



Organic Foods from Denmark - Rules and Inspection



Denmark has had a long tradition of organic farming, and over the years organic food production has attracted great attention from politicians, authorities and organisations.

Effective inspection of organic production has given Danish organic products a high degree of credibility. Credibility has been an important condition for the marketing of organic products.

Trade in organic foods has been widespread in Denmark. Organic products have been sold mainly through ordinary sales channels such as supermarkets, but also sales at fairs, subscription sales, internet sales and farm outlets have been common.

Danish legislation on organic food production

Denmark was one of the first countries in the world to introduce legislation on organic production. The first Act was issued in 1987. A short time later, the state inspection logo, known as “the red Ø logo”, was introduced.

The interest in organic production increased also at the European level, resulting in European legislation on organic production of vegetable foods in 1991. In the summer 1999

the work for a common European legislation culminated with the adoption of rules on animal production. Denmark has been very active during the entire negotiation process in influencing the European legislation.

The member states have always had the right to supplement the European organic regulation with stricter national rules on certain areas. Denmark has taken advantage of this and has implemented more stringent national organic requirements and stricter inspection rules. A Danish key issue has been animal welfare. Denmark has implemented a number of rules so animals can satisfy their natural needs and avoid painful stress factors.

Another leading Danish issue has been traceability, the flow of organic food “from stable to table”, which has resulted in stricter and more detailed rules on documentation systems and mass balances.

100% organic feed

Since 2005 Denmark has had the ability to provide enough organic cereals for the feed production. Use of non-organic cereals for organic animals has therefore been abandoned in Denmark. From June 2006 all ruminant fodder of agricultural origin has to be organically produced.

No additives, please

It has been important to Denmark that organic foods preferably contain no additives. Additives have had to be very essential before their use has been accepted. The Danish list of additives allowed in organic food produced from meat, milk and eggs is very short, and does for instance not allow nitrites, colouring agents or flavourings. This list will apply until the autumn 2007, when the European positive lists applicable to all categories of organic food in are expected to come into force. Denmark has been working towards a more restrictive European legislation on the use of additives in organic products.



Efficient state inspection from stable to table

It is difficult to compare private and state inspection. Public authorities are subject to parliamentary control and are therefore regarded as independent and impartial. The same effect can of course be ensured by accreditation of private inspection bodies.

In Denmark state inspection is carried out by authorities under the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs. The primary production is inspected by the Danish Plant

Directorate, while processing and trade of food is inspected by the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration. Some undertakings are inspected daily, while other undertakings have inspection visits at least once a year; cf. the section on “Frequent inspection”.



Inspection of organic foods in the EU applies to all stages from stable to table. Firms that are exclusively wholesalers or store organic foods at the wholesale level are encompassed by the organic food inspection. Denmark considers this an important condition for an effective inspection system thereby enhancing the possibility of carrying out “cross checks”. In Denmark the organic firms accountancy and documentation of product origin and organic status are being cross-checked as part of the ordinary organic food inspection as well as inspected by a special task force exclusively set up for that very purpose.

Cross-checking has been one of the most efficient means in uncovering possible fraudulent trade in organic products. Almost all of the few cases of fraud or serious errors have been discovered by comparing accounting information from different undertakings. Danish authorities therefore attach great importance to cross-checking as a means of complementing the ordinary inspection of the companies’ internal accounts. Although only a small percentage of all transactions are cross-checked, the fact that these checks *are* carried out, is believed to have a significant preventive effect.



The Danish Public Access Act

The inspection of organic food production is usually carried out as part of the inspection according to the ordinary food legislation. The Danish inspectors are impartial and independent. They have no personal or financial interest in the inspected undertakings. Like all Danish authorities, they are subject to the Danish Public Access Act and the Danish Public Administration Act.

Basically The Public Access Act is securing that any Danish citizen can request access to the files of the public administration with a few exemptions such as strictly confidential or personal information. The purpose of The Public Access Act is that everybody should be able to gain access to background material that has been leading to decisions made by public authorities. The Public Administration Act ensures that a citizen has the opportunity to submit his or her comments before a decision is made.

Frequent inspections

All organic farmers need a license for organic operation from the authorities, and it is a condition for all organic production, processing or labelling that the work may not

start until the authorities have issued a report stating all the conditions for the activities.

The rate of inspections in food companies, with and without notice, depends on the complexity of the production involved. Most inspection visits in food companies are made without notice, and in practice many processors are visited more frequently than required by the rules on organic production. Some of the big slaughterhouses, for instance, have daily inspections, while a potato producer or packer may only need one ordinary visit a year.



Inspectors visit organic farms that are selling organic produce at least once a year. In addition about 10 per cent of the organic farms are visited for a second time at random without notice during the year. Every year all authorized organic farms have to report their organic fields, crops and husbandry. This yearly report is the basis for the inspection. The inspectors also review the accounts and check that vouchers, feeding plans and the health care records are satisfactory. The animals and living conditions of the different animals are inspected, likewise food and grazing areas available in accordance with the organic legislation.

During the inspection visit at the farm, an inspection report is drafted. The inspection report is the basis for the decision on the continued authorization of the farm.

Competent and independent inspectors

All inspectors have relevant educations in, e.g. agriculture, food science or veterinary science, and they are full-time employees of local inspection units. As the inspectors carry out inspections according to the ordinary food legislation and to the rules on organic production, they visit the same firm frequently and have a thorough knowledge of the firm's production and undertaking.

The inspectors' competence in inspecting organic production and processing is ensured through annual courses for new and experienced inspectors, through working groups and detailed inspection manuals.

Fraudulent production is reported to the police

The Danish authorities intervene when met with irregularities in the organic production. Downright fraud is reported to the police, and in cases of serious or persistent violation of the rules, the undertaking can be divested of the right to market organic products for a period of up to five years. Minor violations are handled through the imposition of warnings, orders, administrative fines or prohibition against marketing a product. All violations of the rules on organic production by companies are published, which has a great preventive effect.

The Ø logo

The red or black Ø logo is an inspection label. The logo shows that the latest preparation of the product has been performed by a company inspected by Danish authorities. From the very beginning, the inspection of organic foods has been very important for Denmark.

The Ø logo shows that the latest preparation of the product has taken place in a Danish company inspected by the public authorities. Therefore, the logo can be seen on products that originate from Danish organic farms and on imported products that are processed or packed and labelled in Denmark.



The European logo

The EU logo is guaranteeing that an organic product is produced and inspected according to the EU organic standard and standards equivalent to that. However the EU logo cannot yet be used on labels of organic fodder.

After state funded campaigns in 2004 and 2005 the logo has become well-known amongst many Danish consumers. The use of the Ø logo or EU logo is voluntary. They can be used alone or in combination.



*The Danish Plant Directorate
The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration*