



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

### Communiqué of the ITF meeting in Stockholm 11-13 October 2006

The International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture (ITF), composed of individuals working in government agencies, inter-governmental agencies, and civil society and other private sector organizations<sup>1</sup> involved in organic agriculture regulation, standardization, accreditation, certification and trade, joined forces in 2003 in an open-ended platform for dialogue between public and private stakeholders to seek solutions to facilitate international trade in organic products and access of developing countries to international organic markets.

The ITF focuses on opportunities for harmonization, recognition, equivalence and other forms of cooperation within and between government and private sector organic guarantee systems. It commissions technical studies to fill information gaps and meets at least once a year to discuss and agree on next steps. It publishes the results of its work in books and on a dedicated website<sup>2</sup>.

The Review Phase of the ITF work (2003-05) analyzed the impact of existing organic regulations on trade, current models and mechanisms that enable organic trade, experiences of cooperation, recognition and equivalence in the organic sector, and potential models and mechanisms for harmonization, equivalence and mutual recognition.

The current Solutions Phase of the ITF agreed to pursue a strategy comprised of the following elements:

- A single international reference standard for organic production, as a basis for regional and national standards;
- A mechanism for the judgment of equivalence, based on the reference standard;
- One international requirement for organic certification bodies;

---

<sup>1</sup>ITF participants have so far come from government agencies of twenty-one countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Netherlands, Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Tunisia, Uganda and USA), seven inter-governmental agencies (EU, OECD, FAO, UNCTAD, UNECE, UNEP and WTO) and sixteen civil society organizations and businesses (IFOAM, IAF, ISF, IOAS, Argencert, Ecocert, Ecologica, Green Net, KRAV, , Rachel's Organic Dairy, ISEAL Alliance, ICEA, JONA, Kawacom Uganda Ltd., Migros and Oregon Tilth)

<sup>2</sup> [www.unctad.org/trade\\_env/itf-organic](http://www.unctad.org/trade_env/itf-organic)

- Common international approaches for recognition or approval of certification bodies.

The ITF also agreed to:

- use or adapt existing structures and mechanisms of regulation, rather than establishing new entities;
- give special consideration to the situation of developing countries;
- gear actions towards cooperation at and between all levels: among and between governments (with or without an organic regulation), accreditation bodies and certification bodies.

The ITF agrees that solutions should support the continued growth of organic agriculture and maintain its principles. They should fulfill the additional criteria of: benefits to both producers and consumers; respect for national sovereignty; access to all markets with minimal bureaucracy; fair competition; consumer protection; context-sensitivity; stakeholder support and participation; market choice; transparency.

The ITF is currently developing the following tools:

- a set of essential international requirements for organic certification bodies, as a basis for equivalence;
- a guidance document for judging equivalency of organic standards.

In light of the progress achieved so far, the ITF recognizes that a single reference for organic standards is not yet a feasible proposition; although the guidelines of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and IFOAM Basic Standards (IBS) are very similar in content, their scope and governance are too distinct to be merged. The ITF however realizes that having two international reference standards, from the public and private sector respectively, is valuable, provided that there is effective linkage between the sectors.

The ITF recommends that:

1. Countries make every effort to utilize the ITF results in order to facilitate trade, and in their efforts to build or enhance the organic sector;
2. Public-private participation be improved in decision-making for both international organic standards (i.e. CAC and IBS);
3. Governments commit to using international standards as the reference point for import approvals;
4. The International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies, being developed by the ITF on the basis of ISO65 and the IFOAM Accreditation Criteria, serve as a benchmark for equivalence, a catalyst for convergence on a single international requirement and for direct accreditation as possible;
5. Governments and private accreditation systems develop mutual recognition, which will be based on the International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies;
6. Equivalence of organic standards and technical regulations will be based on one set of criteria, which is being developed by the ITF;
7. Consideration is given to emerging alternatives to third party certification, such as Participatory Guarantee Systems.

With this Communiqué, the ITF commences the Communications Phase of its work in order to mobilize political support. ITF members commit to bring this Communiqué to the attention of their respective constituencies, with a view to seeking participation - and engagement - in the ITF process of development and use of the above-mentioned tools.

Stockholm, 13 October 2006

Ms. Teresita G. Oyson, Ms. Na Xu, Mr. Gunnar Rundgren, Ms. Sophia Twarog, Ms. Laura Cecilia Montenegro, Ms. Selma Doyran, Ms. Nadia Scialabba, Mr. Christer Arvius, Ms. Marianne Joensson, Dr. P.V.S.M. Gouri, Dr. Mwatima Juma, Mr. Ken Commins, Ms. Felicia Echeverria, Mr. Ananto K. Seta, Ms. Sasha Courville, Ms. Maria Fernanda Fonseca, Ms. Wibulwan Wannamolee, Mr. Stefan Schönenberger, Mr. Don Gaidano, Ms. Samia Maamer Belkhiria, Ms. Radha Ranganathan, Mr. Asad Naqvi, Mr. Alessandro Pulga, Mr. Maohua Wang, Ms. Cristiane Mascarenhas S. Sampaio, Mr. Johan Cejie, Mr. Antonio Compagnoni, Ms. Margreet Hofstede, Mr. David Eboku, Mr. Miguel Castro, Ms. Peggy Haase, Mr. Min Pu, Ms. Margret Backes