

**International Task Force on Harmonisation and Equivalence in  
Organic Agriculture**

**SUMMARY RECORD**

**First Meeting of the International Task Force on  
Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture**

**18 February 2003, NÜRNBERG, GERMANY**

The first meeting of the International Task Force on Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture, held on 18 February 2003, in Nürnberg, Germany, was jointly convened by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). These three organizations act as the Secretariat of the International Task Force (ITF). The establishment of the ITF is the concrete follow-up to the main recommendation of the IFOAM/FAO/UNCTAD International Conference on International Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture, held in February 2002, in Nürnberg, Germany and the recommendations made by two UNCTAD Expert Meetings,<sup>1</sup> as endorsed by the 7<sup>th</sup> session of UNCTAD's Commission on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities (Geneva, 3-6 February 2003).<sup>2</sup>

1. The meeting was attended by experts of two United Nations agencies, two inter-governmental organizations, five governments and 14 international and national civil society organizations (representing the production, certification, accreditation, trade and consumers sectors). More experts from different sectors and governments were invited but were unable to join the first meeting. The Secretariat will inform them of the outcome of the meeting and their future participation will be encouraged. A full list of attendees and other invitees is given as Annex 1.
2. The meeting confirmed its status as an open ended expert group at which members, although members of a stakeholder institution, participate in their personal capacity. Although new members of key institutions will be encouraged to join the ITF, it was agreed that continuity of participation was preferred in order to ensure progress and delivery of defined outputs.
3. The draft terms of reference prepared by the Secretariat for the ITF were discussed and finalized; these are attached in Annex 2.
4. To commence implementation of section 1 of the terms of reference, the ITF agreed on key reviews to be prepared and developed a work plan leading up to the next ITF meeting, in Geneva, scheduled for late 2003 (dates to be announced). The work plan is attached as Annex 3.

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail, see the reports of the Expert Meeting on Ways to Enhance the Production and Export Capacities of Developing Countries of Agriculture and Food Products, Including Niche Products, such as Environmentally Preferable Products (TD/B/COM.1/41), held in Geneva on 16-18 July 2001 and the Expert Meeting on Environmental Requirements and International Trade (TD/B/COM.1/53), held in Geneva on 2-4 October 2002, accessible at [www.unctad.org](http://www.unctad.org).

<sup>2</sup> See: Agreed Recommendations for the UNCTAD secretariat, TD/B/COM.1/L.26, accessible at [www.unctad.org](http://www.unctad.org).

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5. The ITF agreed that the purpose of the documents to be prepared is primarily a working base for the ITF on which to develop future proposals, but that they may be freely available to interested parties, once finalized and agreed upon by members of the ITF.
6. Coordinators were designated for each output, who may or may not be responsible for their actual preparation. Coordinators were asked to consider the cost of preparing their respective documents and feedback to the Secretariat ([dianebowenxx@aol.com](mailto:dianebowenxx@aol.com)).
7. Coordinators will prepare an annotated outline of their respective documents, for the comments of the ITF. Members of the ITF may indicate their active involvement in one or more documents. The preparation of each document would therefore be the responsibility of its coordinator and a small working group, composed of a few ITF members. The annotated outline and semi-final document are however subject to the clearance of the whole ITF.
8. Outputs are expected by the end of October 2003 in order to be made available to the next meeting of the ITF. These, however, are subject to the availability of funding to the Secretariat. Outputs may need to be prioritised in the event of not securing sufficient funding. It was accepted that the consumer sensitivity review would not be completed by November 2003.
9. The ownership of the different documents is that of the three convener organizations, i.e., FAO, IFOAM and UNCTAD, with due recognition to the inputs of the authors and responsible coordinators and contributors.
10. UNCTAD's International Trade Division agreed to set up an electronic forum for discussion and the posting of documents and information, including password access for members to working materials.
11. UNCTAD will host the second ITF meeting, in Geneva, tentatively scheduled for 24-25 November. The third meeting will be held at FAO in Rome in 2004.
12. In between ITF meetings, members are encouraged to liaise with their partners at home in order to gather information about different needs and perspectives of importance to the issues examined by the ITF. As such, each ITF member is considered a resource person for broader consensus on harmonization and equivalence in organic agriculture, both vertically (throughout the production to consumption chain) and horizontally (within and between countries).

