

Grolink

"There is not one developed and one underdeveloped world,
there is only one world that is badly developed."



Guaranteeing the organic quality
Standards, inspection, certification, accreditation and
regulations

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1 Certification in general

Certification is a system by which the conformity of products to applicable standards is determined and confirmed. This confirmation can be done by:

First party	Supplier
Second party	Customer
Third party	Independent body

"Certification" is normally only used for third party certification.

A third party certification system must be based on an independent system.

General principles for certification programs are developed in the ISO Guide 62 and 65 and in the European Norm 45011 and 45012.

Both products and services can be certified. In recent years certification of Quality systems (as certification according to ISO 9000 and GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices)) has been very popular. Each type of certification must develop verification procedures relevant for what is certified, and for the "risks" involved in non-compliance. Product testing as one example can be very relevant for product certification. For products where safety concerns are high there can be interesting to test each single product while for others a certification of the production process as such can be sufficient. For quality systems certification, certification is based on competency, documentation and procedures.

2 Certification of organic agriculture

Organic agriculture is a production system, and organic products are products originating from such a system. Certification of organic agriculture is primarily certification of a *production method*. Furthermore, in order to be interesting on the market the certification must encompass the handling of products originating from such a production system. The "organic" quality of the product can not be verified through product testing as in most other product related certification systems. Testing can however be used to determine, in some cases, that a product is *not* produced according to the standard (substantial residues of a certain pesticide etc.).

Principles for organic certification programs are developed by the IFOAM Accreditation Program in its Operating Manual. In addition to this certification programs must follow any regulatory demands in the countries of operation as well as in the country where the product is marketed.

2.1 What is certified?

Normally certification of organic production is a "three step" approach with certification of:

1. Producers

The producer and the fields and facilities used in the production.

2. Their production system

The organic production method and processing methods. This includes the documentation and precautionary measures taken for keeping the integrity of the production system.

3. Products

The products finally labelled with the mark (logo, symbol) of the certification program. For bulk products the "mark" is mostly replaced by a trade (transaction) certificate

2.2 Elements of an organic certification system

An organic certification system normally has the following elements:

2.2.1 Standards

Standards should be clearly formulated and communicated to all participants of the certification system as well as available for interested parties. Standards must also comply with existing regulation both in the country of production and in the country where the product is marketed. One must keep in mind that standards will develop continuously.

2.2.2 Contracts and legal framework

All producers within a certification system should be bound by written agreement with clear conditions, and consequences in case of violations. The certification system should be handled by a body with a legal registration and ownership of its certification mark etc.

2.2.3 Inspection

The inspection system must cover:

- Agricultural production
- Transactions between participants
- Storage, Processing
- Labelling and certificates

2.2.4 Certification, approval and handling of violations

Organic agriculture is a production system. The certification of producers and production are in many cases complicated and can not be reduced to simple checklist procedures. This makes the element of decision making, the certification, critical. To have consistent procedures for handling of violations etc. is also very important. Operators must also have a possibility to appeal.

2.2.5 Management

The certification program must also work efficiently, and be able to administer not only the inspection and certification but also complaints and inquiries from outside parties.

2.2.6 Labelling

There must be clear regulations around labelling and the use of certificates and the certification mark. Also the program must monitor the market for any use of its certification by producers not participating in the certification system.

2.2.7 Information

Since certification of organic agriculture is complex and the labelling of an organic product in itself does not provide the consumers with much information, the certification program should inform the public of the standards, inspection and certification procedures. Information directed to the operators (producers) within the certification system is also needed to ensure their proper understanding of standards procedures etc.

2.3 Basic criteria for a certification system

A good concept in the establishment of a certification system is to apply the following criteria to the elements listed above:

Objective	Independent
Transparent	Competent
Credible	Voluntary
Non-discriminatory	Confidential
Cost-effective	Goal-oriented
Easy to communicate	

The criteria are sometimes partially conflicting as is the case with confidentiality and transparency. Which criteria should have the highest priorities must be determined both by the conditions for the production and for the certification system itself as well as by the expectations from the market and legal requirements. Independence, Competency and Objectivity will in most cases be seen as the most essential criteria.

3 Harmonisation, Regulations and Accreditation

3.1 The IFOAM System

3.1.1 IFOAM

The International Federation of Organic Movements (IFOAM), is the global umbrella organisation of the organic movement. Founded in 1972 with 5 founding organisations from Europe, the US and South Africa, it has 770 member organisations in 107 countries today (May 1999).

IFOAM's mission is to represent the worldwide organic movement and provide a platform for exchange and co-operation. IFOAM is committed to a holistic approach in the development of organic farming, production and lifestyle systems, including the sustainable use of resources.

3.1.2 The IFOAM Basic Standards

There were no standards or regulations in earlier times of the organic movement. Producers, processors, scientists and consumers, were simply guided by ideological principles, e.g. to improve soil fertility. As practical experience and scientific knowledge developed so did a more definite understanding of what constitute organic methods of farming, processing and management.

The IFOAM Basic Standards for Organic Production and Processing represent over 20 years of practical fieldwork and scientific research of member organisations worldwide. The content, structure and language of the document have evolved over time. Early versions, like most existing organic standards at the time, were simply structured, including general principles and description of farm practices. Standards drafting grew more thorough and complex as practical and scientific knowledge developed. Also in keeping with consumer expectations and developments in inspection and certification procedures.

The IFOAM standard setting process is highly participatory and democratic. Every amendment or addition to the document goes through a two-year consultation process (in-between general

assemblies), drawing input from the membership as well as others concern. Motions are then prepared by the IFOAM Standards Committee for open debate before a vote at the IFOAM general assembly.

For the above reason, the IFOAM Basic Standards are widely accepted by the organic movement worldwide. It is currently the only international organic standards available. It is an NGO document, but because it represents a global consensus, it has been used as a reference for many governments in organic legislation, e.g. the EU, Argentina.

3.1.2.1 Application

The IFOAM Basic Standards today, is intended to serve as a framework for certification programmes worldwide to develop their own national or local standards. It is the reference Standard in the implementation of the IFOAM Accreditation Programme (IAP).

3.1.2.2 Uniformity or equivalence

IFOAM does not insist on uniformity in organic standards. It is antithesis to the movement, founded to respect the diversity of natural organic systems against mono-cropping systems. The IFOAM Basic Standards supports local decision-making and standards development by highlighting the need for local determination of appropriate minimum requirements.

IFOAM however, is concern to maintain unity in diversity, and a level playing field for all stakeholders in the practice and development of organic agriculture. Whilst uniformity is not insisted upon, there is burden of proof for equivalence based on the Basic Standards in the IFOAM Accreditation Programme.

3.2 IFOAM Accreditation

Besides the Basic Standards, IFOAM also developed and publish the IFOAM Criteria for Organic Certification. Whilst based on ISO guide 65 and EN 45011, IFOAM's Criteria draws from the experience of the movement and is specifically tailored for organic certification. Like the standards, it is recognized that procedures and management structures of certification programmes may differ due to local social, cultural, political and economic and regulatory conditions.

IFOAM is not involved in certification. The IFOAM Criteria along with the IFOAM Accreditation Programme (IAP), was established to further strengthen the organic assurance system. It offers the global oversight, which has been lacking, for the organic guarantee system for domestic as well as international trade. There is currently no "official" international system or procedure to assess equivalence between organic certification bodies of different countries. Although not officially recognized, IFOAM provides such a service through the IAP.

3.2.1 The IFOAM Accreditation Programme

The IFOAM Accreditation Programme (IAP) was started in 1992.

Its main features are:

- a voluntary system open to every certification body, private or state.
- based on IFOAM Basic Standards and Criteria for Certification
- making an international guarantee for organic foods a reality.
- interaction with state or supranational regulations to avoid redundancy.

The IAP accredits local, national or international certification bodies, based on application. It is a voluntary programme. Not all existing certification programmes are accredited by IFOAM.

To distinguish between IFOAM as a movement and the IAP as a professional service, a separate entity, the International Organic Accreditation Services, Inc. (IOAS) was established by IFOAM in Feb. 1997, to operate the IAP. The IOAS is incorporated as a non-profit corporation in Delaware, US.

The office is in North Dakota, USA. It is run by an international Board, which is appointed by the IFOAM World Board.

Accreditation in this context means the assessment of the performance of a certification body against the IFOAM Criteria and the certification body's standards against the IFOAM Basic Standards.

The accreditation process includes:

- Application
- Documentation screening
- Assignment of an evaluation visit
- Accreditation decision by the IOAS Accreditation Committee.
- Annual review, based on annual reports
- Re-evaluation as necessary; minimum re-evaluation once every four years.

Assessing equivalence with respect to different agro-ecological cultural and political economic conditions is not a definite science. Biases are bound to arise. The IOAS address this by including participation of different sector interest (certification, trade, environment, etc.) and geographical spread, on the IOAS Board and Accreditation Committee, to maintain a healthy balance of interests.

Programme Status as of March 21st 2000: see annexe 1.

3.2.2 The IFOAM seal

To increase market influence and value, an IFOAM seal has been launch to be placed on products. Operators certified by IFOAM accredited certification bodies may use the IFOAM seal in combination with the certification mark on their product.



3.3 Regulations

In the eighties countries like France and Denmark as well as a number of states in the USA implemented regulations on organic products. This was often done at the request of organic growers that felt that they needed protection from fraudulent marketing of organics. To a certain extent they were also influenced by political efforts to support or subsidise organic farming. If governments are supposed to pay subsidies to organic farms they are likely to regulate what 'an organic farm' is and how they should be monitored. Only to a minor extent were consumers the driving force in regulations.

