

Use of non-renewable fossil water

Information note for BIOSUISSE ORGANIC (BSO) operations outside of Switzerland (version 01/2026)

Basis: [Bio Suisse Standards, part V, chap. 3.6](#)

Introduction

The following information sheet serves as a guide for BIOSUISSE ORGANIC producers and smallholder groups that use non-renewable fossil water in accordance with the Bio Suisse definition. It also serves as information to their inspection bodies and importers.

BIOSUISSE ORGANIC certification will no longer be possible for farms that use non-renewable and fossil water for their export crops. The definition requires that both criteria must be met simultaneously. Both the aquifer used and the water quality are taken into account [Whymap Groundwater Resources](#) (Major Groundwater Basins, indicators 'low' and 'very low') provides a good overview of the regions affected. In these regions, BIOSUISSE ORGANIC certification may still be possible under certain conditions. The relevant conditions and exemptions are described in this information sheet.

The Bio Suisse guidelines, [Part V, Art. 3.6.3](#), are the basis for this ban and also provide information on its scope and transition periods:

3.6.3 Ban on the use of non-renewable fossil water resources

Non-renewable fossil water resources are groundwater deposits in mostly very deep aquifers that have had no or only a minimal connection with the water cycle for at least 10'000 years. These are finite groundwater deposits that are used in arid regions, among other things, for the irrigation of agricultural crops. Bio Suisse takes the view that the use of non-renewable fossil water resources for the production of Bud products is not sustainable and accordingly not compatible with the credibility of the "Bud" trademark.

Individual producers and smallholder groups operating in arid regions, where it can be assumed that there are non-renewable and also fossil water resources, must provide additional information about their sources of water. Based on this information, the BSO certification body assesses whether or not the water used is permissible for BSO certification. The renewability of an aquifer is classified with reference to the [Whymap Groundwater Resources](#) (Major Groundwater Basins, indicators "low" and "very low"). As the depth of water abstraction increases, the likelihood of encountering non-renewable fossil water also rises, which means that well depth is crucial for classification. The classification can be reassessed taking into account operation-specific, scientifically substantiated data.

The following transitional periods apply:

- Individual producers ([Individual producers Part V, Art. 3.1.1.1, Page 259](#)) have a transition period until 31 December 2026. No applications from new operations will be accepted during the transition period.
- Smallholder groups ([Smallholder groups Part V, Art. 3.1.1.3, Page 259](#)) have a transition period until 31 December 2028.

The classification of whether a farm falls under the definition and is therefore subject to the ban is carried out by the responsible BIOSUISSE ORGANIC certification body using a specified scheme. Regional aspects are taken into account in this process. If there is no agreement on the classification, a new classification can be requested on the basis of operation specific, scientifically substantiated data. This information sheet describes the three cases in which a reassessment may be considered.

1. Several water sources are used

The whole farm approach is an important criteria for Bio Suisse. This means that farms with multiple water sources are generally not eligible for Bio Suisse certification, if one of these sources is non-renewable and fossil, according to the Bio Suisse definition. However, small proportions, measured in relation to the farm's total irrigation requirements, can be tolerated. Alternatively, the farm can apply to Bio Suisse for a temporary exemption, if they are willing and can demonstrate that they will be able to dispense with the non-renewable, fossil water source in the foreseeable future.

The total water consumption of the farm or smallholder group, broken down by the various water sources, must be provided. The [water management plan](#) (spreadsheets R1&R2) or a comparable presentation is suitable for this purpose.

→ **The required documentation must be submitted to the competent BIOSUISSE ORGANIC certification body.**

2. Geohydrological expert report:

A geohydrological expert report can be used to prove that the aquifer used for irrigation is renewable. Such a report may be comprehensive and costly.

The following requirements must be met:

- a) Geological and hydrological data necessary for understanding the subsurface structure and natural conditions must be included.
- b) Verifiable, documented investigations and data collection on the aquifer used to obtain current and site-specific data must be included.
- c) Hydrological evaluations, including a description of the groundwater regime and quantification of recharge, must be carried out.
- d) Evaluation and conclusion, including justification with comprehensible statements on the renewal of the aquifer.
- e) The expert report must be carried out by an independent body with proven professional competence for such an assessment.

→ **The complete report including attachments, must be submitted to the responsible BIOSUISSE ORGANIC certification body.**

3. Isotope Analysis:

Isotope analyses can be used to obtain information about the origin and age of the water being analysed. These tests provide indications as whether the irrigation water comes from aquifers close to the surface or from deep, older aquifers.

However, isotope analyses do not allow quantitative statements to be made about groundwater recharge or the renewal rate of the aquifer.

Procedure:

- a) The inspection body takes a water sample from the irrigation water. The water sample (not a mixed sample) is placed in a clean, labelled container (approx. 5 ml – may vary depending on the laboratory).
- b) The inspection body takes a sample of the product. The product sample must be representative; fruit or plant parts can be sent in (approx. 200 g – may vary depending on the laboratory).
- c) Both samples are sent to an accredited laboratory for isotope determination: e.g. Agroisolab GmbH in Jülich, Germany.

→ **The analysis results must be sent to the responsible BIOSUISSE ORGANIC certification body.**

For general questions on the subject of non-renewable fossil water, please contact Bio Suisse (international@bio-suisse.ch).