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US and Switzerland sign organic equivalency agreement

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On 9th July 2015 Switzerland and the US signed an organic equivalency agreement. The new trade pact will facilitate the import and export of organic products between both countries.

Under the terms of the agreement, US products that carry a regional organic certification can be retailed as organic in Switzerland and vice versa, which eliminates the need for a double set of certifications. The US has already signed similar equivalency agreements with Canada (2009), the EU (2012), Japan (2013) and Korea (2014).

“The arrangement opens Switzerland for US organic farmers, ranchers and food makers,” said Robert Anderson, Senior Trade Advisor for the US’s Organic Trade Association (OTA). “Equally important, coupled with the historic US-EU organic equivalency agreement, it creates streamlined access to continental Europe’s strong organic marketplaces, and promotes mutually beneficial flows of organic ingredients between Switzerland, Europe and the US.”

Indeed, the fact that Switzerland is not part of the European Union but sources ingredients from EU countries (and the other way around), has in the past complicated trade relations between Switzerland and the US. With the new agreement in place, both countries – as well as the organic markets in the rest of the EU – are set to benefit.

Swiss organic agricultural association Bio Suisse said that they welcome the agreement.

Switzerland is one of the biggest organic markets in Europe. In fact, the European Research Institute of Or-

ganic Agriculture (FiBL) estimates that Swiss consumers have the highest per-capita rate of organic consumption in the world.

According to Bio Suisse, the organic food market grew 7.5% to 2,207bn CHF in 2014. This means that certified organic products now account for 7.1% share of the entire food market in Switzerland. Fresh produce and packaged goods were the most successful categories growing 4.5% and 7.3% respectively.

The two largest supermarket groups in Switzerland, Migros and Coop, both reported an increase in organic food retail, as did the small yet growing organic specialty retail sector. And although organic farming in Switzerland is growing – Bio Suisse reports that last year, 5979 farms operated according to the Bio Suisse certification rules which marks an increase of 1.6% – the constantly rising consumer demand for organic products can't be met by national agriculture alone.

The organic market in Switzerland is therefore relying on imports. Conversely, many Swiss manufacturers are eyeing up the lucrative US organic market, which according to OTA's annual study grew 11.3% to 39.1bn USD in 2014.

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