crucial for organic fruit growing is the proposal of the Commission to use only organic or in-conversion plant reproductive material. Both Parliament and Council are willing to take account of exceptions for using non-organic plant propagating material where the organic form is not available. However, while IFOAM EU shares the objective towards 100 % organic input use, we ask for at least a 10-year transitional rule and an ambitious investment package to directly tackle these challenges sector. The Commission's proposal to introduce a decertification threshold for non-authorized substances, such as synthetic pesticides, also remains a major issue and is particularly relevant for fruit growers who often have to confront contamination from neighboring conventional farms.

IFOAM EU is also working to ensure that plant protection products, in line with the organic principles, are permitted where appropriate management practices are not available or the crops cannot be adequately protected by the preventive measures. Indeed, following more than two years of strong engagement by IFOAM EU with EU and national policymakers and experts, the Commission approved calcium hydroxide – a traditional organic substance – as a basic substance under EU law. A second application for quassia remains ongoing, with similar applications also made by IFOAM EU members for several foodstuffs and plant extracts deemed important for organic production sector. IFOAM EU is continuing to engage in the process to ensure that the EU registration process is further adapted to naturally-occurring substances used for plant health in organic farming (including those substances with multiple modes of action). Engagement also includes efforts to introduce a fast-track procedure for inclusion in the organic regulation of those substances that are in line with the organic principles and necessary for organic plant health.

At the same time the organic fruit growing sector must continue to innovate based on the organic principles with appropriate design and management of biological processes and natural resources internal to the agroecosystem, central to long-term agro-ecological-based strategies for plant health. To this end the European technology platform TP Organics is actively lobbying politicians and policymakers to invest more in research and innovation orientated towards eco-functional intensification the enhances the productivity, stability and resilience of agro-ecosystems. This concept is a key part of TP Organic 'Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for Organic Food and Farming' published in December 2014 and identifies the specific challenge of finding practical ways to develop more resilient agro-ecosystems for perennial and protected crops. This address issues such as the intensive use of energy, water and other inputs, and making full use of functional biodiversity is still limited. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Organic Vision for Europe in 2030. Launched in June 2015, where the EU organic movement is working towards a Vision of fair, environmentally conscious, healthy and food and farming systems by 2030. This envisages that 50% of Europe's agricultural land would be managed according to organic principles of health, ecology, fairness and care.

IFOAM EU wishes you a constructive and fruitful conference and hopes you will join us in confronting the current challenges and opportunities facing the organic movement now and into the future so that we as a movement and sector can continue to transform food and farming through organics.



Marco Schlüter
Director IFOAM EU

