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Development of a National Standard for Organic Products in Russia

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Report Highlights:

A draft law "On Manufacture of Organic Agricultural Products and Modification of the Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation" has been developed by the Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with Russian industry and published on November 26, 2012. A definition of organic products, where its main feature is compliance with the requirements of national or international standards of organic agricultural products, is provided in the draft law. The law also covers issues related to the state support of the production of organic agricultural products and provides amendments to be made in a wide range of other federal laws. The law is currently in the draft phase and has not yet been notified to the WTO.

The final law is anticipated to come into force in 2015. Unofficial translation of the draft law is attached to this report.

General Information:

The organic market in Russia is in the development stage. One of the main obstacles to market expansion is the absence of a regulatory body or state certification system for organic products. As a result, Russian producers keen to operate in the organic food market have to obtain official certification from third countries (often the EU) in order to place an official certification label on their products as bio or organic, or to export them abroad. Some Russian producers apply “bio” or “organic” labels without any official certification. Imports of organic products are currently not restricted to nationally certified food products. Thus, consumers do not have a consistent standard to look for on food product labels.

In 2012, several Russian producers of so-called “bio” products, e.g. Corporation Organic, the "Planet Health" group of companies, and the Association "EcoKlaster", came out with an open letter to the Russian Minister of Agriculture wherein they raised concerns about the lack of regulation of organic agricultural products in Russia and stressed the need to amend current regulatory rules. These companies introduced proposals to be included into a draft regulation “On Producing Ecologically Clean (Organic) Agricultural Products”.

As a result, the draft law "On the production of organic agricultural products and amendments to legislative acts of the Russian Federation" was developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and published on November 26, 2012. A definition of organic products, where its main feature is compliance with the requirements of national or international standards of organic agricultural products, is provided in the draft law.

According to the law, in order to be able to put an "organic" or “bio” label on packaging it is necessary to pass a voluntary certification. But for now there is no organization in Russia with the necessary accreditation, experience and acceptance that is similar to non-governmental regulatory authorities in the EU or the National Organic Program in the United States. At the present time, organic agricultural product manufacturers can use the services of European or the U.S. certifiers.

The law also covers issues related to the state support of the production of organic agricultural products by means of directed lending, risk hedging, and informational and methodological support of production.

The draft law also provides amendments to be made in a wide range of federal laws, particularly: the Federal Law dated 29.12.2006 No. 264-FZ “On Agricultural Development”, the Federal Law dated 02.01.2000 No. 29-FZ “On Foodstuff Quality and Safety”; the Federal Law dated 27.12.2002 No. 184-FZ “On Technical Regulation”, the Land Code of the Russian Federation, and several others.

There are farms in Russia working under the principles of environmentally friendly agriculture, e.g. without the use of synthetic herbicides, pesticides and mineral fertilizers. Russian farmers expect this law will make their products more competitive on the international market. They plan to offer reduced prices for their products and use Russia's accession to the WTO to enter the EU market with organics. Also the advent of bio/organic certification will provide greater assurance for consumers regarding the growing practices used in the production of organic foods in Russia.

The development of a national standard will begin after the draft law's approval by the State Duma. Until then, the government experts are studying U.S., European and Japanese certification schemes for organic products. The committee reports that harmonization of international and national standards is their main task.

The law is expected to come into force in 2015.