IFOAM Organics Europe welcomes the European Parliament own-initiative report on increasing access to biocontrol, while reminding the importance of preventive practices

Tuesday 25 November, 2025

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IFOAM Organics Europe welcomes the adoption of the European Parliament's own-initiative report on biocontrol, which calls for a faster registration and uptake of biocontrol.

"IFOAM Organics Europe congratulates MEPs for their efforts made through the compromise amendments to keep the report and the requested measures targeted to biocontrol only. Increasing access to biocontrol must never be a pretext to weaken rules for synthetic pesticides, which remain a major cause of health issues, biodiversity loss, and contamination of soil and water", stresses Eduardo Cuoco, Director of IFOAM Organics Europe.

The organic movement is highly concerned about the leak of the European Commission's omnibus proposal, which reveals plans to amend Regulation (EC) 1107/2009 on the placing of Plant Protection Product (PPP) to the market to grant unlimited approvals for all types of PPPs, removing Member States' obligation to consider the latest independent science and doubling grace periods to keep using hazardous pesticides. "Maintaining synthetic pesticides on the market indefinitely would be in complete contradiction with the ambition to increase the use of biocontrol and would be a serious step backward for public health and the environment. We command the European Commission's sense of responsibility for following MEPs in keeping the discussion focused on biocontrol only," concluded Cuoco.

When it comes to biocontrol, the organic sector welcomes the clear demands from MEPs, notably the introduction of an EU-wide definition, adapted risk assessment for biocontrol products, a stronger mutual recognition procedure, facilitated renewal process, provisional authorisations, support to small and medium-sized enterprises applying during the application preparation process, and increased capacity for EFSA and national competent authorities.

"The call for addressing the current regulatory barriers hampering the availability and access for biocontrol is welcome," highlights Jan Plagge, President of IFOAM Organics Europe. He continues, "biocontrol products are an important tool in the holistic strategies used by organic farmers to manage pests and diseases. Yet, their availability is limited because the risk assessment and approval procedure had been made for synthetic pesticides, which are fundamentally different from biocontrol".

Nonetheless, while highlighting that biocontrol can help reduce dependency on synthetic pesticides, the report continues to frame biocontrol as a complement to synthetic pesticides in a "wider toolbox", noting that biocontrol cannot always substitute synthetic pesticides. "It is true that simply substituting one input for another is not the solution. This is why we need broader measures to drive real changes in agricultural practices. The EU must take as an example the complementary plant health strategies developed by organic farmers - based primarily on preventive agronomic practices such as selecting resilient varieties, implementing crop rotations, and promoting functional biodiversity - which successfully manage plant health while limiting the use of external inputs", highlighted Jan Plagge. "Biocontrol is not a silver bullet. It only works well in well-managed ecosystems and as part of combination strategies," he concluded.

Biocontrol refers to nature-derived organisms and substances - such as essential oils, (micro)organisms, or semiochemicals - used to manage plant health. In organic systems, biocontrol constitutes a tool among others to address pests and diseases. Most of the time, preventive and agronomic measures like crop rotation, the choice of variety, or the use of natural enemies are sufficient. In fact, only 10% of organic agricultural land requires the use of natural substances in addition to preventive agronomic measures, with some crops requiring more than others, like fruits and grapes.

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