



Country Report for Estonia

Work Package: WP01 - Regulation & policy framework regarding production, use, and transparency of organic seed

Dissemination level: Public

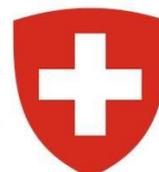
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About the report

This report has been produced in the framework of the Horizon 2020-funded project LIVESEED.¹ The main aim of LIVESEED is to boost the production and use of organic seeds and plant breeding for organic agriculture across Europe. It is co-ordinated by IFOAM EU, and its scientific coordinator is FiBL-CH.

Work Package 01 of LIVESEED explores EU Member States in terms of their implementation and best practices connected to the EU Organic Regulations, in the contexts of national regulatory and policy frameworks, specifically regarding the production, use, and transparency of organic seed.

As part of this Work Package, Bionext, FiBL-DE and IFOAM EU visited selected countries during 2017-2018, where the organic seed production is low, to understand their bottlenecks and possibilities for improvements regarding the production and the use of organic seeds at the national level. During the visits, several stakeholder groups were interviewed (competent authorities, seed database managers, seed companies, research institutions, organic farmers, seed associations, organic certifiers, etc) in each country.

The main outcomes of the visits were summarized in country reports presenting the status quo for that given Member State. The reports' findings then were disseminated among a wide range of national stakeholders in 2019 and discussed during workshops to define viable next steps to improve the status quo in each country. The Workshop for the Baltic States took place on 31st January 2019, in Riga, Latvia, and was co-organised by a LIVESEED partner, the Latvian Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics (AREI).

This country report is recommended for national policymakers, and all stakeholders involved in the production and use of organic seed: national authorities, farmers, certifiers, producers, retailers, plant breeders, seed authorities, and the general public.

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¹ <http://liveseed.eu>



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Implementation of the regulation on organic seed in Estonia

Findings from the national visit to Estonia September 6-7 2017

1. General information on Estonian organic farming

There are 1,753 organic farmers in Estonia covering 18,9 % (=181,000 hectare) of the agricultural land area. From this area 52,4 % is permanent grassland, 46,5% is covered with arable crops and 1,1% are permanent crops. Source: IFOAM EU 2016.

2. Production and use of organic seed

There are about 90 specialized farmers that produce seeds in Estonia and around 20 of them produce organic seeds from arable, forage and vegetable crops. The Estonian Crop Research Institute (ETKI) delivers basic seed to organic farmers on a contractual basis. The farmers multiply the seed, ETKI buys it back from them and sells the seed. This can be done directly or through the organic seed database.

Around 45 farmers and 10 seed trading companies are members of the Estonian Seed Association. Some of the trading companies also sell organic seed.

In 2016, the Estonian Crop Research Institute conducted a study about the situation concerning the Estonian organic seed production. They concluded that between 1,5 and 26% of the seed demand from organic cereal producers was covered by organic certified seed in 2015. The highest demand was for oats (2181 t) and the lowest for winter wheat (370 t). There is also a lot of farm saved seed used in Estonia. Organic farmers may re-use their own seed, and this is accepted as organic seed by the law.

3. Implementation of the EU regulation: the database and derogation policy

The Agricultural Board from the Ministry of Rural Affairs is responsible for the management of the organic seed database and for the authorisation of derogations. To enter seed in the database you must be recognized by the Agricultural Board as a producer and supplier of certified organic seed and pay an entrance fee of 40 EUR to cover administrative costs.

In 2017 there were 15 suppliers of certified organic seed listed in the database: leguminous and grasses (5 suppliers), cereals (10 suppliers), oilseeds (1 supplier), pulses and vegetables (3 suppliers.) Not all organic seeds are put on the database, some of them are sold directly to farmers.

There is one list in the database that contains all the information about the varieties for which organic seed is available or was available but has been sold out. Farmers must explain in writing to the Agricultural Board why they need a derogation. The application (online or paper) must contain information about the species, variety, amount and the time period, and the time when the seed will be used. The applicant has to provide the reasons as well why the seed available in the database is not suitable and why the use of non-organic seed is necessary (e.g. organic form of the desired variety is not available). The authorisation will be granted for one season.

If all the varieties of a species are sold out, the general authorisation applies, which means that organic producers can buy and use certified non-organic seed, which is not treated with plant protection



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products. However, organic producers are still obliged to ask for derogation (special permission) for this.

If a crop is not mentioned in the database at all, a farmer may assume that the general authorization applies, and he does not have to ask for derogation. Therefore, for crops for which there is no seed available at all, for example for many vegetables, there are no data available about the amount of conventional seed used or the varieties requested. Organic farmers have to apply for derogation before a certain date. The first of March and the first of September are the deadlines for asking for a derogation.

4. Policy measures to increase production and use of organic seed

The government is subsidizing the use of **certified organic seeds** from cereals and potatoes. Farmers get a 20% higher support (under the Rural Development Program – M11 for organic support) for the size of the area they use organic seeds or seed potatoes on. This is written in the national interpretation of the organic regulation. In the past, the production of organic seed was promoted as well but the seed quality was not always sufficient, so this subsidy has been stopped.

5. Breeding research and field trials

The Estonian Crop Research institute is breeding varieties (for vegetables and cereals) that are also suitable for organic farming, for instance, varieties with a good disease resistance. There is not a specific organic breeding program, but they do organize organic field trials, also on organic farms.

6. Constraints and opportunities

The use of uncertified seed is a problem. Sometimes seeds that are sold to farmers as animal feed are used for sowing. At the same time there is not enough certified organic seed available on the Estonian market to cover the demand.

There is a lack of seed handling and cleaning equipment. Furthermore, some farmers do not trust the quality of organic seeds. They question whether the seed is healthy and vital enough to produce competitive yield.

The production of certified organic seed potatoes is very complicated. Some Estonian farms have tried to produce organic seed potatoes, but they had problems with the marketing. In general, organic seed producers say that the sales are too uncertain.

An opportunity is that ETKI can produce more organic seed. They just need more farmers that want to multiply it. For instance, there is a very popular carrot variety (*Jogeva nantes*) which could be organically propagated.

7. Recommendations from the stakeholders

- Seed companies need to produce more according to the market demand for organic seed. Now they do not always have the varieties that Estonian organic farmers need.
- Not all farmers are aware of the fact, that the use of organic seed is subsidized, this should be communicated more widely.
- The seed database should be made more interactive and updated more regularly.



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- The production of organic seed should be subsidized under the condition that the quality is good, and the seed passes the certification tests.
- The government should facilitate the establishment of seed cleaning centres.
- Further research is needed on conventional seeds to find out whether the pesticide residues will transfer to the crop. If this is the case this would be an incentive for farmers to use organic seeds.

8. More information

The organic seed database: www.pma.agri.ee/index.php?id=104&sub=128&sub2=411.

National legislation on organic farming: www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/125042017006

The Estonian Research Institute: www.etki.ee

Estonian Organic Farming Foundation (EOFF) www.maheklubi.ee



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