



## Country Report for Latvia

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

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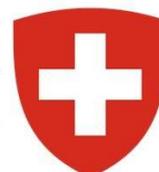
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## About the report

This report has been produced in the framework of the Horizon 2020-funded project LIVESEED.<sup>1</sup> 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 31<sup>st</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> <http://liveseed.eu>



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## Implementation of the regulation on organic seed in Latvia

### Findings from the national visit to Latvia, September 8-9 2017

#### 1. General information

There are 4,145 organic farmers in Latvia covering 14,3 % (= 259,000 hectare) of the agricultural land area. From this area 45,9 % is permanent grassland, 53,3% is covered with arable crops (mainly cereals and fodder crops) and 0,7% are permanent crops like berry bushes. Source: IFOAM EU 2016.

#### 2. Production and use of organic seed

In total, there are around 190 registered seed producers in Latvia. Twenty-six of them are organic seed producers, including specialized farmers and research institutes.

The Latvian Seed Producers Association has 47 members all producing certified seed. Most of them are farmers, 8 members are trading companies and 4 members are organic producers. Latvia has no national seed companies.

A lot of farm saved seed is used in Latvia, especially from cereals. Organic farmers may re-use their own seed, and this is accepted as organic seed by the law.

Although the exchange and sale of farm saved seed is forbidden, there is still a lot of uncertified seed on the market. Organic farmers are among the main buyers of certified seed (organic and conventional) because they must account for their seed use to their organic certifier.

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

The State Plant Protection Service is responsible for the organic seed database management and the authorisation of derogations. In 2017, 13 seed suppliers were listed in the organic seed database.

The quantity of seed that is available per variety is specified. There is a separate list for vegetative propagating material, for instance from blackberries. Foreign seed companies cannot enter their offer on the Latvian database. This is because this seed is much more expensive than nationally produced seed. The government does not want to oblige the farmers to buy more expensive seed. Besides that, this seed might not be suitable for the Latvian growing conditions.

The application for a derogation must be submitted before a certain date, depending on the crop. If a farmer requests derogation for a variety that is not in the database, or not available in sufficient quantities, they receive the derogation. Farmers pay 7 EUR for each derogation to cover administrative costs. General derogation applies for crops for which there is no seed production in Latvia: conventional nor organic.

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

There is an expert group on organic seed, which was established by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2006. The expert group meets 1 to 3 times a year and discusses all the issues that are relevant to organic seed production. The group members are: one expert per crop type (i.e. potato, grain, fodder crops, vegetables), members of the control bodies and experts on seed legislation.



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The president of the Organic Farmers Association is also invited as an observer. The expert group functions as an advisory body. They develop amendments to the existing legislation, give advice about the derogations and contribute to solving the upcoming issues.

The Ministry offers mandatory – 180 hours – training to organic farmers before receiving any subsidies. The training’s curriculum includes seed production. Under the current Rural Development Programme (direct payments) Latvia offers subsidies for those who grow seeds – organic and conventional – with a minimum production per hectare.

## 5. Breeding research and field trials

The Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics (AREI) has an organic breeding program. The breeding for organic farming is carried out for several crops: barley, pea, potato, wheat and oat. AREI is also testing varieties for suitability in organic farming. They organize field trials for potato, several cereals (spring barley, winter rye, winter triticale) and peas.

The Latvian University of Agriculture ensures the assessment of the value for cultivation and use (VCU tests) of conventional and organic plant varieties. Organic varieties in general are tested for the same criteria as conventional varieties but under organic conditions (some crops have specific trait assessment – for instance – lodging for cereals). In the Latvian Catalogue of Plant Varieties there is set information regarding variety suitability for organic farming.

## 6. Constraints and obstacles

The main obstacle for organic farmers to use certified organic seed is the higher price of these seeds. Before Latvia entered the EU, farmers were subsidised to use certified seeds, but now this is no longer the case. Farmers also have to pay for the transport of the organic seeds if they are available in another part of the country.

Although forbidden by law, it is very easy, and cheap, for farmers to buy uncertified seeds (officially “grains with germination ability”) directly from other farmers. Farmers prefer to buy seeds from someone they know.

Conventional seed producers are not interested to convert to organic seed production, because they are already in a profitable business. It is more difficult to grow seeds under organic conditions and on top of that there is a need for investments to develop suitable varieties.

In Latvia an organic seed producer is often not competitive on the market. It is difficult for them to get a good price and they have problems with different diseases and weeds. Sometimes the organic seeds are only certified for organic production in Latvia and then exported (for instance to Denmark) for cleaning and seed (quality) certification. After that the seeds are sold by companies like DLF.

It is easy for organic farmers to get a derogation so there is no secure market for organic seed producers. Farmers can choose different varieties than the ones that are in the database and they also get a derogation if the organic seed is not available in the right quantity.

## 7. Recommendations from the stakeholders

- The price is the main obstacle for not using organic certified seeds; so, the use of organic seed should be subsidised.



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- There is a need for information about the advantages of the use of organic seeds so the demand for organic seed will increase.
- For organic seed producers, good cleaning machines are essential to meet the quality requirements (get rid of the weed seeds), they need a “seed cleaning factory.”
- Compulsory policy measures are needed; it is too easy to get a derogation.
- The removal of the information on the exact availability (kgs) per variety from the database may make farmers more proactive.

## 8. More information

The Latvian organic seed database:

<http://www.vaad.gov.lv/sakums/registri/biologiska-lauksaimnieciba.aspx>

National legislation on organic farming:

<http://www.videskvalitate.lv/> <https://www.stc.lv/biologiskas-lauksaimniecibas-sertif>

The Latvian Seed Producers Association: [www.seklaudzetaj.lv](http://www.seklaudzetaj.lv)

Institute of Agricultural Resources and Economics: [www.arei.lv](http://www.arei.lv)

Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture: [www.lbla.lv](http://www.lbla.lv)



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