

The best way out of polluted agriculture



Organic

OPTA
Organic Processing
and Trade Association

www.opta.bio

OPTA position paper on organic quality and residues

85% of organic products are “clean”

One of the many reasons for consumers to choose organic, is their own health. They like to eat food that doesn't contain pesticide residues nor chemical additives. In general, organic food is the best choice because organic farmers don't use chemical-synthetic pesticides themselves. And what isn't used on organic crops, reduces the chance of contaminations. According to the latest EFSA report on pesticide residues¹ 85% of organic products tested doesn't contain any quantifiable/measurable residues versus 54% in conventional products.

But what about the other 15%?

To start with: 9 of these 15% contain residues of substances that are either officially allowed in organic farming and production (e.g. copper or spinosad) or are defined as pesticide in the respective pesticide legislation but not used as such (e.g. naturally occurring bromide or chlorate stemming from chlorinated drinking water).

From the remaining 6% of organic products containing quantifiable pesticide residues the organic sector cannot be held accountable: unfortunately organic growers are a minority of 7 to 8% in the EU and of 2-3% in the world. The use of chemical pesticides in the artificial agriculture is still the 'normal' way to grow food. This production system has polluted over a period of more than sixty years the whole environment, from soils to humans. Agricultural chemicals can even be found in the ice at the North pole, as long it will survive the climate change... So it is not difficult to understand that a part of the organic crops show very little parts of contamination as well.

¹ EFSA „The 2018 European Union report on pesticide residues in food“: <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.2903/j.efsa.2020.6057>

Why does OPTA refuse a zero tolerance to residue contaminations in organic?

Organic processors and traders have high quality standards. Together with the organic farmers they take responsibility for the best and healthiest food available. In accordance with these organic principles, the organic sector believes it is not fair to put the risk for contaminations totally to organic farmers who don't use the chemicals themselves. If society demands a total residue free organic product, the polluter-pays-principle should be in force. The risks for organic production are already enormous and the pure possibility of residue findings put the organic sector under big pressure. Especially for small holder farmers and processors the zero tolerance approach on residues would become killing.

OPTA likes to turn it around. The polluter has to take care for the costs and the obligation to prevent pollution. And we know from our experience there is only one final solution to prevent contaminations: a transformation to 100% organic agriculture. As soon as possible.

Do we need more residue analysis on organic products?

No, more analyses is not the way out of contaminations. On the contrary, having experience over more than thirty years of residue analyzing on organic crops, the organic sector knows that an analysis is very restricted to verify organic integrity. First of all: a clean analysis is no 100% guarantee of organic integrity.

OPTA members put more trust in risk assessments, quality management systems, and traceability systems to reduce risks on violating organic integrity. Part of their systems is regular residue analysis when there is an uncertainty about the quality.

Should organic be synonym for “residue free”?

Organic is the best guarantee for food without pesticide residues, but it can't be synonym with “residue free”. Contaminations on very low levels are unavoidable as long the artificial agriculture and chemical industry deliver a polluted environment.

Green Deal Farm to Fork Strategy

As stated before: the only way to get rid of pollution is stop polluting. Therefore, OPTA welcomes the Green Deal Farm to Fork strategy and specially the aims to stimulate organic production and to reduce the use of chemical pesticides as much as possible. This is not only necessary for your health, but also for our biodiversity, quality of water and air, animal welfare, climate protection and soil fertility.

On the way to harmonization of residue handling in EU organic regulation

One of the main aims of OPTA for the next years is to support and inform the debate to come to a harmonized residue approach in the EU. At this moment, there are different approaches in different EU countries and that leads to a lot of confusion between operators, certifiers and authorities. OPTA works together with the FiBL research institute and many stakeholders to offer instruments for a new harmonized residue approach in the organic EU regulation.

For the research reports of OPTA-FiBL on harmonization of residue handling in EU follow the links:

[Link Report part I](#) (June 2019)

[Link Report part II](#) (July 2020)

You can find the Banner in three versions here:

[Version 1 \(pdf\)](#)

[Version2 \(png\)](#)

[Version 3 \(png\)](#)

OPTA – position paper *not for publication*

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