



## Country Report for Spain

**Work Package:** WP01 - Regulation & policy framework regarding production, use, and transparency of organic seed

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## About the report

This report has been produced in the framework of the Horizon 2020-funded project LIVESEED.<sup>1</sup> The main aim of LIVESEED is to boost the production and use of organic seeds and plant breeding for organic agriculture across Europe. It is co-ordinated by IFOAM EU, and its scientific coordinator is FiBL-CH.

Work Package 01 of LIVESEED explores EU Member States in terms of their implementation and best practices connected to the EU Organic Regulations, in the contexts of national regulatory and policy frameworks, specifically regarding the production, use, and transparency of organic seed.

As part of this Work Package, Bionext, FiBL-DE and IFOAM EU visited selected countries during 2017-2018, where the organic seed production is low, to understand their bottlenecks and possibilities for improvements regarding the production and the use of organic seeds at the national level. During the visits, several stakeholder groups were interviewed (competent authorities, seed database managers, seed companies, research institutions, organic farmers, seed associations, organic certifiers, etc) in each country.

The main outcomes of the visits were summarized in country reports presenting the status quo for that given Member State. The reports' findings then were disseminated among a wide range of national stakeholders in 2019 and discussed during workshops to define viable next steps to improve the status quo in each country. The Workshop for Spain took place on 08<sup>th</sup> April 2019, in Madrid, and was co-organised by our LIVESEED partners Ecovalia and Society for Organic Farming & Agroecology (SEAE).

This country report is recommended for national policymakers, and all stakeholders involved in the production and use of organic seed: national authorities, farmers, certifiers, producers, retailers, plant breeders, seed authorities, and the general public.

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## Implementation of the regulation on organic seed. Findings from the national visit to Spain 16-21<sup>st</sup> April 2018

### 1. General information

There are 36,207 organic farmers in Spain covering 8,7 % (two million hectares) of the agricultural land area. From this area 52,1 % is grassland, 24,4 % is covered with arable crops and 23,5 % are permanent crops. (Source: IFOAM EU 2016). Andalucía is the main organic producing region covering around 47% of the total Spanish organic production. Castilla La Mancha covers 18% of all organic land.

### 2. Production and use of organic seed

There are two seed associations in Spain (ANOVE and APROSE) representing national and international conventional seed companies. Some of their members, for instance Intersemillas SL, also sell organic seeds. Around 20 seed producers and trading companies offer organic seed on the Spanish seed database. Most of the organic seed comes from foreign companies.

In addition, there are many regional seed networks in Spain aiming to increase agrobiodiversity and fostering the use of traditional varieties. *Red de Semillas* is the national organisation coordinating the regional networks that are involved in conservation and multiplication of traditional seeds for organic farming.

For the production of vegetables organic farmers often use organic transplants. According to the transplant producers, the majority of the seeds used are untreated conventional seeds. Transplants from organic seed are on average 10-25% more expensive.

The use of farm-saved seed by organic farmers is very low (1% or less of the total). This is mainly due to the fact that organic farmers must prove to the authorities that they used certified seed in order to receive European subsidies. Only very few small producers preserve and exchange their seeds and sell the products (fruits, vegetables, bread) on local organic markets. In terms of cereals, some farmers from Catalonia and Malaga (Andalusia) still preserve and grow open pollinated materials in organic.

### 3. Implementation of the EU regulation: the database and derogation policy

The National Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Environment (MAPAMA) is responsible for the management of the organic seed database. The autonomic regions are in charge of the implementation of the organic regulation and the derogation process.

In 2017, there were 727 varieties offered on the organic seed database, mainly from vegetable crops. To enter an offer on the seed database a seed supplier must apply at the competent authority from one of the 17 regions. They check if the company complies with the seed law and is certified organic. This information is sent via mail to the Ministry, which then enters the offer to the database. The organic seed database is updated twice a year. In Andalucía and Catalonia, the regional authorities have delegated the derogation process to the control bodies (certifiers).

Farmers can request derogation at their certifier if they want to use a variety that is not offered on the seed database. To prove that organic seed from this variety is not, or no longer available, they must add a screenshot from the database and an email from the seed company. Once a year, the regional authorities send an update to the national Ministry which prepares the national report.



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In case conventional seeds are used, farmers must prove that their seeds are untreated with a declaration from the seed producer.

#### 4. Policy measures to increase production and use of organic seed

The Valencian Agricultural Diversity Plan, which started in 2016, has the objective to guarantee the conservation of Valencian local varieties and their dissemination. The traditional seeds conservation centre in Valencia describes and conserves cultivars. They focus on regional cultivars from vegetables that are not (or no longer) registered and commercialised but still are interesting for farmers.

