



Press release
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Is Ukraine a trustworthy place to source organic produce ?

Fraud is one of the biggest threats to the organic sector; scandals can seriously undermine consumers' confidence in organic produce. The latest case of fraud, which involves organic sunflower cake from Ukraine contaminated with the pesticide agents Thiamethoxam and Metalaxyl raises the question of the safety of organic produce from Ukraine and the reliability of the country's organic operators. This short document reflects on this issue.

As the implementer of the Swiss-Ukrainian Organic Market Development Project funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), FiBL is strongly involved in the development of the organic sector in Ukraine. One of the project's focal areas is the development of the organic arable crop sector in Ukraine, especially for export. Trust building along the supply chain and measures to guarantee safety and quality are central aspects of the project and measures in place include laboratory testing for contamination by pesticides and GMOs. FiBL only works with partners who operate transparently, e.g. who provide valid organic certification documents and accept pre-audits by neutral advisers. The project helps farms and other stakeholders that meet these criteria through 'matchmaking activities', such as participation at Biofach or by inviting potential buyers to visit these farms in the Ukraine. This allows importers to personally assess farms personally before signing a first contract.

In general, FiBL does not believe that there is a higher risk associated with building partnerships with Ukrainian organic producers than with those from other countries – but as in all countries appropriate and rigorous quality management measures are strongly recommended.

FiBL considers the following measures to be the most important:

1. International traders should only cooperate with organic operators, who have transparent communications and are willing to open the farm gate for an independent audit (in addition to the certification procedure).
2. Buyers should trade directly with single producers and avoid intermediaries.

EXCELLENCE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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3. Due to the risks of contamination or co-mingling during storage and transport, e.g. at container harbours in Ukraine, FiBL recommends the use of sealed big-bags (sealed before leaving the at farm gate).
4. A quality management system needs to be established that evaluates the risks of commingling, contamination and fraud. Such system should include
 - a. regular audits (beyond the annual control by the certification body), sampling and residue analysis;
 - b. ensuring that the producers are familiar with the standards, and;
 - c. supervision of the export process e.g. loading and sealing containers, sampling the products and checking the documentation to ensure traceability by a trustworthy local service provider.

FiBL has developed a range of organic manuals and videos and makes, presentations, all in Ukrainian to inform stakeholders about organic production techniques and to share knowledge about best practises in organic farming. To further enhance transparency, FiBL also supports the ongoing efforts by IFOAM and other international players to create an international and freely-accessible database of organic operators (including those from the Ukraine) with real time data on their certification status.

Further information

Swiss-Ukrainian Organic Market Development Project 2012 – 2016,
www.ukraine.fibl.org

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