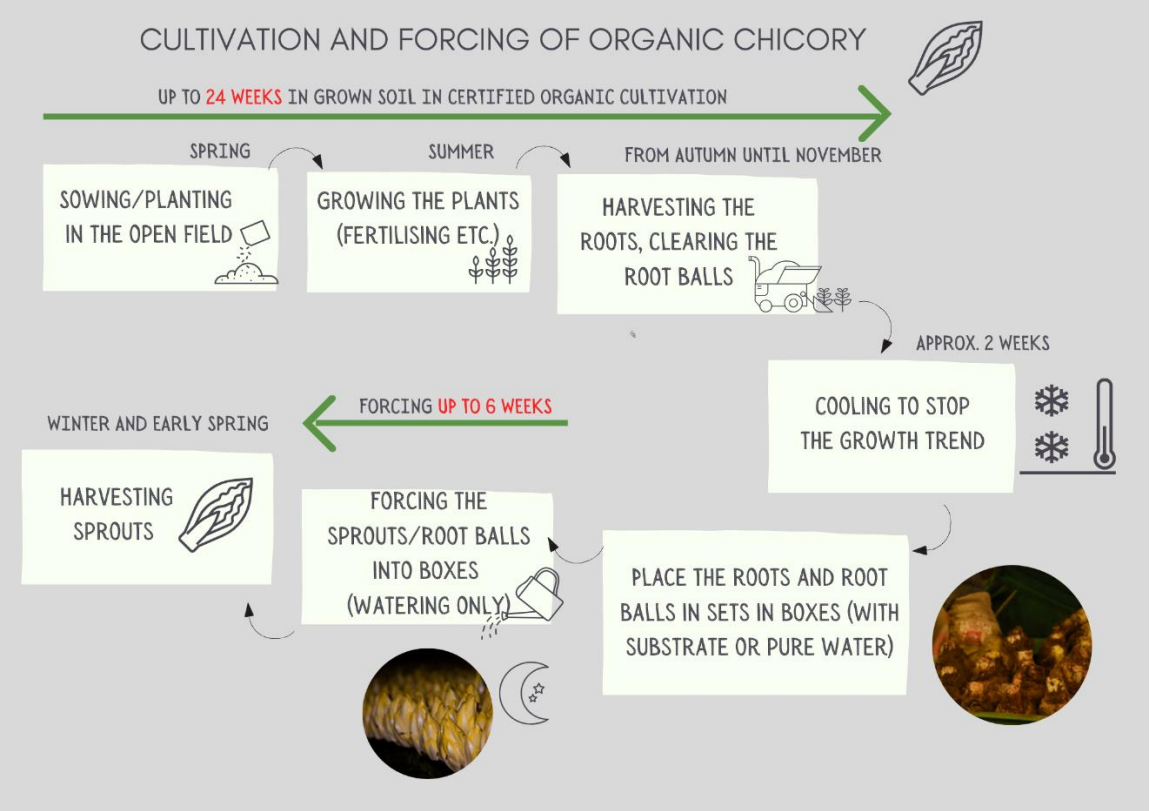
Proposal to include forcing of ornamental bulbs and chives in organic farming

Germany and the Netherlands propose an amendment of Annex II Part I No. 1.3 of Regulation (EU) 2018/848) to enable the forcing of ornamental bulbs and chives in organic farming on pure water or an allowed growing medium.

Cultivation and forcing of chicory

According to Article 5(f)(ii) of Regulation (EU) 2018/848 , soil-based plant production is a general principle of organic farming. In Annex II, Part I, point 1.3(b), the forcing of chicory on either clear water or an allowed growing medium is authorised by way of derogation.

The following illustrations are intended to visualise the exact process of the cultivation of chicory:



Cultivation and forcing of ornamental bulbs

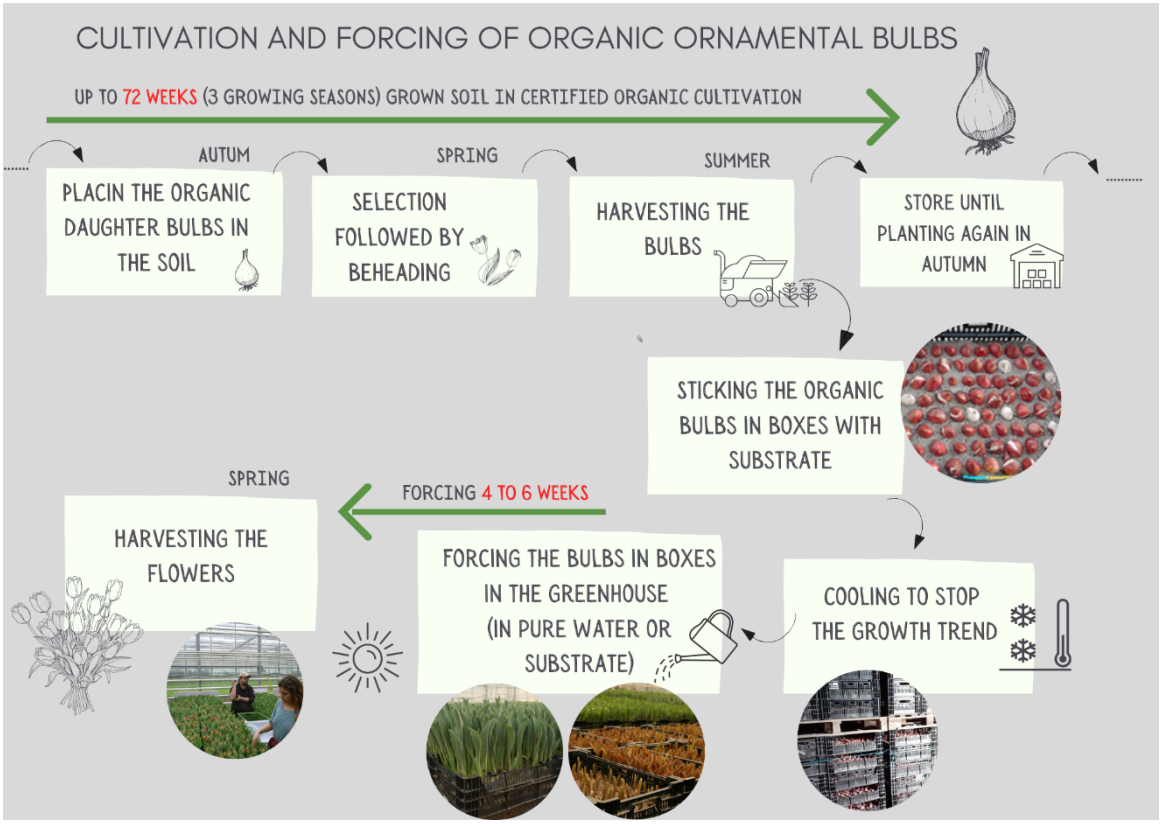
The forcing of chives and ornamental bulbs hardly differs from that of chicory.
In forcing, the main development steps take place in the growth process in the soil. The bulbs are produced in compliance with the requirements of organic farming. Forcing is only a final "push" in the warmth, as the cold temperatures in winter and spring do not allow growth in the open field. This means that forcing is not a new production step, but a second phase in the organical cultivation of bulbs and chives. It is a sensible horticultural opportunity to offer organic flowers and chives from regional production

from colder regions. The quality of the plants does not change during this process: it was already determined during the growth phase in the soil.

In the Netherlands, there are two organically certified companies that force bulbs into flowering. Both of these companies use clear water. The process is as follows: the bulbs are harvested from the land in June/July. The bulbs are dried and stored in conditioned cells at a constant temperature. After drying, the bulbs are peeled and sorted into different sizes, from which the largest bulbs are used for flower production and the smaller bulbs are used for the next growing season in the open field. After “stage research”, in which it is determined how far the flower has developed in the bulb, a schedule can be made from which period the bulbs are drawn into flowering. Based on this schedule, starting from September, bulbs will be placed in a cold room/refrigerator every week. After a cooling period of 13 to 15 weeks (cooling period depends on the cultivar), the bulbs are removed from the cold room/refrigerator and are planted on so-called hydro trays. These trays are filled with clear water without any nutrients. The trays are placed in a cold room, where the bulb starts to form roots. After two weeks, the bulb has made sufficient roots, so then the trays are placed in a greenhouse with a temperature of 15-16 degrees. In 20-25 days, the bulb has grown into a flower that is ready for harvesting. The hydro trays are emptied and cleaned, and then refilled with new bulbs. The remaining water can be re-used.

In Germany, before the new regulation came into force, some organic farms planted organic tulip bulbs in substrate. These were primarily direct-selling vegetable growing businesses, which provided them with good employment and a source of income in the winter. The organic tulip bulbs were not produced in Germany but were purchased from the Netherlands. These companies have stopped forcing tulips. There is currently one organic cut-flower business that, as a conventional operating unit, grows tulips in boxes with soil to supplement the product range and offers them conventionally. There were no companies that forced bulbs in water. Overall, there are more and more small organic businesses in the cut-flower sector that can make good use of forcing flower bulbs to expand their product range. For larger cut-flower businesses with an entire product range, it is important (also in terms of funding) that they can also convert their entire operations in the future. For some nurseries, forcing tulips is also a good additional business and activity in the winter, which they would very much like to practice again.

