



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

REPORT

**Eighth Meeting of the
International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture
(ITF)**

06-07 October, 2008

Geneva, Switzerland

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

Table of Contents

Background and Summary	5
Welcome.....	5
Steering Committee Report.....	5
EquiTool: Guide for Assessing Equivalence of Organic Standards and Technical Regulations.....	6
IROCB: International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies	7
ITF Summary Report.....	7
Communiqué	8
Outreach: The Way Forward.....	9
Closing and Reflections.....	10
Annex One MEETING AGENDA.....	11
Annex Two LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	13
Annex Three REPORT OF THE HIGH LEVEL PUBLIC SESSION.....	15

Background and Summary

The eighth and last ITF meeting was held from 6-7 October, 2008 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, with UNCTAD serving as host. The 37 meeting participants included 27 from governments, 7 from intergovernmental organizations and 3 from the private sector/civil society. During this meeting the ITF approved two Tools, which are intended as practical solutions to the problem of trade barriers arising from multiple organic standards and certification performance requirements in the public and private sectors. IROCB (International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies) is a normative document that aims to foster equivalence and recognition in organic conformity assessment. EquiTool (Guide for Assessing Equivalence of Organic Standards and Technical Regulations) is a guideline for assessing the equivalence of one or more sets of standards for organic production and processing. The ITF also reviewed and approved a Summary document which captures all ITF recommendations and agreements, and a final Communiqué. A presentation by the Steering Committee on outreach to promote the ITF Tools and recommendations was followed by small group discussions among participants, who generated and reported ideas for how they can move the ITF results forward in their regions and sectors. The meeting concluded with reflections from members on the process and achievements over the course of the six-year term of the ITF.

The main ITF meeting was followed by a high level public session, during which officials of the three convening organizations (UNCTAD, FAO and IFOAM) delivered remarks and launched the two ITF Tools.

Welcome

UNCTAD Secretary General, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi welcomed the ITF participants and offered opening remarks. He noted that, although WTO is now negotiating drastic cuts in tariffs, technical barriers to trade from standards and related requirements have increased. Citing UNCTAD's conclusion that the multitude of organic requirements are one of the main obstacles preventing developing countries from taking full advantage of the many benefits of organic agriculture, Dr. Supachai commended the ITF for its impressive intellectual analysis and development of practical solutions to this problem. He congratulated the ITF members for their work so far, and urged them to approve the two ITF tools at the meeting and then to go out as ambassadors to promote the tools and recommendations.

Steering Committee Report

The ITF Steering Committee reported on its activity since the 7th meeting in 2007, which included three in-person meetings, two conference calls, the development of a communications strategy and related materials, targeted presentations on the ITF, and preparation of a summary report.

EquiTool: Guide for Assessing Equivalence of Organic Standards and Technical Regulations

The ITF received a brief report on the development process for the EquiTool since the first draft which was presented at the 7th meeting in Bali, 2007. This process included two written consultations and an expert workshop held at the Organic World Congress in June, 2008. Qualitative changes between the first and final drafts were noted, including that the final draft of the tool is more efficiently organized and written in simpler and clearer language.

The EquiTool final draft was presented as a tool to facilitate acceptance that different standards or technical regulations on the same subject fulfill common objectives. The EquiTool recommends reference to international standards as "base standards" for this process; however, any other sets of standards can be compared using the procedure and criteria in this guidance document. EquiTool features a clear process and criteria for identifying and assessing differences in standards. The procedure provides for transparency and allows for exclusions of items that cannot be judged as equivalent. The guide presents the basic elements of the assessment process, which are then followed by a detailed procedure, criteria for assessing variations and considerations for acceptance of differences. The procedure is also presented in a flow chart. An annex contains a sample template to manage the equivalence assessment process.

Discussion: ITF members discussed the utility of choosing an international standard as a base standard, although also noting that EquiTool can also be used to compare any sets of standards. Some participants expressed a preference for using paraphrased or summarized texts in making comparisons rather than the actual production and processing standards, which tend to be detailed. Paraphrased or summarized texts were seen as enabling a focus on objectives. It was noted that expert panels could take up the preparation of paraphrased or summarized texts. Some participants suggested including additional details such as qualifications for expert panels, process for clarifying objectives and more detailed provisions for transparency. However the meeting concluded that revisions such as these should be considered after the Tool is implemented and some experience with it has been gained. ITF participants agreed to the following changes to the final draft prior to its approval:

- 3.2 and 4.1 change to “Panel can be composed of the representative parties/ representatives of.”
- Annex 2 delete “minimizing use “ (of synthetic chemicals).
- Annex 2 change “biotechnology” to “genetic engineering/modification and change “irradiation” to “ionizing radiation.”
- Annex 4: ensure that any quantitative references such as totals in columns have been deleted.
- Annex 4: add cross-reference to 3.6
- Annex 4: Change “MoU” to “Agreement”.
- Annex 4: Add a 4th flow chart regarding resolution of outstanding issues.

