



## Policy Brief

# A national roadmap towards 100% organic seed

## Main findings

- Based on surveys and on extensive stakeholder consultation process over four years in 21 European countries, the current increase in production and use of organic seed in Europe seems too slow to reach the goal of 100% organic seed in 2036.
- Seed companies need reliable data on the actual demand for organic seed and clear deadlines for derogations for the different crops to invest in scaling up organic seed production.
- Increased availability of organic seed from suitable and locally adapted varieties is needed to motivate farmers to use more organic seed.
- At the national level, a roadmap with intermediate goals should be developed to phase-out derogations by 2036.
- LIVESEED developed a decision tree for national seed expert groups to facilitate making a roadmap on a crop level.

## Key policy recommendations

- LIVESEED developed a range of recommendations for policymakers on how to increase the availability and use of organic seed considerably, in order to comply with the new Organic Regulations' which aims at phasing out the use of non-organic seed in organic farming by 2036 (Article 12, Regulation (EU) 2018/848).
- Member States' national organic action plans should include measures to improve, the national seed databases, establish or strengthen existing organic seed expert groups and stimulate organic plant breeding and cultivar testing.
- Seed expert groups are recommended to develop a national roadmap towards 100% organic seed using the LIVESEED's flowchart outlining the actions and intermediate goals to reach eventually 100% organic seed use for a specific crop.

## Context

Seeds are the foundation of farming. Therefore, organic production should start with organic seed. According to IFOAM “The choice of high-quality organic seed and plant propagation material of suitable varieties is an important key to successful organic farming, allowing for improved yield and product quality, for crop resilience, considerate use of non-renewable resources and increased genetic and species diversity” (IFOAM Organics International, 2011).

Since the introduction of Regulation EC No 2092/91, **the use of organic seed has become mandatory in the EU**, whenever available. Since then, the term “available” has been clarified, the establishment of **national organic seed databases to list all offered organic seed and seed potatoes has become mandatory for Member States**, as well as the reasons for authorizing derogations for the use of non-organic seed are defined. **The new organic Regulation EC No 2018/848**, effective from January 1, 2022, prescribes the phasing-out of these derogations by 2036.

To support this aim, the use of a national Annex of (sub)crops for which no derogation is possible, will become mandatory. Several Member States have already developed such a non-derogation list since 2004 (Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, Sweden, and Luxembourg).

Organic production in the EU is expected to grow rapidly in light of the new **EU Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy**, aiming to **increase the share of agricultural land under organic farming from the current 8.1% at the EU-level to 25% by 2030**.

These targets require Member States to deal with the question of availability of organic seed. **National seed expert groups and organic advisory committees need to start planning the phasing-out of derogations**, so seed producers know when to scale up their organic seed production.

This brief is based on surveys and an extensive stakeholder consultation process over four years in 21 European countries. The project partners explored the current subsidy systems, national derogation rules and national annexes, farmers’ training and research efforts for organic seed production and plant breeding at the national level. They looked into issues around access to facilities/infrastructure for organic seed producers, organic breeding and variety testing systems, and the role of traditional varieties and farm-saved seeds for own use. They analysed the functionality of the current national organic seed databases and the derogation reports of the Member States, as well as issues connected to organic seed expert groups in the EU. Based on the findings from these activities, the project developed a range of recommendations for policymakers on how to increase the availability and use of organic seed considerably by 2036 (see resources).

## Key results

In the framework of the LIVESEED project, activities were conducted to:

- a) identify and describe the political obstacles and bottlenecks that hamper the implementation of the current EU organic regulation regarding organic seed and vegetative propagating material;
- b) collect best practices and policy measures across Europe supporting the increase in the production and use of organic seed;
- c) foster stakeholder discussions and define necessary steps towards increased organic seed availability at the national level;
- d) support Member States in their efforts to improve their national organic seed database;
- e) develop a European scale Router Database connecting national databases to increase access to organic seed for farmers in Europe.

One of the key recommendations from LIVESEED is the establishment or the extension of organic seed expert groups in the Member States.

### The role of organic seed expert groups

National organic seed expert groups are cornerstones for Member States in successfully respond to the challenges of the organic seed sector. Such expert groups are national groups of all relevant stakeholders involved in the organic seed supply chain. They can:

- advise the national competent authority on implementing the regulation on organic seed in the country;
- discuss how to increase production and use of organic seed;
- make recommendations on the classification of the crops in the different derogation categories (if already set-up in the Member State) based on seed availability in the national database, expert knowledge and internal discussions in the group, and make recommendations on which crops can be placed on the national non-derogation list;
- discuss potential equivalent varieties that could replace varieties for which organic seed is lacking;
- initiate demonstration fields to show how the different available varieties perform under organic conditions;
- stimulate public research and breeding programmes for organic varieties.

