



Country Report for Greece

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.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 Greece took place on 4th October 2019 in Athens and was co-organised by the LIVESEED partner AEGILOPS.

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 Greece

Findings from the national visit to Greece, 4-6th February 2018

1. General information

In 2017, there were 20,197 organic farmers in Greece covering 5% (410,000 ha) of the agricultural land area. From this area 48.9 % is permanent grassland, 36.6 % is covered with arable crops and 14.5 % are permanent crops (source: IFOAM EU).

2. Production and use of organic seed

There are two seed associations in Greece; one for the seed trading companies that controls around 70% of the seed market and one for the Greek conventional seed companies controlling 30% of the market. There are no Greek seed companies producing organic seed. The organic seeds on the market are imported, mainly vegetable seeds from Italy, and only available in small quantities.

Most organic seed in Greece is farm saved seed. Before 2017, around 70% of the derogations were for farm saved seeds. Since 2017 farmers can use farm saved seeds without derogation for all varieties that are not protected by breeder's rights.

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

The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for the management of the national organic seed database. The database is updated on specific dates related to the sowing period of crops. Currently the database is empty. To enter their seed on the database a (national or foreign) seed supplier needs to be certified as an organic operator and seed producer in Greece. They must offer their supply at a regional level. The suppliers must pay a 10-euro fee per variety because in the past one supplier uploaded a lot of varieties which were only available in small amounts. These quantities were not enough for professional farmers.

Farmers can apply for a derogation at one of the 52 regional authorities. They must enter an application in an electronic platform. If a farmer asks for a derogation and there is organic seed from this crop available on the database, the system blocks the derogation. Then the farmer must contact the Ministry and provide arguments why he needs this specific variety and why the one available is not suitable. Farmers must ask for a derogation for every variety regardless the crop. There are no general derogations. Farmers only get a derogation for the area they grow. The regional authorities check the amount of seed requested for derogation and the area for cultivation.

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

There are currently no policy measures to increase production and use of organic seed.

5. Breeding research and field trials

The Institute of Plant Breeding and Plant Genetic Resources (IPBGR) is connected to the Greek gene bank and has several breeding programs. They breed cereals (wheat, barley, oats and rye) for low-input systems. These varieties are suitable for organic farming. IPBGR sells the basic seed from their



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own varieties to conventional Greek seed companies which then propagate them and sell these varieties to farmers - including organic farmers who buy under derogation as conventional seed.

The gene bank is focussing on landraces and local varieties of all crops cultivated in Greek agriculture. In total the collection contains about 60,000 accessions including more than 250 grape cultivars, aromatic and medicinal plants, trees (apples, pears, nuts, olive trees, figs), vegetables, cereals, pulses and legumes.

There is an ongoing collaboration between IPBGR, Aristotle University (Plant breeding section) and Aegilops for evaluation and breeding of wheat (hard, soft, hulled) varieties under organic conditions. The cereal field at the IPBGR, is not certified organic but managed under organic conditions for 10 years. The University of Thessaloniki is doing organic breeding research. They work on cereals, legumes, vegetables and aromatic crops.

6. Obstacles and opportunities

The main problem is that many organic farmers in Greece only grow organic for the European subsidies. They sell their organic products on the conventional market and are not interested in organic seed. In addition, some farmers are subsistence farmers who certify for instance their old orchards to get subsidies.

Another obstacle is the fact that farmers do not see the difference between conventional and organic seed. They do not see the advantage of using certified organic seeds. The price of the seeds is higher, and the final organic product is the same.

There is a lack of trust between farmers and the gene bank because farmers are not sure that they receive the seed they asked for.

According to some researchers the quality of organic seeds might also be an issue; in some tests (germination, disease, etc.) organic seeds were performing worse than conventional seeds.

Greek seed producers that used to produce organic seeds stopped because they found no market for their seeds. At the same time farmers that do want to use organic seeds have difficulties to find them because the seed database is empty.

It takes a lot of administration for farmers to receive a derogation to use conventional seeds even when there are no organic seeds available at all.

One opportunity is the fact that, due to the derogation policy, there is a good overview of the potential demand for organic seed for each crop. Since derogations are only granted for the area of cultivation the total amount of derogations gives a clear indication of the amount of organic seed that is missing. Another opportunity is that the IPBGR is willing to invest in organic breeding if there is a clear demand from organic farmers and if it will be possible to register organic varieties.

7. Recommendations from the stakeholders

- Remove the quantity of organic seed per variety from the database;
- Make it easier for seed suppliers to put their seed offer on the organic seed database;
- Improve the database so it is interesting for farmers to use it;
- Develop a definition for organic bred varieties, so they can be registered;
- Provide training for farmers to become a registered organic seed producer;



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- Create a market for organic seed. Once there is some seed on the database Greek companies might think: "There is a market for organic seed, we need to invest in this otherwise the money goes somewhere else."
- Invest in local seed production.
- Subsidise the use of organic seed for a limited period of time.
- Reduce the price difference between conventional and organic seed. A price difference of 10% is acceptable.
- Inform farmers about the advantages of organic seed.
- Invest in organic breeding and organic field trials

8. More information

Greek seed database:

www.minagric.gr/biologiki/biologikh.aspx

National legislation for organic farming:

<http://www.minagric.gr/index.php/el/for-farmer-2/biologikgeorgiaktinotrofia>



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