

Organic Rules Database: to support revision of the EU Regulation on organic agriculture

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Abstract - Within the FP6 project, ORGANIC REVISION a public web-based database was implemented to support the revision of the EU Regulation on organic agriculture. The database describes differences between the major European organic production standards plus other relevant international organic standards (e.g. Codex Alimentarius and IFOAM Basic Standards) in relation to the EEC Reg. 2092/91 ("the EU Regulation") and gives information on areas not yet covered by the EEC Reg. 2092/91. The database at: <http://www.organicrules.org>, is still under development.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Organic Rules database is to:

- A. Create an overview of differences between the EU regulation as well as public and private international and national organic standards.
- B. Contribute to the development of the EU regulation.
- C. Form a basis for communication and discussion with stakeholders.

The communication and discussion with stakeholders concerns questions on the relationship between the EU regulation and organic values and principles as well as harmonisation, simplification and regionalisation in the EU Regulation.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The potential users of the database may be:

- **Administrators:** for equivalence questions, to learn how issues are understood (interpretation) and implemented/enforced. Which problems arise? Which subject areas may benefit from increased harmonisation or regionalisation?
- **Certifiers and inspection bodies/authorities:** for equivalence questions; to find inspiration for the development of their own standards; to support traders in exporting or importing issues; to learn about the additional requirements of market relevant standards.
- **Traders:** for equivalence questions; to learn about the additional requirements of market relevant standards.
- **Advisors, researchers, standards setting institutions:** to have a common information source; to learn about how special areas are regulated in different standards and in different countries and regions; to learn what the reasons for the differences are and to get other basic information necessary for research or standards setting.

METHODS

The database was developed based on experiences from the Organic Eprints database. Organic Rules is running on Linux and other open source software. It is based on *GNU EPrints* archive-creating software.

Different information including attached documents (Eprints types) can be uploaded to the database (Figure 1):

- **Complete regulations.** A whole set of governmental regulations, private standards or implementation rules. Including a link to the most recently updated version.
- **Differences between other regulations-/standards and EEC No 2092/91.** A description of differences in standards, interpretation or implementation rules between other regulations-/standards and the EEC Regulation No 2092/91.
- **Recommendations or comments.** Recommendation or comments for improvements of EEC No 2092/91.

The complete regulations and the descriptions of differences are uploaded by partners from the Organic Revision project. Any person interested in this area can upload recommendations and comments for improvements of the existing regulation.

Users of the database can find information via full text search and via several browse trees (Figure 2). The Organic Rules database will be demonstrated at the Joint Organic Congress.

RESULTS

Currently, approximately 30 national and private standards, as well as 600 differences between these standards and the existing regulation are in the database. Via the development of the database, the following weaknesses in the structure of the existing EU regulation have been identified.

It is difficult to navigate in the EU Regulation, because information on one subject may be found in several articles and annexes. There are some inconsistencies regarding subject areas covered and not covered. The degree of details varies strongly. Therefore, the Organic Revision project proposed an improved and adapted structure, which has a more logical structure and a more clear differentiation between the different decision levels as well as the different subject areas. The new structure also allows including new subject areas, which at present are not covered by the EU Regulation.

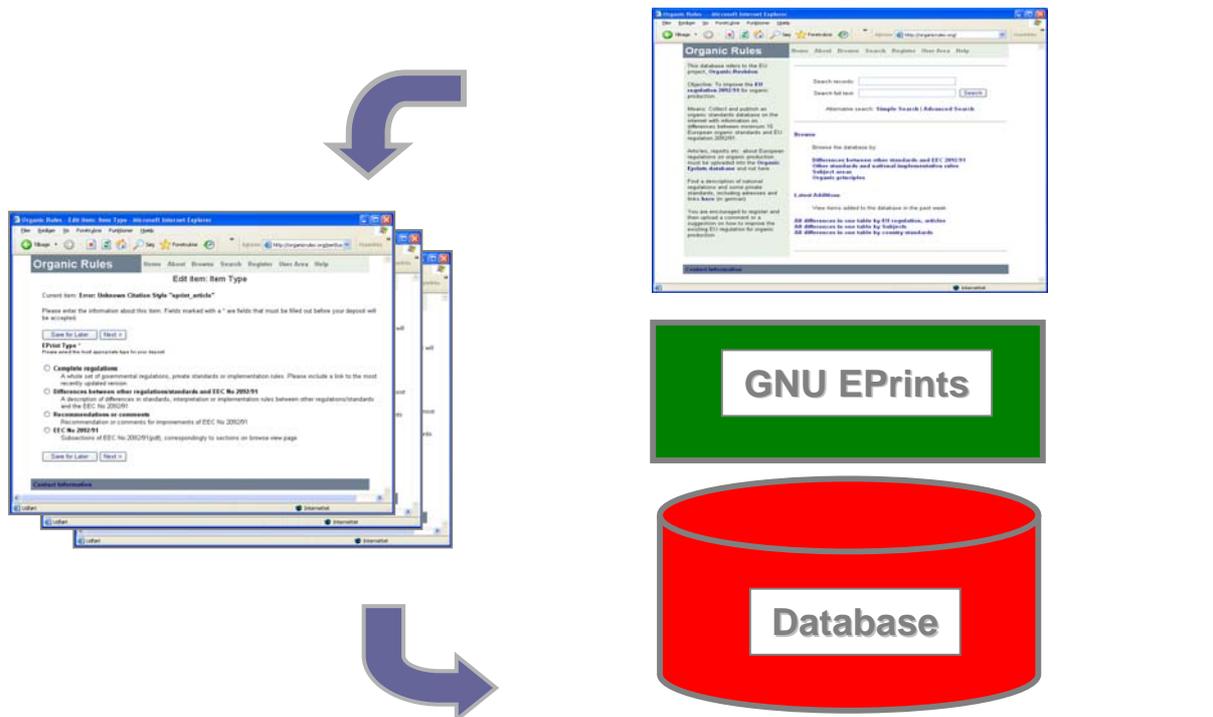


Figure 1. Structure of the Organic Rules database and web system. The database holds national and private standards. Partners from the Organic Revision project upload national and private standards via web interfaces, as well as differences between other standards and the existing EU regulation on organic farming. All stakeholders are encouraged to upload comments and suggestions for improvement of the regulation, using the same system at: www.organicrules.org.

This figure displays several screenshots from the Organic Rules web system. The top row shows search results for "Organic Rules" and "Differences by EEC No. 2092/91", listing various regulatory items like "Prohibited substances for plant protection" and "Copper preparations". The bottom row features a detailed comparison table of "Differences" between EU and other standards, and a document titled "OE Biobed 2005: Origin of plant propagation material".

| EU Regulation | Other Standard | Description of Difference | Justification |
|---|--|---|---------------|
| EU Council Regulation No. 2092/91 (636) | Prohibited substances for plant protection (3) | The EU Council Regulation No. 2092/91 (636) prohibits the use of certain substances for plant protection. | ... |
| EU Council Regulation No. 2092/91 (636) | Copper preparations (3) | The EU Council Regulation No. 2092/91 (636) allows the use of copper preparations for plant protection. | ... |
| EU Council Regulation No. 2092/91 (636) | Manure (3) | The EU Council Regulation No. 2092/91 (636) allows the use of manure for plant protection. | ... |

Figure 2. Example of database views of "Differences" between other standards and the EU regulation. Left: all differences related to a certain paragraph in one table including title, description of rule, description of the difference and justification of the difference. Right: via browse trees, the same differences can be found, including attached documents regarding the difference of concern.