The ITF approved the final draft of the EquiTool as amended.

IROCB: International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies

A brief history and overview of the development of IROCB was presented. Consultation on this Tool included two written consultations with a broad group of stakeholders plus two additional written consultations with ITF members in preparation for the 6th and 7th ITF meetings. The document was also shaped through two expert workshops connected to the 6th and 7th meetings, an in-person expert working group prior to preparation of the 4th draft, and intensive group work by the ITF at the 7th meeting.

Participants were reminded that at the 7th meeting the ITF decided that the final IROCB draft for ITF approval would be prepared and distributed in early 2008, and that no further consultation would be undertaken. The Steering Committee noted that the final draft has been formatted and copyedited and one redundancy has been deleted, and therefore that the document is finalized for publication.

Discussion: In response to questions and comments, clarifications were given on the normative character of the document and its potential use for direct accreditation, and about who can use the IROCB. Discussion was taken on whether to delete or modify language to address the questions and concerns expressed, but those making comments agreed not to change the language in light of the discussion. One participant requested consideration of preparing a guidance document for certification bodies to implement the certification requirements. It was mentioned that IFOAM already has a certification program guidance document that contains much of the relevant information. It was agreed that IROCB can also be useful as a guide for developing sectors.

The ITF approved the final draft of IROCB with no amendments.

ITF Summary Report

The ITF Summary Report, which recaps all ITF recommendations and agreements, includes five key conclusions from the ITF work:

- Base acceptance of imports on equivalence.
- Judge equivalence according to International Standards (Codex and IFOAM) and the IROCB.
- Use several mechanisms for import acceptance, as there is no one mechanism that fits all situations.
- Accept diversity and innovation, e.g. group certification and participatory guarantee systems.
- Forge private-public partnership in development and implementation of import regulations.

The ITF's work concentrated on four areas: production/processing standards, certification performance requirements, cooperation and recognition, and future developments. ITF conclusions and recommendations in these areas are based on ITF criteria for solutions, which are a part of the Summary document. Conclusions and recommendations are:

Production Standards

- Standards used in various countries/regions will be different but they should follow a basic framework upon which equivalence can be based.

- The ITF recommends that for import approvals governments use Codex Alimentarius CAC/GL 32 & IFOAM Basic Standards as the basis.
- EquiTool should be used for equivalence assessment.

Requirements for Certification Bodies

- There is one set of international certification performance requirements that can be the basis for equivalence – the IROCB.
- IROCB should be used when regulating imports and also for recognizing certification bodies in private guarantee systems, and when developing requirements for organic certification bodies.

Cooperation and Mutual Recognition

- Governments should utilize and encourage in their regulatory systems, cooperation and mutual recognition in certification and accreditation.
- One evaluation/assessment can form the basis for multiple accreditations.
- A platform for cooperation between accreditation/approval bodies for organic certification should be created.
- Mutual recognition between certification bodies should be used as one option for import approval.¹
- Delegation of the certification decision should be considered (as reflected in IROCB).

System Development

- Group certification should be recognized everywhere.
- Participatory guarantee systems should be considered in the future.

The draft of this paper presented at the meeting contained three highlighted items which were reconciled via ITF's approval of IROCB and EquiTool and approval of one final recommendation, as noted above, on the use of mutual recognition between certification bodies as an option for import approval by governments. During the discussion on this point, one participant pointed out that governments will only be able to accept this option if a) they can clearly see what mutual recognition agreements are happening between certification bodies, and b) there are conditions on the certification bodies e.g. for reporting and oversight. It was also pointed out that up to now there has been no dialogue and exchange between governments and private sector certification bodies regarding imports, and that this recommendation opens the door. The ITF approved all the recommendations in the document.

The ITF approved the Summary Report without amendment.

Communiqué

An updated version of the ITF Communiqué, based on the original document from the 6th ITF meeting, was presented.

The ITF approved the Communiqué without amendment.

¹ This item in the draft paper was approved by the ITF at the 8th meeting.

Outreach: The Way Forward

The information kit, consisting of a folder with the ITF brochure and fact sheets, was presented. The uses of the information kit, an ITF slide set and new ITF "outreach" website were explained. The Steering Committee requested ITF members to act as ambassadors (acting on their own) from this meeting forward. In the ambassador role ITF members should use the communications resources for presentations, organize national and regional workshops and other initiatives, and encourage use and testing of the ITF Tools. It was explained that the convening organizations have delegated (with ITF approval) the stewardship of the ITF Tools to IFOAM. The organizations also plan that IFOAM would manage funds in a follow-up project. The follow-up project would continue the cooperation of the convening organizations to further communicate and promote ITF results, provide assistance to developing countries in implementing ITF tools and recommendations, foster regional cooperation, and receive updates and revise communications and ITF Tools as necessary. The Steering Committee reported that it has received an oral commitment from one donor to carry this work forward.

ITF meeting participants organized themselves into three small groups to discuss individual and joint activities to promote and implement ITF results. The groups reported on their discussions.

Group One

- ITF Tools will be promoted to governments in East Africa that are now elaborating regulations.
- EquiTool could be used in equivalency negotiations with South Africa and other African countries.
- ITF tools will be promoted in the Caribbean countries that are working on organic regulations.
- In the EU, elements of EquiTool have already been applied and will continue to be implemented. EU is committed to flexibility for local conditions when considering imports.
- ITF should support an initiative (using the Tools) for a regional standard that is applying for recognition by EU or US.
- There should be additional exchange among countries that have elaborated or are elaborating regional standards.

Group Two

Promotion: Promotion should be done in OECD meetings, and regional organic meetings such as the Sarawak conference. It is critical that the organic movement is fully informed and included in the process so that they support it rather than seeing only threats from imports.

Field Testing: Intergovernmental organizations e.g. FAO should encourage countries to test the Tools. The Pacific regional organic initiative volunteered to test the tools. There should be beta-testing (countries are not bound by results). More than one country should test so that there can be comparisons of processes and results.

Long Term Uptake: More detailed guidance on IROCB could assist its long-term uptake. IROCB should be recommended to the International Accreditation Forum (IAF). Initiatives in Latin America on equivalence and harmonization should use the ITF Tools (Central America could use IROCB as the certification requirements in its

proposed Central American Standard). In Japan, IROCB could be useful for equivalency determinations in the private sector.

Group Three

Thailand will use the EquiTool to benchmark its standard against USDA NOP, China, JAS , EU and IFOAM standards. It will also propose to the Accreditation Board to use IROCB for accreditation of the certification bodies.

India will consider applying the organic sector requirements of IROCB in addition to ISO 65 requirements to certification bodies.

China will present the ITF results to stakeholders in China and attempt to organize a task force to look into use of the Tools for harmonization strategies. It will propose to use the Tools for future collaboration of the ASEAN countries, specifically at an upcoming meeting of the Task Force on Harmonization for Horticultural Produce.

Tunisia reported that Arab countries are developing standards and EquiTool could be used for development.

The group members made several recommendations, including that:

- Other economic partnerships among countries should be looked at for opportunities to introduce the Tools, especially EquiTool.
- It might be good to consider in future revisions of IROCB to add requirements for inspectors.
- Countries using the Tools should cooperate among themselves to gain leverage.

Closing and Reflections

ITF members reflected on the process and results from beginning to end of the ITF. Several themes emerged from the individual reflections. ITF has provided an opportunity to examine how the world works – harmonize with your neighbor as possible and cooperate with others based on common objectives. The process itself was unique and remarkable for its cooperative and cordial nature, the exchange between the public and private sectors, modeling of the public-private teamwork that will be needed to solve these and other problems, and the attainment of objectives. This process and why it worked is a story that should be told to many others so that they can learn from the ITF experience. ITF shows the power of ideas to become reality. The ITF communication and information was complex and difficult to understand, especially towards the middle of the process, but then at the end, the results and especially the tools are simple and easy to understand and communicate. It was and is a process of maturing and the overall effort must continue beyond ITF. The networking, contacts, results (including studies) and visibility resulting from the ITF will assist the general cause of organic agriculture in government policy and programs. The ITF donors are very much appreciated for making all this possible.