Part of the plan is to promote the use of traditional varieties within organic farming. Therefore, a network of organic multipliers has been created. Organic farmers who want to multiply the seeds sign a contract with the seed centre. A disclaimer in the contract states that the seeds are not commercial. The farmers can use the seeds for themselves and within the network, but they cannot sell them to others. The seed users are mainly small organic producers, producing for the local market.

#### 5. Breeding research and field trials

Since the 1980's, researchers at the SERIDA Institute have been devoted to the conservation of apple landraces and to breeding for organic cultivation, with special focus on Northern Spain (Asturias). They are considered a pioneer group in organic breeding in Spain.

Several research institutes are gradually expanding their efforts in organic breeding in recent years.

The financing is primarily based on public funds from European, national or regional research programs. In the past 5-10 years, new lines of research have been developed in Valencia (Universitat Politècnica de Valencia) for organic breeding in vegetables.

Currently, there is also a national project (funded by INIA-Spain) focusing on Capsicum peppers landraces. Around 100 landraces were tested, also under organic conditions. They performed well in organic cultivation in the open field. The first 15 varieties have been selected for higher scale trials and for more locations in the coming years. Next step will be introgression of resistances to some (main) viruses that modern varieties have.

#### 6. Constraints and opportunities

There is not enough organic seed available on the Spanish market and at the same time there is not enough demand for organic seed. Most organic farmers ask for a certain variety, not for a type of seed (conventional or organic). They want top quality varieties with the newest resistances. They see no advantage in the use organic seed. It is only more expensive.

Since there is no clear demand for organic seed and farmers can easily get a derogation to use cheaper conventional (untreated) seed, there is no incentive for conventional seed companies to invest in organic seed production. They have no confidence they can sell their organic seed to Spanish farmers. According to some Spanish seed companies, organic seed is currently not a profitable business in Spain because a high diversity of varieties is used, and the amount of organic seeds needed per variety is too small. They lack information about the varieties that organic farmers prefer.

The seed database is only updated twice a year; therefore, the information is often outdated.



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The seed marketing legislation hinders the use of organic seed from traditional and local varieties. For some farmers it is a problem that the exchange and sales of uncertified seeds is not allowed. They are forced to buy seeds from seed companies. At the same time the local varieties they produce cannot be submitted for certification.

There is no good definition of organic seed in the organic regulation; traditional seeds are not mentioned. The regional authorities fear that strict rules for the use of organic seed might threaten the agrobiodiversity and limit the use of traditional seeds. They see a strong movement to increase the use of local varieties.

The MEC-ECO meeting, where all the regional authorities meet, could be a good opportunity to discuss organic seed and the development of a common strategy, for instance, to improve the seed database. Another opportunity is that the regional initiatives promote the use of (organic) seed from local varieties. In Valencia, there is a regional seed network for traditional varieties. In this group they also look at the derogations and if there is a high demand for a certain variety the organic farmers in the network start producing organic seed from that variety.

## 7. Recommendations from the stakeholders

- The seed regulation needs to be adapted; the exchange of seeds among farmers should be allowed. Now farmers are forced to buy seeds from seed companies.
- The big conventional seed companies that now dominate the organic market should receive less prominence. Stricter regulation is needed to force seed companies to produce more organic seed.
- Make it more difficult for organic farmers to get a derogation to use conventional seed.
- Create incentives for farmers to use organic seed. If supermarkets would ask for organic seed, everything would start to change; the market is decisive.
- Farmers need teaching about organic agriculture including seeds; a helpdesk for organic farmers is needed.
- There is a need for organic field trials to test which varieties perform best under organic conditions.
- The responsibility to increase the production of organic seed should lay with the control bodies/competent authority. The certifiers should engage with the seed suppliers and push for more organic seed production, only then the farmers can be obliged to buy it.

## 8. More information

Organic seed database:

[www.mapama.gob.es/app/EcoSem/ListadoSemillas.aspx?idPro=-1&idEs=-1&idPa=100000](http://www.mapama.gob.es/app/EcoSem/ListadoSemillas.aspx?idPro=-1&idEs=-1&idPa=100000)

Link to the National 'interpretation' of the organic regulation 'MECOECO'

[https://www.mapa.gob.es/es/alimentacion/temas/produccion-ecologica/programacontrolecoactualizadoversdic2018\\_tcm30-379436.pdf](https://www.mapa.gob.es/es/alimentacion/temas/produccion-ecologica/programacontrolecoactualizadoversdic2018_tcm30-379436.pdf)

Red de Semillas: [www.redsemillas.info](http://www.redsemillas.info)



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