

THE NEW ORGANICS LOGO FOR EUROPE

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Abstract

Europe has a new organics logo from 1 July 2010. The new logo is mandated for all organic produce of Europe. The new logo is the product of a Europe-wide competition which attracted 3,422 entries, of which three were shortlisted and subjected to an internet vote. The new logo is text-free. It does not replace the plethora of certifier-specific logos currently used by Europe's certifiers, instead, it will appear in conjunction with certifier logos.

Logos and Product Differentiation

A logo can be remarkably successful in embodying and disseminating a message. The crucifix, hammer and sickle, swastika, Apple, and the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) logo, are examples of the success to which a logo can ascend.

The organic food and farming sector lacks a universal logo. This is despite the fact that the organics sector relies on its produce being differentiated from the produce of chemical farming which is visually indistinguishable. The formation of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) at Versailles, France, in 1972 created an opportunity for a universal organics mark, but none has been forthcoming in the interim.

Product differentiation of the non-synthetic-chemical production of food in Europe was pioneered by biodynamics advocates more than eight decades ago. Biodynamics pioneer, Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer (1928, p.34) reported that: "in the course of the year 1927 it was necessary to found a company, which has undertaken the collection, preparation and distribution of the land produce

obtained by biological methods". Erhard Bartsch (1929, p.58) referred to "the work of the Selling Department, founded September 1927, by members of our Experimental Circle" of Anthroposophical farmers.

Organics logos have proliferated with each certifier developing their own mark. Examples in Europe include the marks of: Demeter (biodynamic produce), the UK's Soil Association; the Dutch SKAL; and Norway's Debio. Examples in Australia include the marks of: BFA (Biological Farmers Association); NASAA (National Association of Sustainable Agriculture Australia); and TOP (Tasmania Organic-Biological Producers). China has a national organics mark with text in both English and Chinese characters. USA has a national 'USDA Organic' compulsory mark. In Australia the ill-conceived, and deservedly ignored, 'Australian Government Certified' mark, in shades of orange, has been voluntary, and it is obsolete as of 30 October 2010 (OFA, 2010). A Europe-wide logo for organic and biodynamic has been a long time in gestation.

European Organics Logo

A European logo to mark organic produce was scheduled for introduction in 2009. The logo proposed at that time bore a remarkable similarity (in colour, graphic composition, and with the text 'bio' dominant) to the mark already used by German supermarket Aldi for their organic produce; and that first EU logo was promptly withdrawn.

As a consequence of that fiasco, a pan-European competition was announced to develop the new European organics logo, with competition entries restricted to Europe-based students of art and design (Barroso, 2010). The criteria were that entries: "should give the message of organic agriculture and of EU origin in a picture, not in words, should be easily recognisable, have high quality graphical design elements and should be applicable in different colours and sizes on food labels" (Niggli, 2009). A total of 3,422 entries were submitted. "A jury of four leading European graphical designers and of four organic experts, as well as the former bicycle racer Miguel Indurain" culled these proposed logos. The public was then presented with a selection of just three logos, and invited to vote via the Internet, with voting from 7 December 2009 to 31 January 2010.

For the public, it was a kind of Clayton's choice (Fig.1). There was: Number 1, the stars; Number 2, the what-were-they-thinking bat's ear; and Number 3: can a cow-carrot-creek hieroglyph qualify as a logo? As for the other 3,419 proposed logos, we are left wondering what might have been.

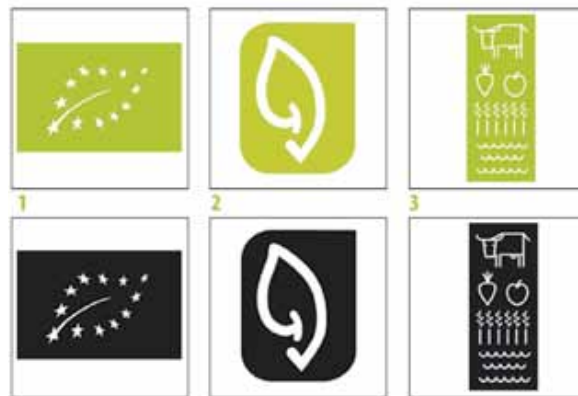


Figure 1: From 3422 competition entries, three were presented to the public for an internet vote.

Number 1 was the winner (Fig.2). It attracted 63% of the 130,000 votes cast. The winning logo was submitted by German student, Dusan Milenkovic (Mann & Reyniers, 2010). This logo has been adopted and is compulsory on all European organic produce from 1 July 2010.



Figure 2: Europe's new organics logo, compulsory from 1 July 2010.

Those expecting a logo to be strong, bold and forthright will be disappointed with the new European organics logo. Jury member Urs Niggli (2009) defends the choice: "The graphical design is soft-footed and elegant. A further advantage ... is that it is not a dominant one, it is low profile in a gentle way ... it won't compete with attractive private, regional or national logos, but it will

add a congenial ‘green European element’”. This apologia for the new logo introduces new criteria absent from the competition guidelines.