Annex One MEETING AGENDA

EIGHTH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE ON HARMONIZATION AND EQUIVALENCY IN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

6-7 October 2008

Room XXV, Building E, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Monday 6 October, 2008

09:00 -10:00 Introduction

- Opening remarks, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary General of UNCTAD
- Agenda approval
- Introductions
- Steering Committee Report

10:00 -10:30 Presentation: EquiTool (Guide for Assessing Equivalence of Organic Standards and Technical Regulations), Final Draft

10:30 -11:00 coffee/tea break

11:00 -12:30 Discussion: EquiTool, Final Draft

12:30 -14:00 Lunch

14:00 -14:30 International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies (IROCB) Report

14:30 -15:30 Presentation and Discussion of ITF Summary Report

15:30 -16:00 coffee/tea break

16:00 -17:00 Discussion of ITF Summary Report (continued)

17:00 -18:00 Presentation and Discussion of ITF Communiqué

Tuesday 7 October, 2008

09:00 -10:30 The Way Forward

- Outreach
- Concept for follow up project

10:30 -11:00 coffee/tea break

11:00 -12:30 Approval of ITF Tools and Results

- IROCB
- EquiTool
- Final Report and Recommendations
- Communiqué

12:30 -14:00 Lunch

14:00 -15:00 Closing Session
- member reflections and commitments
- closing remarks

15:00 -15:30 coffee/tea break

15:30 -17:30 High Level Public Session

15:30-15:35 Welcome remarks, UNCTAD

15:35-15:50 Overview of the ITF presentation

15:50-16:20 High-level speeches by UNCTAD, FAO and IFOAM
- Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Dr. Alexander Müller, Assistant Director-General, FAO
- Dr. Urs Niggli, Vice-President, IFOAM

16:20-16:25 Launching of IROCB and EquiTool (tools developed by the ITF)

16:25-17:30 Statements and comments by ITF and UNCTAD members

17:30 Closing

17:30 – 19.00 Organic Reception, Escargot Bar, 3rd floor, Lausanne end of building

Wednesday 8 October, 2008

Field Trip organized by FiBL (Research Institute of Organic Agriculture)

Annex Two LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Aebi	Patrick	Quality and Sales Promotion Unit (QSPU), Federal Office for Agriculture (FOA)	Switzerland
Backes	Margit	Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft u. Ernährung (BLE)	Germany
Van Boxem	Herman	European Commission, DG AGRI	Intergovernmental
Castro	Miguel	National Organic Program, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Costa Rica
Chen	Yunhua	China National Accreditation Service for Conformity Assessment	China
Eboku	David	Uganda National Bureau of Standards	Uganda
Gacanja (Kiarii)	Eustace	Kenya Organic Agriculture Network	Kenya
Gouri	PVSM	APEDA	India
Gschwendtner	Therese	Quality and Sales Promotion Unit (QSPU), Federal Office for Agriculture (FOA)	Switzerland
Huber	Beate	FIBL	Switzerland
Indramangala	Jintana	Department of Livestock Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives	Thailand
Jönsson	Marianne	Kommerskollegium - National Board of Trade	Sweden
Kenji	Matsumoto	Japan Organic and Natural Foods Association	Japan
Leu	André	Organic Federation of Australia	Australia
Lu	Zhenhui	Product Certification Centre, WIT Assessment	China
Maamer Belkhiria	Samia	Organic Agriculture Directorate, Direction Générale de la Production Agricole Ministère de l'Agriculture	Tunisia
Mapusua	Karen Lee	Women in Business Development Inc.	Samoa
Montenegro	Laura Cecilia	Argencert SRL	Argentina
Naqvi	Asad	United Nations Environment Program	Intergovernmental
Niggli	Urs	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)	International
Oetiker	Barbara	Quality and Sales Promotion Unit (QSPU), Federal Office for Agriculture (FOA)	Switzerland
Ong	Kung Wai	Humus Consultants	Malaysia
Oyson	Teresita G.	Department of Trade and Industry, Bureau of Export Trade Promotion	Philippines
Piccioli	Fabio	ICEA - Institute per la Certificazione Etica e Ambientale	Italy
Prosecka	Katerina	European Commission, DG AGRI	Intergovernmental
Seta	Ananto Kusuma	Ministry of Agriculture	Indonesia
Steenblik	Ronald	OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development	Intergovernmental
Vivas	Lara	Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Product Standards	Philippines

