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## Request for advice

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On 4 May 2009, Gerda Verburg, the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV), sent the following letter (reference VD.2009/707) to the President of the Health Council.

One of the topics included in the Health Council's 2009 Work Programme was the question "How healthy are organically cultivated foods?".

Society is increasingly interested in organically produced food, partly because consumers assume that it is also healthier. For instance, people's natural immune system is thought to benefit from the consumption of organic products. A consortium, which investigated this issue at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) and the organic sector, published its report in late 2007. In the course of this study, chickens were given either organic or conventional feed. Several differences between the two groups of chickens were observed. However, the investigators were unable to reach agreement concerning the interpretation of their research results.

In their report, the researchers recommended that further research be carried out. Before taking a decision on the funding of such research, the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) would like the Health Council to draw up an advisory report on how such research should be conducted and evaluated. One aspect involves questions about methodology, such as "What are the essential elements of a study into a product's impact on health?". "Which biomarkers can be identified?". The other aspect concerns the inter

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pretation of the findings. “If differences can be found between products produced in different ways, what is the significance of such findings in terms of the healthiness of the products in question?”.

I would be grateful if this advisory report could be in my possession before the end of 2009.

The Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality

(signed)

G. Verburg