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## ANNEX 1

### PARTICIPANTS LIST

#### Attendees

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Anup Thakur	Government - India	anupthakur@ub.nic.in
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#### Invited but unable to attend

Audrey Talley	Government – USA	Talley@fas.usda.gov
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# **International Task Force on Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture**

## **ANNEX 2**

### **Terms of Reference for the International Task Force on Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture**

The International Task Force on Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture, convened by FAO, IFOAM and UNCTAD, will serve as an open-ended platform for dialogue between private and public institutions (intergovernmental, governmental and civil society) involved in trade and regulatory activities in the organic agriculture sector. The objective is to facilitate international trade and access of developing countries to international markets.

More specifically, the International Task Force will:

1. Review the existing organic agriculture standards, regulations and conformity assessment systems including:

- Their impact on international trade in organic agriculture products;
- Models and mechanisms of equivalency and mutual recognition;
- Extent of international harmonisation

2. Build on the recommendations of the IFOAM/FAO/UNCTAD Conference on International Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture (2002), and on the reviews mentioned above, to formulate proposals for the consideration of governments, Codex Alimentarius Commission, relevant bodies of FAO, UNCTAD and IFOAM and other appropriate organisations on:

- Opportunities for harmonisation of standards, regulations and conformity assessment systems;
- Mechanisms for the establishment of equivalence of standards, regulations and conformity assessment systems;
- Mechanisms for achieving mutual recognition among and between public and private systems;
- Measures to facilitate access to organic markets, in particular by developing countries and smallholders.

These proposals will take into account their impact on production systems, their relevance to consumers and the need for transparency.

3. Advise stakeholders and provide information on developments following discussions of the above proposals.

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**ANNEX 3**

**WORKPLAN**

**DISCUSSION PAPERS**

1. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STATUS OF STANDARDS AND CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

Co-ordinator: Ken Commins - IOAS

2. IMPACT OF ORGANIC GUARANTEE SYSTEMS ON PRODUCTION AND TRADE OF ORGANIC PRODUCTS

Co-ordinator: Ulrich Hoffmann/Sophia Twarog - UNCTAD

3. CONSUMER SENSITIVITY TO DIFFERENCES IN STANDARDS AND COMPLIANCE SYSTEMS.

Co-ordinator: Bjarne Pedersen - CI

4. EXTENT OF INTERNATIONAL HARMONISATION AND TRANSPARENCY MECHANISMS

Co-ordinator: Diane Bowen - IFOAM

5. WTO/TBT AND ORGANIC TRADE FACILITATION.

Co-ordinator: Katherine Di Matteo - OTA

6. EXISTING AND POTENTIAL MODELS AND MECHANISMS FOR EQUIVALENCY AND MUTUAL RECOGNITION

Co-ordinator: David Crucefix - IOAS

**INFORMATION BRIEFS**

7. UPDATE ON ORGANIC REGULATIONS

Co-ordinator: Ken Commins - IOAS

**FUTURE ISSUES**

IMPLICATIONS OF OTHER FOOD CODES OF RELEVANCE TO ORGANIC AGRICULTURE.

## **International Task Force on Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture**

### **TIMEPLAN**

- Document's annotated outlines to be completed by end March 2003;
- ITF secretariat prepares and circulates project proposal for securing extra-budgetary funding support of planned ITF activities for 2003 and 2004 (March and April 2003);
- Task force comments on outlines, authors to be agreed and offers of assistance to be received by end of April 2003;
- Document preparation from May to August, 2003;
- ITF review/clearance of documents in September, 2003;
- Documents finalised by end October 2003 to enable distribution for next meeting in November, 2003.