Wang	Maohua	CNCA, The Certification and Accreditation Administration of P.R.C	China
Wannamolee	Wibulwan	National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards	Thailand
Zapata Gomez	Josè Altagracia	National Program for Organic Agriculture, Organic Agriculture Control Office	Dominican Republic

ITF Steering Committee

Compagnoni	Antonio	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)	International Civil Society
Doyran	Selma H.	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Codex Alimentarius Commission / Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme	Intergovernmental
Hoffmann	Ulrich	United National Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	
El Hage Scialabba	Nadia	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	Intergovernmental
Rundgren	Gunnar	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)	International Civil Society
Twarog	Sophia	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	Intergovernmental

ITF Secretariat

Bowen	Diane	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)	International Civil Society
-------	-------	---	-----------------------------

Annex Three REPORT OF THE HIGH LEVEL PUBLIC SESSION

Dr. Ulrich Hoffmann of UNCTAD welcomed those attending the High Level Public Session following the ITF meeting. He explained the three objectives of the session as launching the ITF Tools, discussing ITF's work with UN and WTO representatives, and reflecting on achievements and the way forward. Dr Sophia Twarog from UNCTAD gave a brief presentation on the ITF work and results. This was followed by addresses from high-level officials of the three convening organizations, UNCTAD Secretary General Dr Supachai Panitchpakdi, FAO Assistant Director General Alexander Müller, and IFOAM Vice-President Dr Urs Niggli.

Dr. Supachai noted that the food supply and price crisis has called attention to problems in agriculture and the need for change in the way the world grows its food; and that organic agriculture is an approach with strong potential to address these problems. Dr. Supachai observed that organic agriculture is particularly well suited for smallholder farmers as it preserves traditional knowledge and reduced dependence on external inputs and exposure of farm families to harmful chemicals. Furthermore, organic agriculture preserves biodiversity, soil and water quality, and it sequesters carbon. A major constraint for small farmers, obtaining certification for different markets, has been addressed by the ITF. Dr. Supachai urged all sectors, public and private, to embrace the ITF findings and use the Tools.

After supporting all the points of UNCTAD's Secretary General, Dr. Müller noted that organic agriculture presents a very good opportunity for small producers to participate in trade. Market demand is strong, he said, and consumers know that the quality of organic products is high, and the production system is environmentally friendly. But this opportunity for producers is hindered by the multitude of certification and accreditation requirements in the sector. Many requirements for trade in organic products are unnecessary obstacles to trade. The ITF is a model of successful public-private partnership to address this core problem for market access. The tools produced by ITF follow relevant principles of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, ISO 65 and WTO, and thus they offer a truly international basis for facilitating trade of organic products. There are four reasons for which FAO is interested in this work, Dr. Müller stated. First, FAO wants to assist to create a fair environment for small farmers' entry to organic export markets, including low-cost inspection and certification schemes. Second, FAO seeks to better assist developing countries' governments to establish appropriate organic regulations and control systems. Third, through the Codex Alimentarius Commission, FAO wants to facilitate inter-governmental mutual recognition of organic regulations and certification systems. Fourth, FAO is also interested in a forum to bridge private sector activities and government regulation of organic agriculture. Noting FAO's investment in the ITF, Dr. Müller committed to following up, including informing FAO's Committee on Agriculture and the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its Committee on Food Labeling, about the ITF achievements and potential adoption of the ITF Tools as Codex guidelines or annexes to the current guidelines.

Dr. Niggli expressed appreciation for the UNCTAD Secretary General's remarks on the benefits of organic agriculture. He noted that this ITF cooperation with UNCTAD and FAO to solve problems in the organic sector is a key achievement in IFOAM's history. Dr Niggli summarized the opportunities and challenges for organic agriculture that continue since IFOAM was founded 36 years ago. Organic farmers want equitable terms of trade. Consumers, who increasingly are concerned about the quality of food and the environmental

consequences of food production, want to support organic agriculture and look for credible guarantees for organic products. Organic markets are growing fast and traders/retailers want a high quality but harmonized system for standards and certification. Society wants farmers to deliver public benefits such as natural resource preservation and therefore public authorities want standards that reflect and support these benefits. The ITF results address these challenges and opportunities via equivalency approaches, and harmonization could well be a future development. IFOAM will integrate the ITF results and tools into its policy and look for ways to intensify its cooperation with the UN partners, FAO and UNCTAD.

Following the remarks by officials, ITF members reflected on the process and achievements of the ITF.

The session ended with the launch of the IROCB and EquiTool by the UNCTAD, FAO and IFOAM officials.