



Organic production according to the EC-Regulation 2092/91 Apicultural Production and Inspection

1. Introduction

Production and labelling of organic products in the European Union is regulated by the "Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2092/91 on organic production of agricultural products and indications referring thereto on agricultural products and foodstuffs", as amended. The regulation covers unprocessed agricultural crop and livestock products and processed foodstuffs but is limited to certain animal species and excludes aquaculture. The regulation defines a minimum standard for production, processing and marketing of organic products. It also describes the inspection system to which every producer, collector, processor or importer of organic products has to submit his undertaking. It prohibits the use of genetically modified organisms (GMO) and their derivatives at any level of production or processing (exception: livestock medication). This pamphlet gives a short overview on the requirements of the regulation for bee and hive products and inspection. Further study of the regulation is required for anyone involved in organic production.

2. Rules of production of bee products (annex I C)

2.1 Conversion period (annex I C2)

To be allowed to label bee products organic, the production method must follow the regulation for at least one year before the first organic harvest. During conversion period wax used in new frames must be taken from organic units.

2.2 Origin of Bees (annex I C3)

Health and performance of the bees should be based on locally well adapted races respectively strains. Particular rearing methods are not stipulated. Imports of colonies shall be avoided in case of risk of spreading of bee pests and diseases. Reproduction is managed by division of own colonies. Increasing the number of colonies by buying is allowed provided that the bees originate from organic apiculture. Non-organic hives may be purchased until 24. August 2002, conversion period of 1 year must be applied. For the renewal of apiaries, per year, up to 10 % of the queen bees and swarms may be introduced from conventional origin, provided the colony is kept on combs or foundations of organic quality.

2.3 Siting of hives and collection areas (annex I C4)

During productive period the siting must have sufficient natural feed sources and access to water. Within a radius of 3 kilometers of the apiary nectar or honeydew sources consist mostly of organically produced crops or spontaneous vegetation or crops which are produced with low environmental impact methods, keeping the risk of contamination on the organic quality of the bee product low. Pollutive or polluted areas must be avoided, e.g. heavy traffic junctions, industry areas, dump sites.

2.4 Feeding / Overwintering (annex I C5)

Winter supplies should consist of honey and pollen of own colony sources left to the bees from harvesting. Artificial feeding, using organic honey only, may be carried out only if survival of the hives is threatened due to extreme climate conditions and only between the last honey harvest and 15 days before the start of the next nectar or honeydew flow period. By way of derogation organic syrup or sugar, or non-organic feed (the latter expiring 24. Aug. 2002) can be allowed by the inspection body. Pollen substitutes are prohibited.

2.5 Diseases, pests, veterinary measures (annex I C6)

Animal health should be based on keeping locally well adapted bee species as well as prophylactic measures to increase resistance against infections and pests, e.g. regular inspection of the colonies, check of varroa infestation (nappy), brood diseases, pests, disinfection of tools and hives, removing old combs, good supply with vital needs. Treatments of hives or combs, if compulsory under national legislation is allowed. Phytotherapy and homeopathy must be preferred to allopathic measures, the latter of which may not be used as preventive measure.

In case of need for treatment with synthetic allopathic products, the colonies must be kept in isolation apiaries. All of their wax must be removed and for the effected hives conversion period applies again. For treatment of varroa the following substances are allowed: Formic acid, lactic acid, oxalic acid, menthol, thymol, eucalyptol, camphor. The fight of wax moths e.g. acetic acid and bacillus thuringiensis preparations are allowed.

2.6 Harvesting

While removing crops from the hive, synthetic repellents are prohibited. Particular care shall be taken to ensure adequate extraction, processing and storage of beekeeping products. All the measures to comply with these requirements must be recorded, all operations must be done while regarding the needs and requirements of the bees. Honey combs containing brood may not be harvested.

2.7 Husbandry management practices (annex I C7)

Several conventional bee-keeping practices, such as cutting the queen's wings, destruction of bees, exterminating bees (drones) are not allowed. The killing of male brood is allowed only for protection against the varroa disease.

2.8 Materials used (annex I C8)

Bee hives must be made mostly from natural material which do not contaminate bee products. For treatment only natural substances such as beeswax, propolis or plant oil are allowed. Beeswax should be from organic production sources if available. For cleaning and disinfection only those materials listed in annex II B2 and II E of the regulation are allowed.

3. Inspection requirements for organic apiculture production (annex III Specific Provisions A. 2)

Every operator who produces or collects organic products has to submit his undertaking to the inspection system (as do processors and importers/exporters of organic products). For producers of bee products the following minimum inspection requirements apply:

3.1 Initial inspection / Description of the unit (annex III General Provisions 3, Specific Provisions A. 2. 1, 2 and 3)

For the first inspection the operator must draw up a full description of the unit and his activities, including all conventional parts related to the organic one. The description includes maps of hives and collection areas / fields together with a list indicating the last application of products not permitted by the regulation, storages, processing sites and packaging facilities. Also the measures to be taken to ensure compliance with the regulation must be described. A declaration containing the above mentioned information and the acceptance to the measures in case of infringement or irregularities (annex III, General Provisions 9) must be signed. If any change occurs regarding the description or of the practical measures, the inspection body needs to be informed in due time. Manuals must be kept for each colony which shows all actions and applications of products including those not permitted by the regulation.

3.2 Separated production unit (annex I C, 1.3)

The apiaries, production and storage locations have to be clearly separated from conventional units. All hives of an area where organic hives are held must be organic.

3.3 Bookkeeping (annex III General Provisions 6, Specific Provisions A. 2. 3)

Written and/or documentary accounts must be kept to trace the origin, nature and quantities of all raw materials purchased such as artificial feed, veterinary treatments and products, bees and colonies. Siting, processing actions and the nature, quantities and consignees of all bee products sold have to also be recorded. Sample records are available from Ecocert.

3.4 Packaging and labelling of organic products (annex III General Provisions 7)

Transported products have to be closed in a manner preventing substitution of the content. Clear identification of the producer, the product and the inspection body must be assured by the label of the product.

3.5 Parallel production (annex III Specific Provisions A. 2. 3)

Where an operator runs organic and conventional production units in the same area all relevant data of the conventional unit (e.g. purchased inputs, cropping schedule) are subject to the inspection.

3.6 Frequency of inspections, sample taking and access (annex III General Provisions 5 and 10)

The production unit has to be completely inspected at least once a year, additional random visits are advised. Samples may be taken but they must be taken where the use of non allowed products is suspected. The producer shall provide the inspection body with any information deemed necessary for the purpose of the inspection and shall give full access to facilities. He also shall inform the inspection body about all doubts on organic origin of purchased products and inform his clients about all delivered products later found to be non-conform.