The real drive for regulation started when the EU passed its council regulation (EEC) 2092/91. This regulation covers the marketing of products called "organic" (or its equivalent in the nine different languages within the European Union), or other terms that could be understood as implying the same. Since the regulation was passed 24 June 1991 it has been amended 21 times. In addition the regulations has resulted in national regulations in the European Union member states (in Sweden with 9 different regulations).

The EEC 2092/91 was intended to include also animals already from the initial stage, but difficulties to reach agreement with the member states have delayed the implementation of the animal regulation considerably. In June 1999 the member states made a preliminary agreement on these rules.

The regulation covers the production standards and the inspection measures that should be implemented to ensure the integrity of production. The regulation lists all the inputs that may



be used in organic agriculture and identifies the production methods that are allowed and those that are prohibited. Some issues may be decided on the member state level - the possibilities for national variations will be bigger for the animal regulation due to the fact that the differences in conditions and traditions are huge within the European Union.

As the EU is the largest market for organic products and the main importer, the European Regulation has had a major impact all over the world - this to such extent that a lot of production in developing countries are certified according to the EU rules alone and not to any regional or national standard.



In the USA, the Organic Foods Production Act, OFPA, was passed already 1990. However this act requires a lot of additional regulation before it can be implemented. Through a very thorough process involving a specially established industry board - the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) - the US regulation developed. A 'final' proposal was made public in 1998. This proposal got an enormous opposition from the organic sector and consumer groups, mainly because of the allowance for the use of GMOs in organic farming. In total almost 300 000 public comments were sent in to the USDA. The proposal was withdrawn. A new draft was produced early 2000 and was more positively received by the US organic movement.

In Japan, Australia and Canada regulations are under development. Many developing countries and most Eastern European countries have also started to regulate organic agriculture. This has in most cases been triggered by the demands by exporters that want to access the EU market. It has been thought that a regulation is a prerequisite for access to the EU market. However that is not the case, and most attempts to get EU recognition of organic products certified under a legislation in developing countries has failed (Argentina is the only exception so far).

3.3.1 Summary of EU rules re imports

Regulation	Implementation by	Imports
Approval of country (Article 11.1)	EU	Argentina Australia Israel Hungary Switzerland Czech Republic
Approval of a lot of imports on the request of the importer (Article 11.6)	Member states	Most imports (80%)
Approval of certifier	EU after proposal of	One European

The (EEC) 2092/91 has had a tremendous impact also outside the EU. Since the EU is the main importer and the EU regulations are supposed to be followed also for the imports, the EU regulation has been used extensively in other areas of the world. European certifiers actually certify production all around the world as being according to the EU regulation and make no reference to national or regional standards.

There are a number of problems relating to the access of organic products to the European market. Below is an overview of these problems. One main problem is the complexity of the regulations and the lack of transparency. This is further aggravated by the fact that the EU only speaks with governments and refuses to answer requests from the private sector outside the EU.

4 Market acceptance

Both single buyers, traders and certification programs have their own ideas about what organic production is and necessary requirements for inspection etc. So even within the EU there is not a completely "level playing field" on the market for all products that fulfil the requirements for the regulation.

As two examples can be mentioned that the Danish market is increasingly resisting products sprayed with copper, although that treatment is allowed under the EU regulation, and the position of the private KRAV label in Sweden. KRAV is strongly supported by most market actors (all supermarket chains are part of the membership structure of KRAV) meaning that a KRAV certification is a major advantage for market success in Sweden. KRAV runs a certification recognition programs meaning that other certifications can be accepted under the KRAV label when certain conditions are met (where IFOAM Accreditation is the fundament).

This situation is likely to be continued, meaning that in addition to be legally approved, a certification program can benefit from other types of quality insurances like National accreditation, IFOAM Accreditation and possibly ISO 9000 certification. The ability of the certification program to promote its self in the market place also determines the potential for an "added value" of one certification compared to another.

5 Special concerns for developing countries

5.1 Standards and criteria

Current international standards (IFOAM and Codex) are primarily influenced by the practices and ideologies of organic agriculture in the industrialised world, especially in Europe. This is even more the case with the EU regulation. This can cause problems for emerging organic production in third worlds countries or other countries with different conditions. This concerns not only production methods, but even more inspection and certification methods, where European concepts often impose a high cost for organic production in third world countries. One example is the requirement for annual inspections of each farm, which is fairly reasonable for the average producer in Europe, but may be rather over-ambiguous in situations with thousands of smallholders organised in co-operatives.

5.2 International certification versus national certification

In many cases today inspection of organic agriculture in the third world countries are carried out by inspection bodies from Europe or the US imposing certification cost that may exceed the premium obtained from the market. The establishment of local certification programs is a needed development. In some cases that can be done with the assistance of an established certification program which certification is accepted in the markets, and that the responsibility gradually is moved over to a local program. But of course there must first be some production to certify!

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