

Changes to EU Organic Rules Threaten Farmers' Livelihoods

New EU organic regulations, due to come into force in 2021, will limit the size of organizations, forcing small-scale farmers to restructure their cooperatives, and creating high costs when they are already struggling to make ends meet. At Biofach, the world's largest organic fair, Fairtrade urgently calls on the European Commissioner for agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski, to abandon these changes and instead find solutions which do not negatively impact small-scale farmers and their communities.

The new EU Organic Regulation includes rules for the certification of organic farmers in a cooperative or producer group. The proposed changes will limit such groups to 1000 members, and individual farm size to five hectares.

Fairtrade farmers have voiced extreme concern at the planned changes. Close to half of all Fairtrade producers also farm organically and around 100 Fairtrade small producer organizations, representing more than 400,000 smallholder farmers stand to be affected due to their size. Worldwide it will impact more than 2.6 million organic producers, [according to the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture \(FiBL\)](#).

Being able to group together in larger cooperatives or associations enables small-scale farmers to reduce costs, make joint investments and, crucially, negotiate from a position that would otherwise be beyond their reach. The proposed changes would force Fairtrade and organic certified cooperatives to split into smaller groups, taking away their right to self-determination and increasing their costs and paperwork. Moreover, it risks making them into weaker entities that will struggle to compete and survive in global supply chains.

The regulation will also require producer organizations who export or process their product (for example coffee cooperatives who roast and export their own coffee), to set up a separate entity for this purpose. This again creates additional costs and burden for producers, and will prevent many of them from moving up the value chain, which is widely recognized as a crucial way for smallholders to make their own way out of poverty.

For Abel Fernandez, manager of Fairtrade and organic certified producer organization CONACADO in the Dominican Republic, the proposed changes are disastrous. CONACADO brings together more than 150 cocoa cooperatives, representing more than 10,000 small-scale farmers. "This EU regulation is against rural development and against international cooperation. It limits opportunities for disadvantaged groups and for small producers like our members to grow. It also has the potential to damage, or even destroy existing businesses like ours, as we will not be able to stem the additional costs and red tape."

Fairtrade International CEO, Dario Soto Abril says: "The new organic regulation is completely at odds with the EU's self-proclaimed commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals of ending poverty and promoting sustainable production and consumption. It risks making organic certification too costly and complicated for small-scale farmers, shutting them out of European markets and the sales they need to feed their families. Fairtrade urgently calls on Commissioner Wojciechowski to abandon these changes and instead find solutions which work for the millions of people who depend on small-scale organic farming for their livelihoods."

While Fairtrade recognizes the challenges of certifying large groups, the way forward must be to develop stronger assurance systems that can be adapted to different groups sizes, rather than small-scale farmers having to suffer due to the current capabilities of organic assurance bodies.

Together with the international organic movement, Fairtrade and its member organizations are seeking urgent discussions with the Agriculture Ministries of EU Member States to find workable solutions for small-scale farmers and their families.

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