

A “POSITIVE LIST” OF SUBSTANCES FOR CLEANING AND DISINFECTING AGENTS IN ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTION

A.I.S.E. comments on Reg. 2018/848

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Regulation 2018/848 on the organic production and labelling of organic food provides European Commission (COM) the authority to restrict or prohibit (substances in) cleaning and disinfection products used in the production and processing of organic food. According to Article 24 of the Regulation 2018/848, chemicals for cleaning and disinfecting agents approved for the organic production and processing should be listed in an annex to the Regulation. The Expert Group for Technical Advice on Organic Production (EGTOP) has set of draft criteria for the incorporation of substances and products for cleaning and disinfection in this “positive list” and advises the COM in taking the decisions related to Article 24 and its annex.

We would like to emphasise that cleaning and disinfection is an important part of an organic system plan as food processing environments that are not adequately cleaned and disinfected can be a source of microorganisms that cause food spoilage and foodborne illness. It should be noted that many food processing companies use the same production facilities for conventional and organic production processes.

“Positive list” could result in lack of substances that could be used and undermine safety of the process:

- We do agree that the new Regulation requires the use of safe and effective hygiene solutions. However, it could be noted that prohibition of the use of certain substances might drive users to use/ switch to cleaning and disinfection products which are less or not effective resulting in failure to maintain high hygiene and quality standards.
- We are of the view that Ecolabelled cleaners cannot be an exclusive solution as the current state of ecolabel regulation is not set for the purpose to accommodate the variety of products/ applications that will need to be covered. Moreover, disinfection products can’t be within the scope of the Ecolabel claim.
- We are also of the opinion that the “positive list” of substances or products would hamper the use of innovations for the (organic) farming and for (organic) food processing. Thus, clearly defined criteria for the selection of substances that would achieve the goals of the legislation should be used instead of “positive list”:
 - These EGTOP-criteria should be drafted in such a way that would ensure efficient and effective use of products, allow for product innovation and for placing of new products on the market as well as ensure a level playing field on the market for all concerned parties.
 - For substances or products not meeting the positive criteria defined and where no alternatives exist, a clear and transparent derogation process should be put in place in order to prevent market participants from having to initiate and execute costly operational, legal and contractual compliance processes and to ensure smooth functioning of the system while keeping a high level of safety.

Therefore, considering all said above we would urge the COM to:

- Focus the scope to the cleaning and disinfection products used on surfaces with direct contact with food.
- Lay out the scientific or legislative justification for the different criteria proposed by EGTOP.
- Include Biocidal products approved via the Biocidal Product Regulation (BPR) in the positive list of criteria since they should be allowed in all food-producing areas. They undergo a rigorous authorisation process with very limited in flexibility and long evaluation periods.
- Establish a clear and transparent derogation process for validated criteria. Such process should be in place as soon as possible in order to provide sufficient time to obtain validation for processes with no alternatives.
- Ensure that sufficient time is provided to all parties concerned to prepare for the implementation of new criteria.
- Establish ways for closer cooperation between the EU legislator and representatives of the professional cleaning and hygiene industry.
- Ensure that upcoming criteria will continue to guarantee the high level of efficacy and safety for cleaning and disinfecting operations and to ensure sufficient choice of such substances or products for the users in order not to distort the market, all the more that reputation of organic production can be at stake.

We would also like to remind that addition of extensive requirements or restrictions on top of those stipulated in REACH, CLP and BPR regulations will severely restrict the availability of disinfection products for organic food.

Conclusion

Ecology, environmental protection, and sustainability are gaining more and more importance and are discussed widely, however within those discussions - hygiene, environmental and consumer protection should not be neglected and should have the rightful place. It could be stressed, that in order not to create public health hazards it is important to consider the correct application of the products as well as the use of safe and effective hygiene solutions. *Overall, we do believe that if implemented correctly the Regulation 2018/848 could ensure a levelled playing field for all cleaning and disinfection products and support the EU in becoming more sustainable.*