The picture below shows the cultivation and forcing of ornamental bulbs:



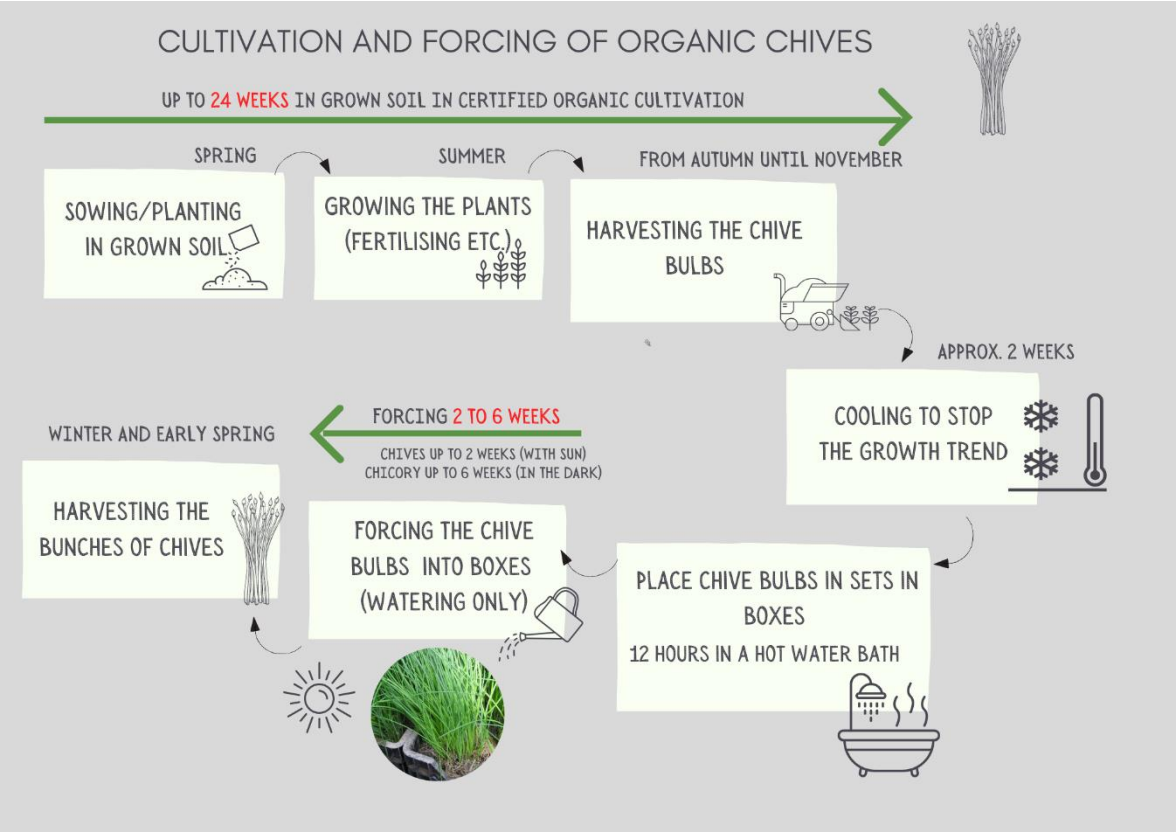
Cultivation and forcing of chives

In Germany chives are planted outdoors in the cultivated soil at the end of March/beginning of April. In autumn, the so-called chive bulbs are cleared. The chive bulbs with soil are then stored in bales in large crates and cooled (open-air cooling or cold rooms). After the chive bulbs have been placed in boxes in batches, growth is stimulated by a 12-hour warm water bath without additives. The subsequent forcing takes place in the greenhouse at 17 °C in boxes placed on tables without additional substrate. It is simply poured with water, there is no fertilizer supply. The forcing period lasts approximately 14-21 days until the chive bundles are harvested. Through forcing, bunched chives are available from November to March. Growing in boxes takes place without additional soil or fertilization, only the storage conditions of the chive bulbs and watering allow the chives to grow.

Many small direct-selling businesses (including social institutions) use chive cultivation to keep them busy in the winter and to supplement their product ranges in early spring. A few companies have also grown larger quantities of chives. There is currently a company that grows chives on tables as a conventional operating unit. These bundles are offered conventionally. The organic chive bulbs are produced by a few specialized companies in natural soil, especially in Germany, and are currently marketed to pot herb companies that sell the grown bulbs including the pot. Smaller nurseries have

produced their own bulbs in native soil. The companies would like to be able to offer regional organic chives again in early spring.

The picture below shows the cultivation and forcing of chives:



Growing sector

As mentioned, the organic sector is currently very small compared to the conventional sector in Germany and the Netherlands. The approval of the process of forcing bulbs and chives could provide opportunities for the organic sector. These sectors could develop more, and the approval of this process could provide the opportunity for new farms to start or to scale up. This could have a positive influence on the growth of the organic sector.

As flower forcing is even more in line with the requirements of the EU Organic Regulation than chicory forcing due to the fact that the bulb is grown for several years in mature soil before forcing, and for the reasons mentioned above, Germany and the Netherlands are in favour of adding the forcing of bulbs to the EU Organic Regulation The reason for this request at this moment is simply because we were too late in the process when this Annex was amended during former negotiations and the Commission then advised to come back to this request at a later moment.

To summarize, we would like to propose that Annex II, Part I, point 1.3 of the EU Organic Regulation be extended to allow the forcing of ornamental bulbs and chive bulbs, either on clear water or on an allowed growing medium.