

## Europe's new logo for organic food

The European Commission introduced a compulsory new logo for organic food on 1 July 2010. The new logo was very prominent at BioFach, Europe's biggest organics fair held at Nuremberg, Germany, in February 2011. However, that is not to say the logo is either popular or well understood.

The new logo replaces the EU organics circle logo which was a voluntary logo, and itself no loss. The new logo is mandated on all organic products packaged in the EU. There is a phase-in period until 1 July 2012. Eurocrats reason that, by then, stocks of packaging with the old logo, or without a pan-European logo, ought to be exhausted. Exceptions to the 2012 cut-off date will be allowed for products with a particularly long shelf life.

The logo design is described as stars in a leaf pattern. It is a green rectangle with the stars reversed out. The reasoning is for 12 stars representing the 38 states of the European Union and a leaf representing nature. In the mind's eye of a few Eurocrats, the formula is 'Stars + Leaf = Europe + Nature = Organics'.

The logo relies for meaning on the logic of its own iconography. There is no accompanying text such as 'organic', 'bio', 'eko', 'eckologisch' 'ökologisch', 'biologique', 'økologisk' etcetera to give a clue to the consumer.

The logo is accompanied by two lines of code; the first for the certification and the second for the origin of the ingredients. The upper line of code is an alpha-numeric string of the form AB-CDE-999, representing the two digit country code of the certifier, the code for the certifier, and the code for producer. The second line is a statement of the origin of ingredients, of the form 'EU agriculture', 'Non-EU agriculture', or 'EU/Non-EU agriculture'. A specific country of origin may be stated where at least 98% of the ingredients are from a single country. The preferred font is Myriad Pro, which is a sans-serif font resembling Futura.

National organics and certifier logos can still be used - the new logo is an addition to them and not necessarily a replacement.

The colour of the new logo is specified as a particular green (Hex colour 003399; Pantone 376) and this is the requirement on full-colour labels. For monochrome labels the new logo can appear in the colour of the labelling. Imported organic products do not require the new logo, however they may use it.

The new logo was a top-down exercise in Eurocracy - it seems there was no consumer, certifier, or farmer demand for a new or mandated EU organics logo.

I did not find any enthusiasm at BioFach for the new logo - other than from the Eurocrats who introduced it. A French exhibitor commented "I prefer the AB, Agriculture Biologique, logo". And it's easy to agree with him. The 'AB' is a logo that is stylish, distinctive, informative and has a strong street-presence in France.

One exhibitor complained: “ “We had to change the film for all of our packaging”. A German exhibitor commented: “Ah, I’m laughing, a lot of money for nothing, what will it do?”.

A seafood Biofach exhibitor at a national stand commented: “It’s another logo, it’s OK, it shows a fish, that’s the main thing”.

There was no budget allocated for marketing and promotion of the new logo, and that is an unfortunate oversight. This is clearly not a logo that ‘sells itself’ and nor is it sufficiently well executed to be ‘self explanatory’ in contrast, for example, to the FairTrade logo.

The new organics logo was the result of a competition to which EU art and design students were eligible to submit. From the 3,422 entries, three finalists were selected by a closed committee and those three candidates were then presented for a public internet vote.

A design competition worked for the Sydney Opera House in creating a world-treasured icon that says ‘Sydney, Australia’ to the world. Time will tell whether the EU stars-on-green-rectangle logo shares a similar fate and wins hearts, recognition and even ‘iconic’ status.

The idea of a pan-European organics logo has undoubted merit. As does the idea of a global organics logo. For those two reasons, at least, the new EU organics logo is a disappointment. The new logo is not strong, vibrant, striking or compelling. It’s message is at best cryptic, and at worst elusive. It has dubious scalability where on sufficiently small labels it becomes little more than a green rectangle as the green ink bleeds the stars into oblivion.

There are numerous European logos that have proven their worth in the marketplace over years and decades - by being scaleable, ‘readable’, readily recognized, and engendering consumer trust. The new logo appears to have started with a blank slate to reinvent the wheel without a nod to seventy years of prior product differentiation for organic food. And the parochiality of the new Euro logo - with its Euro-stars - takes us none of the way towards a global organics logo, and that seems a lost opportunity.

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<b>In a Nutshell</b>
Started 1 July 2010 Phase-in finishes 1 July 2012 Compulsory on EU-packaged organic products Compulsory certifier code Compulsory origin statement Colour is pantone 376 Co-labelling with national labels is OK Co-labelling with private certifier labels is OK Optional use on imports More information at <a href="http://www.organic-farming.eu">www.organic-farming.eu</a>



Plate 1. Pasta Sauce displaying the New EU organics logo



Plate 2. Pizza displaying the Agriculture Biologique logo together with the new EU organics logo.



Plate 3. Apple Chips with a monochrome label displaying the EU organics logo in a non-standard colour.



Plate 4. Organic carrots displaying the new EU organics logo and a Bio logo..