Although the establishment of an expert group is not mandatory according to the new organic regulation, they are crucial to involve stakeholders in organic seed policy and create support for stricter derogation measures. Such groups already exist in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Latvia, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Italy, and lately, within the context of the LIVESEED project have been set up in Hungary, Romania and Spain. It's important to stress that the recommendations of the Expert Groups should be accepted and implemented by national authorities in an effective manner, to avoid a loss of motivation among stakeholders towards working in these groups.

These groups should be established in all Member States and where needed, could be extended to include more stakeholders (e.g., processors) who often play an important role in deciding which varieties the farmers use. Preferably these groups should be organised around different crop groups (e.g., for vegetables, arable crops and vegetative propagating material).

Ideally the addition of new crops to the national non derogation list is the result from a negotiation between the different stakeholders in the seed expert group; seed suppliers commit to produce more organic seed while farmers agree to use more organic seed.

*“The aim of the system is that you increase the production and use of organic seed, step by step and bottom up. It is very important to involve the stakeholders; it will not work without their involvement and commitment. So, the farmers and the seed producers sit down together every year to discuss what is the offer of organic seed, and what is the need. Then the seed companies say we will produce organic seed from the varieties you need but only if you will use it. Farmers cannot come up with requests for new varieties every year. There needs to be commitment from both sides. Then, when the variety assortment is wide enough, the expert group can advise the ministry to put the crop on the non-derogation list.”*

*Maike Raaijmakers (Bionext)*

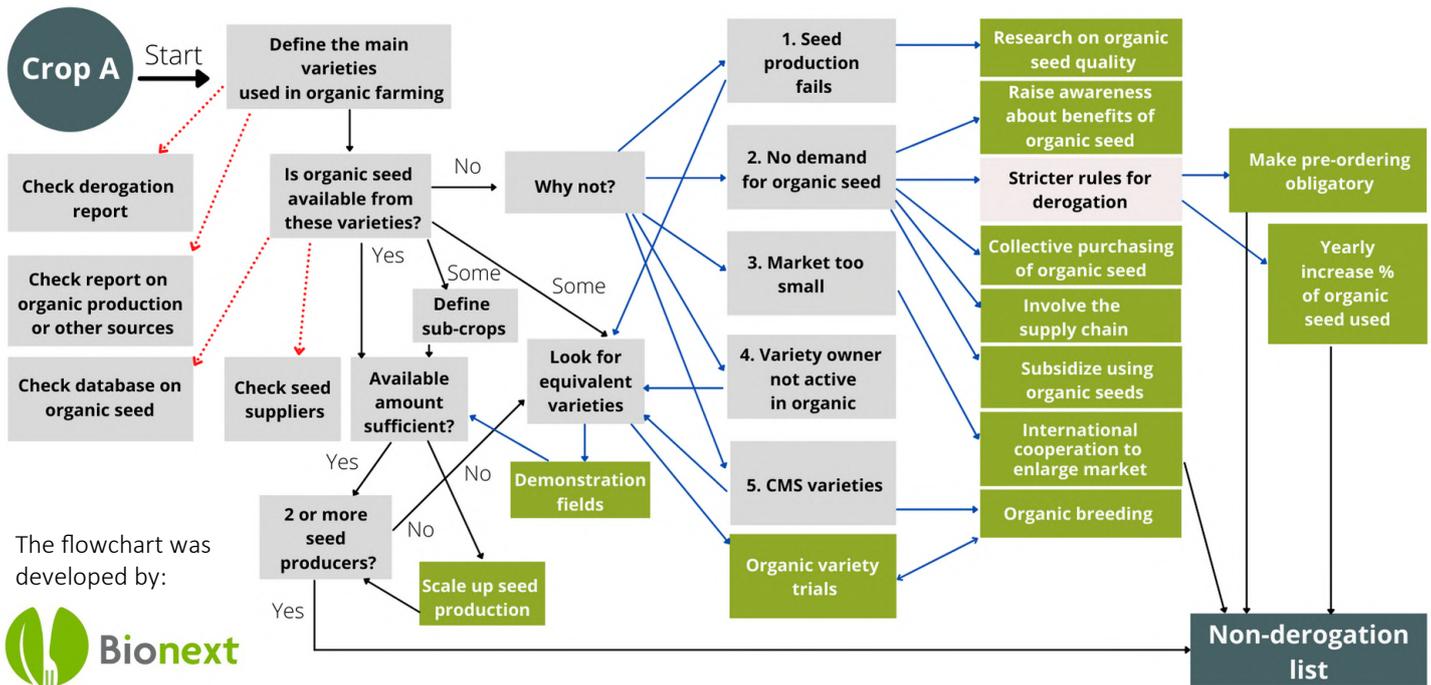
### A national roadmap

Seed companies need reliable data on the actual demand for organic seed in the different EU countries and intermediate deadlines for derogations for the different crops in order to invest in time in scaling up organic seed production. For the competent authorities (advised by seed expert groups) this means setting clear targets and deadlines for derogations.

LIVESEED recommends that seed expert groups jointly develop a national roadmap to achieve 100% organic seed use for the main crops. This roadmap should describe all necessary actions and in between targets.

