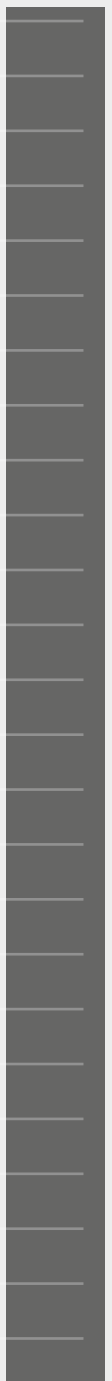


Certification of
organic catering



A NEED FOR HARMONIZATION ACROSS EUROPE?



The consumption of organic food is increasing and people often pay significant premium prices for organic products. Between 1995 and 2007, another remarkable trend occurred: while the average European Union household expenditure on food consumption (adjusted for inflation) was 15%, the spending on catering services increased by 25%. From 2008 onwards total household expenditure and expenditure on catering services stayed more or less in line with general economic developments.

MELANIE LUKAS, CAROLA STRASSNER & ANNE-KRISTIN LØES

The catering sector is attracting increasing attention at the pan-European level and one emerging question is that of the certification of organic establishments. The European (EU) Council Regulation No. 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products obliges the European Commission to report to the EU Council on the scope of the Regulation before the end of 2011, and to make clear reference to 'organic food prepared by mass caterers'. The council Regulation, which came into effect on January 1st 2009, governs these topics in all member states. However, member states are still allowed to adopt national rules or private standards for the out-of-home market, since the regulation does not cover such operations.

The study into 'innovative Public Organic food Procurement for Youth' (iPOPY, 2007-2010) was one of eight research projects conducted as part of the CORE Organic I programme. This investigated the strategies and instruments used within a number of European countries (Italy, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Germany), to increase the consumption of organic



food in serving outlets. The procedures for the certification of organic food served in out-of-home settings were reviewed and analyzed in the first four of these countries. Germany was included as a reference country since it has legally regulated this area. The study provides first insights into how certification procedures for the organic out-of-home market might be harmonized and adapted to general European conditions. Another aim was to find out if certification body officials and other professionals working in this field are satisfied with the current situation, and their experientially-based viewpoints about the issues that should be considered in

any future harmonization process. It was conceived as an explorative pilot study, to analyze and give an oversight of the current situation.

Prospects of harmonization

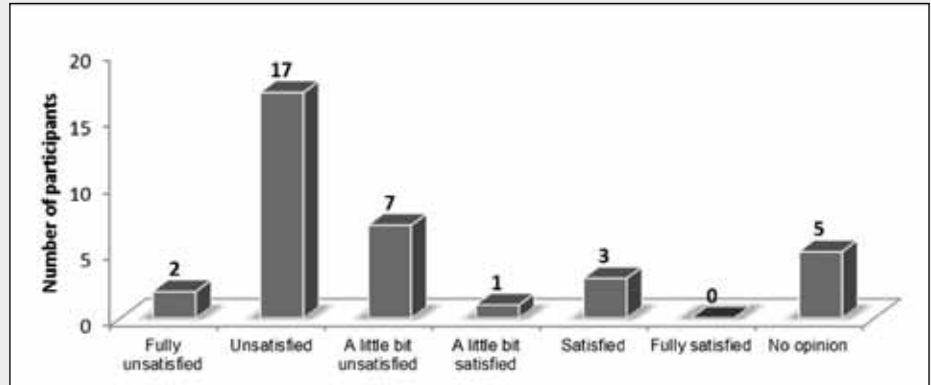
A further web based questionnaire of experts in the field was undertaken which received a response rate of 25%, with replies coming from experts from fourteen EU member states and one non-member country. These countries have developed very different approaches to certifying mass organic catering. When asked about the satisfaction level with the present situation in Europe for organic mass catering certification, the majority of respondents was 'unsatisfied' or 'a little bit unsatisfied' (Figure 1).

Furthermore, respondents would very much welcome a harmonized certification scheme for the organic mass catering sector (Figure 2). A large majority considered that the EU-wide harmonization of organic certification in mass catering would have mainly positive impacts. Only five respondents feared negative impacts. When asked to consider the most important drivers of such a harmonization

Figure 1.

Satisfaction levels about the present regulation of organic certification in the out-of-home sector in Europe

Source:



process, 64% of respondents thought that organic associations will be the most important, followed by certifiers, political authorities and caterers who were all mentioned as important drivers by more than 50% of respondents.

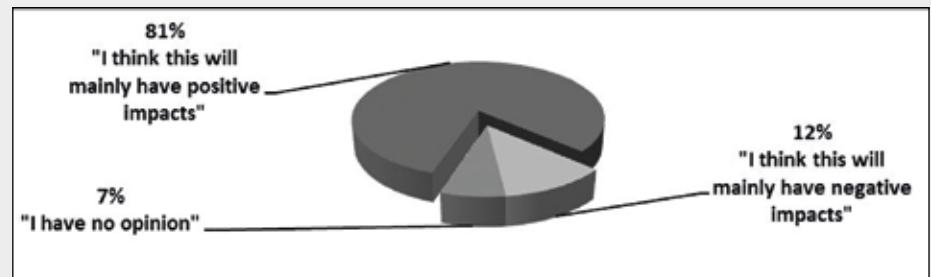
Considerations for the future

The pilot study shows that any initiative from the European Commission to create the conditions for the future harmonization of organic certification of mass catering will very likely be welcomed. Any such process should be conducted in close cooperation with certification bodies and

Figure 2.

Respondents' opinions on a possible EU-wide harmonized organic certification scheme for mass catering (n=25)

Source:



THE EU-REGULATION DOES NOT COVER THE OUT-OF-HOME MARKET

organic associations, even if this will increase the length of time required to develop and implement the regulation and will require resources to carry out the necessary consultations. Networking across borders will provide a good opportunity to create a scheme which is generally binding but has the scope to allow regional and individual country variations. Such an endeavour would be especially supportive of the positive impacts and strengths expected by our respondents, such as "more traceability", "more transparency" or "better consumer understanding".

Further recommendations for next steps in Europe gained from this pilot research include:

- Intensify networking in this sector, espe-

cially between the certifiers, even if a change of regulation for organic certification of mass catering is not an immediate consequence.

- Involve important stakeholders, such as certifiers and organic associations, in any harmonization process from the outset, to create a scheme which best fits all individual conditions but provides more transparency than the current situation.
- Establish a pan-European working group consisting of all the important stakeholders representing the current status quo and can provide objective input into the consultation.

Further details of this pilot study and other results of the iPOPY project can be accessed in the organic eprints database using the search term ipopy.

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