



Press release
For immediate publication

A conclusive consultation forum: a majority of Québec's organic businesses rejects the current proposed Federal Organic Products Regulations

Magog, 16 April 2009 – Meeting in Drummondville on 7 April 2009 at a consultation forum, more than 110 representatives of the Québec organic sector, including nearly 100 corporate leaders, were able to voice their opinions on the relevance of the new federal draft regulations on organic products, published on 14 February 2009. More than 70 % of those participating declared that the draft federal regulations, as published, did not promote control of organic products or the development of organic businesses in Québec and Canada.

This consultation forum organized by the Filière biologique du Québec, at the request of the ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation (MAPAQ), was quite representative of the industry overall. It brought together 50 representatives of the production sector, 29 representatives of the processing sector, 15 representatives of the distribution sector and 16 business advisors. All were able to give their views about the draft regulations and about the possible repercussions of this proposal on businesses, after having looked at the background of the file, the contents of the draft regulations and the issues involved for the sector and the industry.

In general, few positive points came out concerning the proposal in its present form. Participants recognized, however, the need for Canadian regulations that can be uniformly applied across Canada and improve the commercial environment for businesses. They also hope the coming regulations will facilitate recognition of organic products and equivalency agreements with other countries.

The draft regulations raised a number of concerns, and some negative reactions were expressed by the participants about the overall proposal. In general, they noted that the present content of the regulations runs the risk of significantly diminishing the credibility and the good name of organic products with consumers. The proposals concerning import and export management systems, and the accreditation system were simply judged unacceptable. Furthermore, the costs of the control system raised a great deal of concern on the part of business managers.

With regard to exports and imports of organic products, participants at the forum gave the Filière, by a wide majority, the mandate to make the case to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA):

- that organic products exported from Canada be certified to Canadian standards by a certification body accredited by CFIA;
- that article 29 (2) of the draft regulations be replaced by an article that will allow the import of an organic product only if this product is certified to standards equivalent to the Canadian standard by a certification body recognized by CFIA.

In terms of the accreditation system proposed in the draft regulations, again with a large majority vote, participants mandated the Filière to deal with the CFIA on the following matters:

- to bring into line the accreditation system proposed for Canada with that in effect in other industrialized countries that regulate organic products;
- to have CFIA designate as an accreditation body any Canadian accreditation authority constituted specifically by virtue of a Canadian government regulation at the federal or provincial level.

Turning to the strategy to be adopted by the representatives of the Filière and the Québec government, the participants took account of the fact that the administrative exercise undertaken with the CFIA by the Filière over the last 30 months had not produced the desired results. They therefore voted in the majority for:

- the Filière to adopt a political approach as quickly as possible to obtain the changes desired by the Québec organic industry with regard to the *Federal Organic Products Regulations*.

The Filière biologique considers that it achieved the main objective of the forum, which was to hear the opinions and comments of representatives of the Québec organic industry on the draft regulations. The Filière and the MAPAQ will now use the results of this forum to guide its future interventions in the federal regulations issue. An analysis of the comments from organic businesses is underway and will provide more details on these first results.

The consultation period on the contents of the *Federal Organic Products Regulations* will end on 29 April 2009, and it is intended that the regulation will come into force in June 2009. The Filière, therefore, believes that it must act quickly since there is a risk of significant repercussions on Québec organic businesses.

Other consultations on the draft regulations were carried out with 80 organic production businesses during the annual general meeting of the Fédération d'agriculture biologique du Québec, and with 56 businesses of the Bas-Saint-Laurent region. In both cases, the consultations gave the same results as the forum; that is, the draft regulations were rejected in their current form and there was recognition that they must be amended as quickly as possible, taking into consideration the concerns of the companies.

For more information on the work of the Filière biologique in this matter, please visit the website of the Filière at: www.filierebio.qc.ca.