EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
Single Market Enforcement
Notification of Regulatory Barriers

Message 007

Communication from the Commission - TRIS/(2025) 3241

Directive (EU) 2015/1535

Notification: 2024/0682/ES

Communication by Member State (Spain) containing general information regarding the above-mentioned notification.

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1. MSG 007 IND 2024 0682 ES EN 17-03-2025 17-11-2025 ES COMMUNICAT 17-03-2025

2. Spain

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4. 2024/0682/ES - C00A - AGRICULTURE, FISHING AND FOODSTUFFS

5.

6. Luxembourg Organic Farming Association a.s.b.l.

We, the Luxembourg Organic Farming Association a.s.b.l., represent the interests of organic farmers in Luxembourg. The proposed regulation by the Catalan regional government is problematic in this regard, as the introduction of a new certification system, the PAS [Producción Agraria Sostenible] (Sustainable Agricultural Production), for sustainable agriculture could create confusion among consumers, especially if they are unsure which standard to choose. If there are multiple sustainability labels (for example, Bio and PAS), this could undermine confidence in a single, clearly defined label, such as the Biolabel.

Response

Regarding the concern expressed about the use of the term "sustainable," it should be noted that this project pursues precisely the opposite of what is stated in the submitted document. The objective is to provide transparency and guarantees to the consumer by linking the term to a clear, regulated label subject to accredited certification. In this sense, the initiative contributes to reducing the confusion currently generated by the indiscriminate and unregulated use of the term 'sustainable' on the market, where it is often used without any technical basis or control system behind it.

It is important to note that the use of any label —including the Biolabel— can lead to misunderstandings if the consumer does not know its exact meaning or scope. However, this does not invalidate its usefulness, but rather highlights the need to reinforce information and communication with the public. In this case, the proposed regulation defines a set of concrete and verifiable practices to give solidity and credibility to the concept of agricultural sustainability.

Ultimately, this initiative is not intended to confuse consumers, but rather to offer another transparent and controlled certification pathway for producers who implement sustainable practices, thus contributing to the shared goal of improving the sustainability of the European agri-food system.

Currently, many brands on the market already contain the term "sustainability," and it is not entirely clear what lies behind them. The PAS, on the other hand, aims to assess environmental, social, and economic sustainability in the public interest and improve aspects susceptible to improvement in terms of sustainability.

In any case, it is essential to develop a clear and effective joint communication plan that not only adequately distinguishes the PAS from the PAE [Producción Agraria Ecológica] (Organic Agricultural Production), but also demonstrates their complementarity. Both systems can coexist and add value to the agri-food sector, offering different tools to move towards more sustainable production from different perspectives.

Although the PAS promotes sustainable practices, it does not always coincide with the strictest requirements of organic farming. This could lead to farms that do not meet the same high standards as organic production being considered sustainable, thus undermining the value of the Biolabel. This would create unfair competitive conditions for producers and, therefore, distort competition. Furthermore, it would lead to misleading information and, consequently, instability for consumers.

Response

Being strict implies applying rigorous criteria, while being restrictive means limiting options. We do not doubt that the PAE can be strict, but we can affirm that the PAS is also strict because it follows rigorous criteria. What is certain is that the PAE is restrictive because, for example, in agriculture, it does not allow the use of synthetic chemicals or genetically modified organisms, and in livestock farming, it does not allow a farm without a land base to be considered organic.

The aim of the PAS is to accompany all farms on the road to sustainability and the agro-ecological transition and, therefore, the restrictions that the PAE establishes could hardly be applied to the entire agricultural system.

Regarding the claim that the PAS distorts the term 'Bio', it should be noted that they are two different production systems, and the PAS has established a methodology for calculating sustainability that the PAE does not have. Therefore, they are not comparable, and one cannot invalidate the other.

The PAE may be strengthened in the sense that many of the practices proposed in the PAS are already carried out by the PAE, but it does not quantify their degree of implementation on farms and could be complemented by the methodology developed in the PAS.

In Catalonia, farmers and livestock breeders certified under the PAE have shown interest in calculating the sustainability profile promoted by the PAS. Of the total number of farms that have calculated their sustainability profile, 56% are conventional, 30% are integrated production, and 13% are organic. Therefore, a portion of the organic sector has viewed the PAS as an opportunity rather than a threat.

While organic products have strict standards regarding the use of chemicals and fertilizers, the PAS could apply less stringent regulations. This is reflected in the fact that the proposed regulation does not provide sufficient information on pesticides, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and new genetic technologies (NGTs), and it seeks to implement a method for calculating the ecological footprint that takes into account, among other things, pesticide use.

Response

They cannot meet the same standards because they are different approaches: the PAS quantifies sustainability, while the PAE does not. The PAS is applied holistically, to the entire farm, while the PAE is applied to each crop line and/or livestock species.

The European Ecolabel, along with its regulations, constitutes a comprehensive food safety network covering the entire food chain, from production to trade. The term "Bio" is clearly defined and protected by law. Transparency for consumers is guaranteed through annual controls and certifications, which also include the import of organic food from third countries. This system is unique and has been successful in the EU. Eliminating this quality system would be in the interest of neither farmers nor consumers.

Response

Regarding the term 'Bio', the PAS has never intended to replace or eliminate it. On the contrary, it has always been emphasised that the PAS aims to be an integrated system encompassing all production systems, such as Organic Agricultural Production, Integrated Production, and Conventional Production.

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