A flowchart was developed by the Dutch organic sector's branch organisation Bionext, as a tool to help national expert groups decide on actions to include in their roadmap to reach eventually 100% organic seed use (defining the year of non-derogation) for a specific crop (Fig.1 next page).

Instead of focussing on 100% organic seed use for all crops used in organic farming at once, the advice is to start with the most important crops on the national level. This can either be crops with a large organic production area or crops that are typical or unique for the country.



**Figure 1. Flowchart for expert groups to define action points and intermediate goals needed to reach 100% organic seed for a specific crop (action points are coloured green)**

If organic seed from demanded and suitable varieties is already available, the path to a no derogation status would consist of steps of checking if sub-crops need to be defined (for instance for different markets), and whether those all have sufficient availability, and how many seed producers can provide seed so that there is a fair market competition and also stable and enough seed supply.

If organic seed from the main varieties is not available, the group needs to explore the reasons, which may include that seed suppliers who own the main varieties are not active in organic seed production. Again, this can have a variety of reasons, from corporate policy to lack of market demand. It can also be the case that the market for a variety is too small to make organic seed production economically attractive or the organic seed production may fail. Depending on the problem, solutions and actions can be defined, e.g., research investment in seed quality, improving production technology, investing in organic breeding, or international cooperation to enlarge the market.

If organic seed is available from some but not all varieties the farmers ask for, equivalent varieties could be selected by the expert group and introduced to farmers through demonstration fields.

The decision tree allows the expert groups to follow a different route for each crop.

### Preconditions to use the flowchart

The flowchart is based on experiences from expert groups in countries that have already reached the goal of 100% organic seed for some crops and the different steps described have proven to be effective. The flowchart was developed for a scenario where a country at least has:

- one or more multi-stakeholder seed expert groups,
- a functioning real-time updated organic national seed database,
- access to the derogation report,
- seed suppliers that are willing to produce organic seed for the national market,
- organic farmers that are willing to use organic seed from suitable varieties when available,
- a decision framework for a non-derogation list.

In addition, capacity and budget to organize demonstration fields/organic cultivar trials and to fund organic plant breeding and seed quality research are useful. If these prerequisites are not in place (e.g., there is no functioning databases and no transparency on the organic seed supply) other solutions need to be found first. Also, the multiplication rates, challenges and obstacles differ per crop. Therefore, adjustment and extension of the flowchart with other actions might be necessary.

## Policy recommendations

Results from LIVESEED project show that the establishment/extension of national organic seed expert groups and the development of a national roadmap on how to reach 100% organic seed by 2036 can contribute significantly to the objectives of EU-policies on organic agriculture and fosters the implementation of the new EU Organic Regulation with regards to plant reproductive material.

Most urgently, Member States' **national organic action plans** should incorporate the following elements in order to arrive to the development of such roadmaps:

- Improving of the national organic seed databases and connecting them to the EU Router Database in order to increase the transparency of available organic seed offers;
- Establishing or strengthening existing organic seed expert groups, preferably per crop types;
- Facilitating the establishment of national non-derogation lists, (obligatory in the new EU Organic Regulation) and cooperating with other, neighbouring

Member States in putting crops on this list to create a level playing field;

- Establishing or extending organic demonstration field networks, cultivar trials and breeding programs.

Once **organic seed expert groups** are functioning, such groups should have **the mandate** to:

- Meet on a regular basis and involve all stakeholders relevant for the value chain;
- Access derogation reports and statistics on organic seed production and use;
- Follow and modify the flowchart for their own situation and the given crop;
- Define equivalent varieties for those not available to cover organic production;
- Advise the competent authority on which crops or sub-crops should be placed on the national non derogation list;
- Give other policy recommendations to national authorities, for instance about variety trials or research.

### Resources and further reading:

[Report on Political Obstacles and Bottlenecks on the Implementation of the Rules for Organic Seed in the Organic Regulation](#)

[National progress reports on organic seed production and use](#)

[Booklet: How to implement the organic regulation to increase production & use of organic seed](#)

[European progress report on the production and use of organic seed](#)

[EU Router Database for Organic Seed, Guides and training for the use of the EU Router Database](#)

[IFOAM Position paper on the use of organic seed and plant propagation material in Organic Agriculture - Organics International, 2011](#)

[EC No 2018/848](#)

**Willer, Helga**, Jan Trávníček, Claudia Meier and Bernhard Schlatter (Eds.) (2021): The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerging Trends 2021. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL, Frick, and IFOAM – Organics International, Bonn (v20210301)

### About this policy brief

This brief is part of a series aiming to inform policy-makers on the key results of the LIVESEED project, and provide recommendations based on research results.

The flowchart and the recommendations were developed as part of the work on [Regulation & policy framework regarding production, use, and transparency of organic seed](#) (WP1).

The series of LIVESEED Policy Briefs can be found at [Policy Briefs | Liveseed](#).

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