

EU finds 'many weaknesses' in Indian certification of organic products

DAMNING AUDIT. Certification bodies committing severe infringements of NPOP, says report

Subramani Ra Mancombu
Chennai

In a damning report, a European Union (EU) audit has found "many weaknesses" in the certification of Indian organic products for exports to the EU. This includes farmers, who are part of organic producer groups (PGs), knowing nothing about organic farming. The audit, carried out by the EU's DG Health and Food Safety during November 14-25 in 2022, found the weaknesses in the supervision and implementation of the controls at various levels.

The audit team found "severe infringements" of the National Programme on Organic Production (NPOP) by 26 PGs. The violations included very poor or no implementation of the NPOP and farmers knowing



FLAGRANT VIOLATION. The report said serious non-compliances were systematically found among certification bodies during inspections and, in several cases, no action was taken against them

nothing about organic farming. "In many cases, farmers did not even know about their PGs or their internal control system (ICS). They applied unauthorised substances and/or chemical fertilizers," it said.

INSPECTOR'S FOLLY

In many cases, the evaluation committee faced problems loc-

ating the PGs, which had no office at given addresses. In one case, a farmer had a large pile of various plastic materials, partly burned in the middle of an organic field. "While this was recorded as a non-compliance, the inspector did not notice an unburned plastic jug on the top of the pile that had contained Chlorothalonil (a non-systemic

fungicide), not allowed for organic production," the audit pointed out.

"The most significant among the weaknesses is that recent unannounced controls by APEDA as well as the audit team's own findings show a high degree of non-compliance with the NPOP at producer groups and poor quality of inspections," a report of the audit said.

The report said the structure and organisation of the control system continues to remain as it was during a 2015 audit.

The EU audit was also carried out on the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), which is the coordinator in implementing the NPOP. APEDA also acts as the secretariat of the National Accreditation Body which gives nod to bodies that certify and guarantee organic production.