



## Country Report for Bulgaria

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

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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) 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 Bulgaria took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019 in Sofia and was co-organised by the LIVESEED partner BIOSELENA.

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 Bulgaria

### Findings from the national visit to Bulgaria, 7-10<sup>th</sup> February 2018

#### 1. General information

In 2017 there were 6,471 organic farmers in Bulgaria covering 2,9 % (137,000 ha) of the agricultural land area. From this area 29.2 % is permanent grassland, 48.5 is covered with arable crops and 22.3 % are permanent crops (source: IFOAM EU).

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

There are a few Bulgarian seed companies that produce organic seed or organic vegetative propagating material, for instance from lavender and soft fruit (berries). Also, several international seed (trading) companies, offering both conventional and organic seed, are active in the Bulgarian market. In 2018 eleven, mainly Bulgarian, seed suppliers were offering their seed and vegetative propagating material on the organic seed database.

Public breeding and research institutes play an important role in the production of pre-basic and basic seed from the main agricultural crops. Many (organic) farmers, are registered as seed producers, especially for cereals. They buy (pre) basic seed and multiply the seeds themselves.

It is estimated that in cereal production 95% of the seed used is farm saved seed. Farm saved seed is accepted as organic seed. This means organic farmers can use it without derogation. The control body asks for a declaration stating that the farmer has produced and used his own seeds. Farmers that are in conversion to organic, need a derogation if they want to use their own farm saved seed.

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

The department for organic production from the Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry is responsible for the management of the database and for the derogation policy. The technical management of the database is done by an external IT company that maintains the website and updates the database based on input from the Ministry.

Until 2014, Bulgaria worked with the database called OrganicXseeds<sup>2</sup> that is hosted by FiBL. Since 2015 they have used a different database system. This database is updated twice a year. Before the update the Ministry sends all the seed suppliers on the database a letter to check if they still have organic seed available. If they do not react, their offer on the database will be marked as "exhausted". If they are sold out the seed suppliers can also send an e-mail to the Ministry themselves and their offer will be removed directly from the database.

To offer seed on the database you must prove you are an authorised seed producer or supplier and your seed must be certified as organic. Seed suppliers must submit all documents to the Ministry which will respond within a month. Foreign companies (traders or producers) need to present an additional certificate from the Seed Control Agency. Also, they must submit the contract between the original seed producer and their certifying body. When offering seed on the database, seed suppliers

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.organicxseeds.com/international/countryselect>



must include information about the quantity and delivery period of the organic seed or vegetative propagating material and about the region where it can be delivered.

A farmer can ask for a derogation if the variety he wants to use is not available on the database. The derogations are granted by one of the certification bodies according to a standardized procedure, checked by the Ministry.

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

The Ministry stimulates through national policies the production of organic varieties at breeding and research institutes.

#### 5. Obstacles and opportunities

Many farmers produce organic just to receive more European subsidies. They do not always sell their products on the organic market and they are not interested in organic seeds. Farmers can also easily circumvent the use of organic seed. They just ask for a variety for which no organic seed is available on the database. At the same time, there is clearly not enough organic seed available on the market yet. Farmers that actively look for organic seed find the choice of varieties limited and not always meeting their demand.

The organic seed database is not functioning optimally. Information is missing, it is not updated regularly, and many farmers do not know where to find it. Foreign seed companies find it very difficult to get their seed offered on the database. Therefore, they sell their organic seeds directly to farmers.

The research institutes that sell organic (basic) seeds feel they cannot compete with the foreign seed companies. The companies are better traders and can offer the farmers extras like free samples, advice and deferral. Another obstacle is, that many farmers only buy (basic) seed once and then exchange or sell the seeds without paying royalties to the seed producers.

For producers of organic vegetative material, it is a problem that farmers order too late. As a consequence, the organic plants are now often sold on the conventional market.

An opportunity is the fact that some farmers are consciously using organic seed because they have a good quality and the right disease resistances. They are in close contact with the organic seed suppliers and try to solve their cultivation problems together.

#### 6. Recommendations from the stakeholders

- Create incentives for seed producers and farmers to make organic seed more attractive.
- Make the procedure to register organic seeds on the database clearer and simpler. For some companies, it is not clear how to get their seed offered on the database.
- Many farmers don't know about the database and where to get organic seeds, this information should be widely spread.
- Make a specific ordering period obligatory for vegetative planting material. For instance, plants from lavender must be ordered between November and February and from roses between November and June.
- Make sure all certifiers ask for the same information when farmers apply for a derogation.



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- Control bodies must check if the farmers are really growing the variety that they asked a derogation for.
- Make it more difficult to get a derogation and introduce a non-derogation list.
- Install an expert group on organic seed that can advise the government.
- Subsidize farmers that use organic seed.
- All seed companies should test their varieties both under organic and conventional conditions.
- Invest more in organic breeding so farmers have more choices of suitable organic varieties.
- The seed authority must check if farmers who want to register as seed producers have a contract with the owner of the seeds they are going to sell.

## 7. More information

Bulgarian seed database:

[https://www.mzh.government.bg/media/filer\\_public/2019/06/28/poseven\\_autosaved.xlsx](https://www.mzh.government.bg/media/filer_public/2019/06/28/poseven_autosaved.xlsx)

National legislation for organic farming:

<https://lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2137187013>

Register of seed producers:

<https://iasas.government.bg/bg/register.html>



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