



Press Release
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The control system for organic products has improved, but more can be done, say EU Auditors

The control system for organic products in the EU has improved in recent years, but challenges remain, according to a new report by the European Court of Auditors. Further action is needed on remaining weaknesses in the Member States and on the supervision of imports as well as on product traceability, say the auditors.

The prices consumers pay for products carrying the EU organic label are sometimes significantly higher than for conventional products. The vast majority of organic products consumed in the EU are produced in its territory.

There are no scientific tests for determining whether a product is organic. Therefore, a robust control system that covers the whole supply chain, from producers to food manufacturers, importers and distributors is essential to provide assurance to consumers that the organic products they buy are truly organic. The European Commission plays a central role in supervising the control system.

The EU organic sector has grown rapidly over recent years. The auditors followed up on their previous report from 2012 and assessed whether the EU's control system for the production, processing, distribution and import of organic products now provides greater assurance to consumers. In addition to following up on the six previously visited Member States, audit visits in the EU were carried out in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic.

The auditors found that the control system has improved and their previous recommendations have been generally acted upon. The Member States audited last time have taken action to improve their control systems and the Commission resumed its own control visits and has now visited most Member States. However, a number of weaknesses remain; the use of enforcement measures for sanctioning non-compliance has not been harmonised across the EU, and Member States' authorities and control bodies were sometimes slow in communicating cases of non-compliance.

“When consumers buy organic products, they rely on the fact that organic rules have been applied at every stage of the supply chain, whether they are produced in the EU or imported,”
said Nikolaos Milionis, the Member of the European Court of Auditors responsible for the

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report. The full report is available at www.eca.europa.eu.

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report. *“The Commission should work with the Member States to remedy remaining weaknesses and make the control system as effective as possible - this is crucial to maintaining consumer confidence in the EU organic label.”*

This audit covered the import regimes more extensively. In 2018, the EU imported organic products from over 100 third countries. The auditors found that the Commission has started visiting control bodies in the countries exporting organic products to the EU. They also identified weaknesses in the Member States’ checks on incoming consignments and found that, in some Member States, the control bodies’ checks on importers were still incomplete.

The auditors carried out a traceability exercise for organic products. Despite improvements in recent years, particularly in the EU, they found that many products could not be traced back to the agricultural producer, while it took more than three months for some to be traced back.

The auditors recommend that the Commission:

- address remaining weaknesses in Member State control systems and reporting;
- improve supervision over imports, including through better cooperation with the accreditation bodies and competent authorities of other significant importing markets;
- carry out more complete traceability checks for organic products.

Notes to Editors

Special report 4/2019 “The control system for organic products has improved, but some challenges remain” is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages.

This report is a follow-up audit on the ECA Special Report No 9/2012: Audit of the control system governing the production, processing, distribution and imports of organic products, in which the auditors carried out visits to the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, France and Ireland.

The ECA presents its special reports to the European Parliament and Council of the EU, as well as to other interested parties such as national parliaments, industry stakeholders and representatives of civil society. The vast majority of the recommendations the auditors make in their reports are put into practice. This high level of take-up underlines the benefit of the ECA’s work to EU citizens.