



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



International Federation
of Organic Agriculture
Movements



United Nations Conference
on Trade and Development

INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE ON HARMONIZATION AND EQUIVALENCE IN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

0609 DB

Terms of Reference

Feasibility of an Organic Sector Multilateral Agreement (MLA) for Recognition among Accreditation Bodies

ITF Secretariat:
Diane Bowen Secretary
d.bowen@ifoam.org
phone +1 414 352 5789
fax +1 253 669 7921

Matthias Fecht Coordinator
m.fecht@ifoam.org
phone +49 228 926 5018
fax +49 228 926 5099

Objective

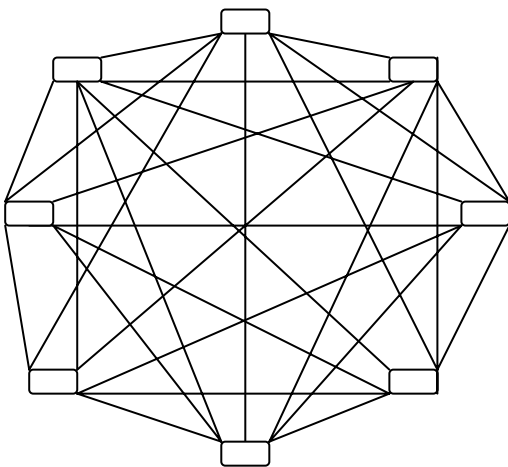
To provide a basis for a decision by ITF on whether to pursue establishing a multilateral recognition agreement (MLA) among those bodies that accredit organic certification bodies.

Background

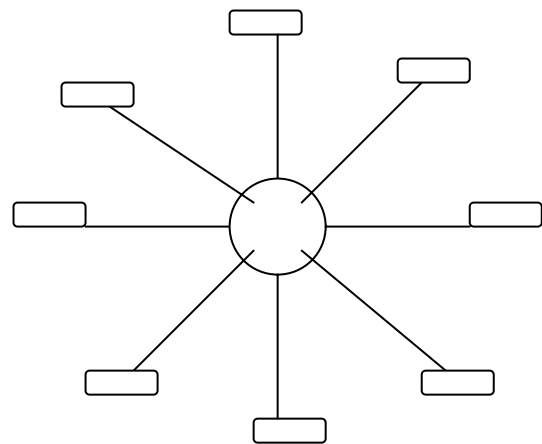
The ITF wants to reduce barriers to organic trade resulting from the proliferation of organic standards/technical regulations and norms related to conformity assessment in the sector. One prong of this work is to facilitate more recognition among private and government accreditation bodies in the organic sector, The ITF’s development of tools such as a set of international requirements for organic certification bodies is one approach to facilitating recognition.

Now comes the question, as raised in the ITF meeting of December, 2005, whether ITF should work to establish an “Organic MLA.” This would presumably be a formal agreement among a group of those bodies that accredit or otherwise approve and supervise organic certification bodies.

Any sort of recognition, bilateral or multilateral, will represent progress toward the ITF’s goal. But a broad multilateral agreement that includes accreditation bodies in both the private and government sectors would represent the highest level of achievement for recognition, presuming that it functions. Given the many actors on this stage, many separate bilateral agreements would be needed to accomplish what one comprehensive multilateral agreement could accomplish via a central mechanism:



Bilateral agreements among 8 actors



multilateral agreement among 8 actors

While conceptually elegant, MLAs have difficulty to achieve practical implementation. The IAF experience and that of others who have established MLAs show that these arrangements do not achieve the ideal represented by the concept. Nevertheless the prospect to provide an alternative to the bilateral agreements with their daunting complexity is what the ITF would like to explore.

The Project

Description

The ITF will commission a feasibility assessment on the establishment of an Organic MLA. The study will cover all the relevant actors – governments, the IAF, and IOAS.

The project will answer the following question:

Could an MLA of the relevant actors be established?

The study will include a brief overview of the approach of the major actors to accreditation and approval, with reference to the coverage of this information in existing ITF papers.

This study will involve consultation and dialogue among the key actors, legal analysis, experiences of government and private sector actors to establish recognition, and relevant case studies of other processes to establish MLAs that include the government and private sectors. It is envisioned that at least one workshop on the topic will be convened as part of the research process. The study will undertake a survey to identify those actors who are tentatively committed to participating in the MLA. The report will include a list of all major actors surveyed, answers to the question on their commitment, and their conditions.

A positive assessment on the question will be accompanied by a rationale based on results of the research and consultation. It will describe the circumstances under which an MLA could be achieved and the probable limitations, based on findings from the study. The potential effect of an MLA on recognition among certification bodies will also be addressed. A positive analysis will also be accompanied by recommendations for next steps to take in pursuit of establishing an Organic MLA.

A negative assessment will be accompanied by a rationale, including analysis of the key determining factors for the assessment. A recommendation will be made for alternative steps that the ITF can take to foster recognition among government and private accreditation bodies.

Timeframe

From January, 2007 to November, 2007.

Deliverables

1. One workshop, (between February and May 2007)
2. First draft report July, 2007
3. Presentation to ITF , Autumn meeting, 2007
4. Final report, November 2007

Budget

50,000 Euro including cost of one workshop and consultant fees.