Description of the German organic certification system (2009):

Origin of the German certification system

In Germany, organic farming and corresponding certification was developed by the organic movement. Historically, the sector development was supported by different private associations with individual standards and according inspections (Lampkin et al. 1999). Private standards and their certification still play an important role in the German organic sector. More than half of the organic farm operations are member of one of the nine private associations (each with its own standard) active in Germany. These farmers manage more than two thirds of organically farmed land (see also below: Logos applied).

Until the implementation of Reg. (EC) No 2092/91, there existed no legal definition of organic food and farming in Germany. Following this regulation’s implementation, the certification system changed. Since then, operators marketing organic food have to undergo the control by an authorised control body which are privately organised entities. Public institutions (federal ministry and regional authorities) are responsible for the governance of the organic control system.

Since January 2009, Reg. (EC) No 834/2007 replaced the former European regulation. According to the European Union’s current communication list, 23 private control bodies are in charge of organic certification in Germany. The control system made operational in Germany is a “System of approved private inspection bodies” (European Union 2009).

The national implementation

The national implementation of the European regulation on organic food and farming is regulated by the Organic Farming Act (Öko-Landbau-Gesetz, lastly adapted on December 7th 2008 to the new EC legislation, http://bundesrecht.juris.de/_lg_2009/). This act assigns specific executive functions regarding the organic control system in Germany.

The Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (BLE) (Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food) has the function to approve control bodies centrally for Germany and also to withdraw the approval according to Article 27 of Reg. (EC) No 834/2007. Furthermore, the BLE is responsible for the approval of imports, the approval of non-organic ingredients and the data transfer on the control system on behalf of the Bundesministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz (BMELV, Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection).

The organic control system is organized federally and governed by the German Länder (federal states). All Länder delegate inspection tasks to the private inspection bodies. Thus, the 15 competent authorities of the Länder (http://www.oekolandbau.de/service/adressen/kontrollbehoerden/) are responsible for the supervision of the system referred to in Article 27 of Reg. (EC) No 834/2007.

The cooperation between the 15 competent authorities of the Länder is performed in the Länderarbeitsgemeinschaft Ökologischer Landbau (LÖK, Working group organic farming of the Länder). Questions of interpretation regarding Reg. (EC) No 834/2007 are discussed during the LÖK meetings in order to attain a harmonized implementation of the European regulation on national level.
The Organic Farming Act covers also the controls of catering establishments such as restaurants and canteens (Bundesministerium für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Verbraucherschutz 2009) that market organic meals.

Finally, this act fixes the fines in case of non-compliance with Reg. (EC) 834/2007. In Germany, violations of the European regulation on organic food and farming can result in a fine of up to 30,000 Euro or lead to a one-year imprisonment (Bundesministerium für Ernährung 2009).

**Certification and controls**

According to Reg. (EC) 834/2007, every operator has to be controlled at least once a year. Within the LÖK, the German Länder specified the general requirements of the EU regulation on additional control visits: At least ten percent of the operators have to be controlled additionally.

Currently, 23 control bodies are approved in Germany (Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung 2009b). These private companies perform the inspections and monitor compliance with the European regulation. This service is paid by the organic operator.

Certification against private standards is performed by most of these control bodies, too. Usually, the annual inspection covers the EU-organic and private certifications during one visit.

The majority of the German control bodies (20 out of the 23 control bodies currently approved) are represented in the Konferenz der Kontrollstellen für den Ökologischen Landbau e.V. (KdK, http://www.oeko-kontrollstellen.de). The farming area controlled by the members of the KdK covers more than 90 % of the German organic farming area. The KdK
participates in hearings (e.g. on draft laws by the national ministry) and the meetings of the LÖK. Hereby, the KdK wants to contribute to a harmonised implementation of organic controls in Germany (KdK 2006).

**Certification subsidies**

In Germany, the Länder are responsible for the implementation of the agri-environmental schemes. Under these schemes, certification subsidies for organic farmers are implemented. Most Länder support organic farming certification with yearly subsidies of up to Euro 530 per farm (Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung 2009a).

**Logos applied**

The most common logo which is also the most known is the German “Biosiegel” (see also [http://www.biosiegel.de/english/homepage/]()). This logo was introduced by the Eco-labelling Act which entered into force in February 2002. This logo may be used voluntarily on every product that complies with Reg. (EC) 834/2007, irrespective of the product’s origin. Using the Biosiegel is costless. Companies have to notify products they label with this logo at a specific information centre. Currently, 3,274 companies use the Biosiegel on 54,199 products.

![Figure 2: The Biosiegel](image)

Some Länder (Baden-Württemberg, Hessen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) and the region Rhön (covering different Länder) use the opportunity of affixing regional indications of origin to the Biosiegel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baden-Württemberg</th>
<th>Hessen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Baden-Württemberg" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Hessen" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mecklenburg-Vorpommern</th>
<th>Rhön</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Mecklenburg-Vorpommern" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Rhön" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Biosiegel with regional indications*
Logos of organic associations

The majority of organic farms in Germany is member in an organic association. The largest associations with respect to their members are Bioland (4,967 members), Naturland (2,005 members) and Demeter (1,341 members). Further associations (each with less than 1,000 members) are Biokreis, Biopark, Ecoland, ECOVIN, Gäa and Verbund Ökohöfe (data from 1.1.2009, Bund Ökologische Lebensmittelwirtschaft e.V. (BÖLW) 2009).

Every association has its own standard on which the labelling is based. Some guidelines of these private standards are stricter than the EU regulation on organic food and farming which is the minimum quality standard for organic food. The private associations, for example, prescribe the total conversion of a farm, whereas the European regulation allows partly conversion.

These are the logos of private organic associations (ordered alphabetically):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biokreis</th>
<th>Demeter</th>
<th>Gäa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bioland</td>
<td>Ecoland</td>
<td>Naturland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biopark</td>
<td>Ecovin</td>
<td>Verbund Ökohöfe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Logos of the nine private organic associations in Germany

The European organic logo can only seldomly be found in Germany. This can be explained by the dominance of the Biosiegel together with the different private logos.

References