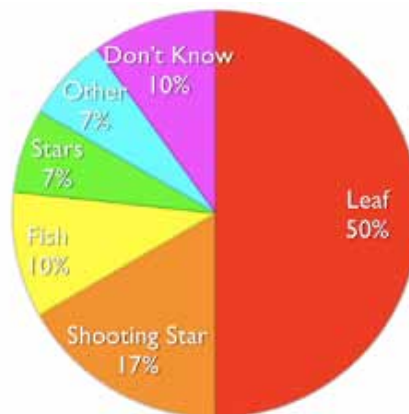
Reading the EU’s New Logo

The rationale for the new logo is described as follows: “Two well known symbols form the basis of the EU Organic Logo: The European flag – official symbol of the European Union since 1986 – and a leaf that is used in a variety of shapes to symbolise nature and sustainability. The combination of these two symbols creates a unique visual element that is self explanatory and appealing” (European Commission, 2010a, p.2).

To test the Commission’s claim that Europe’s new organics logo is “self explanatory”, I presented the logo, in an informal survey, to randomly selected travellers (N=30; 15 M & 15 F) on an Australian interstate carrier. Respondents were advised that: “This is a new food logo” and were asked two questions: (a) “What does it look like to you? How would you describe it?” and (b) “What do you think it stands for?”.

Half of the respondents said that the logo looked like a leaf (Fig.3). Half nominated something else. A male visitor from the Netherlands suggested that the logo looked like “the flag of Australia”. Seventeen percent said it looked like “a shooting star” and a further 7% said it looked like “stars”. Ten percent said it looked like “a fish”. The remaining 17% opted for either something else or “don’t know”.

Figure 3: What Europe’s new organics logo looked like to respondents (N=30).



These results suggest that the new logo is far from “self explanatory” as claimed by the European Commission (2010a, p.2). It also suggests that this logo has an issue in that what purports to be the dominating graphical motif, the leaf, has gone unrecognised by half of the respondents.

A falling star is an unfortunate logo element - albeit an unintentional element - representing as it does a fast burn, a short life, and a rapid extinction; all connotations that the organics sector can well do without. This survey outcome suggests that the logo did not undergo the standard market trialling and testing procedures that one would expect, including exposure to and feedback from focus groups.

Responses to what the logo might mean included: “no idea” (a popular choice); “would be hard to pick what it is”; “a sort of vegetable”; “some kind of fish”; “fresh food”; “Australian made”; “probably vegetables, wouldn’t be fast food”; “something healthy”; “fresh seafood”; “some kind of herbs”; “something good”; “stars represent quality, excellence”; “healthy living”; “fruit and veg”; “good food because it’s green”. One respondent mentioned ‘organic’ suggesting that the logo was: “portraying natural, green, organic, natural, probably butter”. Again, these results suggest that Europe’s new organics logo is far from “self explanatory”.

Use of the New Logo

The new logo does not supersede the plethora of existing organics logos currently in use within Europe. The new logo can sit side by side with the current logos and can be supplemented with adjacent text - provided that the text, for example ‘Organic’, remains separate from the logo (and outside the envelope of the logo). Niggli (2009) has commented that: “Personally I think that with the supplement of ‘organic’, ‘ökologisch’, ‘biologique’, ‘økologisk’, all three logos will be a very good and visible organic EU-logo. It is also important to note the ancillary word-mark is very important as there is no picture or pictogram which can deliver the information ‘organic’ by itself”.

All organic food produced within the EU must bear the new logo, the “Organic

Farming Collective Mark” (European Commission, 2010b) from 1 July 2010. It is not compulsory for imported organic items to bear the logo, but it may be used thereon. The code number of the certifier, the logo of the certifier, and provenance data can appear adjacent to the logo. Provenance can be stated as: ‘EU Agriculture’; ‘Non-EU Agriculture’; or ‘EU/non-EU Agriculture’. These vague claims can be optionally supplemented with specific country of origin claims (European Commission, 2010a).

The “preferred” logo colours are white for the stars (i.e. reversed out) on a ground of a designer light green (Hex colour 003399; Pantone 376). The green of the new European logo is very similar to the signature colour that the German supermarket chain, Aldi, uses on its organic range in Australia. The “preferred” font is Myriad Pro (a sans serif font resembling Futura).

Organivores, those in pursuit of an organic diet and lifestyle, can expect to see Europe’s new organics logo on imported organic foods in supermarkets, in Australia and elsewhere, during the course of 2010.

Lessons and Opportunities

In the future we may reasonably expect to see an Australian organics logo, and perhaps, in the fullness of time, a global organics logo. It is unfortunate that the European model of organics logo creation offers little to emulate. With its lack of transparency, its pseudo-democracy, its exclusion of professional graphic artists from the design process, and the less than compelling outcome - the leaf/falling-star/fish/don’t know logo - the European experience offers few positive lessons. There are lessons in what not to do, but no procedural model for developing the future Australian and global organics logos, that are by now due.

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