



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

Common Regulatory Objectives

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Kinds of Objectives

- Previous paper looked at objectives for different purposes
- Some more visionary, some more functional
- Broad, horizontal groupings include
 - Guiding principles – what do the founders wish to achieve in the broadest sense?
 - Programmatic objectives – what does the program aim to achieve in the context in which it originates?
 - Substantive objectives – how the guiding principles and programmatic objectives translate into action for different constituencies
 - Producers
 - Consumers
 - Value chain
 - Certification bodies



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Horizontal Objectives

**National
Program**

3 year conversion period
mandates label requirements
Some elements
of processing
are covered

**Private
Sector
Program**

18 month conversion period
no label requirements

All elements
of processing
are covered



Vertical Objectives – **specific** to general (organic integrity)

- 3 year conversion period
- Period deemed appropriate for public assurance
- EU Scheme
- Need to provide **organic integrity** to EU consumers
- 18 month conversion period
- Period appropriate for conversion of land not previously treated
- Developing country scheme
- Need to provide assurance of **organic integrity** to market



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Obstacles to Recognition of Common Objectives

- Excessive detail in implementation
- Prescriptive v. performance standards
- Lack of mutually acceptable venue(s)
- Coverage of objective by other instruments (other legislation, for instance)
- General lack of program symmetry
- Lack of program definition (or changing program requirements)
- Lack of resources, including time
- Mandated focus on technical specifications rather than common objectives
- Lack of political will



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Possible Approaches to Agreement

- Avoid prescription/detail in general objectives
- Focus on the 5-10 most important areas
- Articulate standards in terms of performance objectives, rather than prescription (e.g., “achieve soil organic content consistent with regional/national goals” rather than “lay out the farm in this way and use the following practices..“.)
- Find metrics, rather than reports, to describe success



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Ten Basic Organic Objectives

- Protect and enhance soil quality
- Minimize/avoid synthetic chemical inputs
- Protect/enhance biodiversity
- Avoid pollution
- Responsible use of resources (soil, water, air)
- Responsible and organic treatment of farm animals
- Prohibit use of non-organic technologies
- Plan/manage organic production
- Verify organic production
- Maintain organic integrity of processing

NOT an exclusive list, intentionally general

Attempts to isolate objectives unique to organic systems



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Protecting and Enhancing Soil Quality

- Widely shared objective
- Depth and detail vary from program to program
- Issues
 - Substances allowed (ex: sludge)
 - Practices (ex: use of cover crops)
 - Scope (ecosystem or farm?)
 - Time (cumulative? annual?)
- Options to reduce differences:
 - performance standard – is it possible?
 - metric – is it available, acceptable?



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Minimize/Avoid chemical synthetic Inputs

- Fundamental to organic systems
- Overlaps with non-pollution and resource use objectives but specific to organic systems
- Ecosystem balance implied but not always articulated
- Objective usually agreed, but prescriptive approaches not always consistent
- Usually involves use of lists
- Lists must be maintained as well as agreed
- Convergence has been negotiated throughout the systems on most issues
- In some areas, significant differences remain (ex: Chilean nitrate)
- If this could be articulated in another way it could perhaps be the basis of an agreement that is non-technical in nature



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Protect/Enhance biodiversity

- Assumed to be inherent in organic systems
- Rarely stated in ways that offer ability to perform to real standards (perhaps because environmental legislation is separated in many national systems from agricultural standards)
- This could be an opportunity to articulate a generally shared objective, perhaps could be articulated in terms of a performance requirement
- General agreement, few specifics, could make this a promising area
- Issues would revolve around
 - scope (farm or landscape) and measures required, and
 - scale (is organic monocropping acceptable?)



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Avoid Pollution

Two issues:

- How to deal with existing pollution
- How to meet demand for real health and safety standards

Organic systems assumed to offer health and safety attributes that they neither articulate or reference

Most national and private systems treat health and safety in other contexts (HACCP, EUREPGAP, etc.)

No reason not to incorporate, or at least reference them in an organic context - lack of symmetry exists

Existing pollution is the elephant in the room - no real standards exist outside China's requirements to avoid it (ex. Vietnam? Colombia?)

Organic production must come to terms with this before it is discredited (U.S. spinach scare?)



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Responsible use of Other Resources

- This area is generally agreed, but also needs to be specifically articulated
- Environmental standards now cover many areas once left to organic standards to treat reasonably - compliance with local laws may now be more important
- These could be referenced - water effluent standards, air pollution standards, etc..or articulate how organic system exceeds them
- Also possible to use metrics here
- Issue for organic is to what extent large-scale production systems with poor resource use are allowable



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Responsible and organic treatment of farm animals

- Combines organic principles of livestock husbandry with animal welfare principles
- These are not always the same
- This is a rapidly evolving technological area
- Concerns about animal welfare are evolving just as fast
- Some areas clear for agreement (e.g., selection of breeding stock) but others more complex
- Tendency toward increased prescription here (allowed lists of veterinary drugs, etc) which will
 - require constant updating, and
 - tend towards divergence among systems where producers need to respond to specific threats



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Prohibit use of “non-organic” technologies

- Requires constant re-definition as technologies evolve and change, maintaining lists
- Universal agreement against GM methods but other equally novel approaches not (yet?) outlawed
- May ultimately result in divergence if some new technologies are be seen as organically acceptable
- Perhaps discourages innovation in organic technology if some tools are unavailable
- Is there opportunity to describe what is wanted here rather than what is outlawed?



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Plan for organic production

- Farming the world's second oldest profession?
- This has to be one of the most fundamental parts of organic production
- Now taken up by every other management plan (ISO 9001, 14001, 22000, etc..)
- Should be an easily agreed common objective



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Verification of Organic production

- Covers use of organic seeds, conversion, separation of organic from conventional crops and animals, content/labeling requirements, etc.
- This requirement crosses all the constituent boundaries (producer/chain of custody/ultimate consumer)
- Also important to government
- Innumerable details
- Agreement in principle can be obtained BUT if technocrats are the negotiators, systems will have to be perfectly symmetrical or largely agreed with a few negotiated exceptions
- This constitutes 80% of some organic regulations!
- Legislative basis leaves little room for flexible approaches
- Possible agreement in terms of trade facilitation in some areas, Codex standards in others



Organic Integrity of Processing Systems

- Less agreement on what is “organic“ in processing than in production
- New requirements unlikely to tolerate innovation, use of processing aids to “scale“
- Organic constituencies need more time with these issues
- Social justice issues also more pressing in a factory context
- Suggest general description of objective rather than prescriptive approach
- Environmental effects of organic production systems also need to be assessed, with appropriate performance standards and reference to governing obligations



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Recommendations - Issues

- Appropriate objectives for resolution will be
 - Common to most systems
 - Expressed in generalities, rather than detail
 - Able to be articulated in different forms - performance standards in some cases - rather than prescriptive process details
 - Responsive to scale - or not! (your decision)
 - Fundamental to organic, rather than to other systems
 - Important to organic consumers as well as producers



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Recommendations - Venues

- Appropriate venues for negotiation of common organic (regulatory) objectives will
 - Engage the responsible governmental and private sector authorities at appropriate levels (i.e., decision-making)
 - Be available to outside stakeholders (e.g., the public)
 - Utilize work already done in other fora (the Codex Alimentarius for example)
 - Engage relevant multinational institutions (UNCTAD, FAO, UNEP, WHO, UNECE, OIE)
 - Be receptive to the need for the negotiation and determined to deliver a successful outcome
- Possible venues/convenors: UNECE, Codex Alimentarius (CCFICS, CCFL), ITF, others?



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