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INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE ON HARMONIZATION AND EQUIVALENCE IN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

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

**10 -13 October
Stockholm, Sweden**

REPORT

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BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture (ITF) was launched on 19 February 2003 in Nuremberg, Germany. This is a joint initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

The Task Force is an open-ended platform for dialogue between public and private institutions involved in trade and regulatory activities in the organic agriculture sector. The objective is to facilitate international trade of organic products. It is a practical response to the difficulties faced by organic producers and exporters due to the hundreds of different organic regulations, standards and labels worldwide, and a follow-up to the recommendations of the Conference on International Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture held by the three organizations in February 2002.

At its first meeting, the Task Force formulated its Terms of Reference and work plan. The second meeting was held at UNCTAD, Geneva, Switzerland, 20-21 October 2003, to review the existing standards, regulations and conformity assessment systems. At the third meeting in FAO, Rome, 17th to 19th November 2004, the ITF mainly discussed a paper proposing a long-term strategy and a paper proposing short-term actions. Based on these two discussion papers, the ITF moved the process towards formulating concrete proposals on mechanisms for achieving harmonization and equivalence in the organic sector and means of facilitating access to organic markets, particularly for developing countries and smallholders. Following the proposals made at the meeting in Rome, a so-called interim meeting of the ITF on 28 February 2005 in Nuremberg agreed to proceed with four new studies analyzing possible mechanisms for facilitating trade in organic agriculture. Furthermore, the ITF decided to start with an evaluation of the feasibility and necessity of pursuing two additional projects, a standards database and a consumer study.

The International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture held its fifth meeting in Hammamet, Tunisia, from 5-7 December 2005. Based on four discussion documents, the ITF agreed on a work plan for the period from January 2006 to December 2007. In preparation for the meeting, the ITF also held an accreditation workshop with ITF members and other experts from accreditation and certification bodies in the morning of 5 December 2005.

The sixth meeting, convened in Stockholm, Sweden, was attended by 40 participants; 15 from governments (Philippines, China, Sweden, India, Germany, Indonesia, Thailand, Switzerland, Tunisia, Brazil, Netherlands, Uganda, Costa Rica), three from UN agencies (FAO, UNCTAD, UNEP), four from international non-governmental organizations (IFOAM, IOAS, ISEAL, ISF), and eight private sector certification bodies and businesses. A workshop of experts from accreditation and certification bodies was convened prior to the main meeting to discuss the paper on International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies. Results from the workshop were brought to the main meeting. In the course of the three-day ITF meeting, participants: heard information presentations on two topics – participatory guarantee systems and guidance to developing countries on government regulations; discussed two papers presented by their authors – one on International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies and the other on Common Objectives of Organic Standards Systems; discussed and prioritized three terms of reference and one concept note for potential future work; prepared a number of recommendations and agreements; formulated a draft ITF Communiqué on the ITF achievements.

Specifically, the ITF accomplished the following work:

International Standards

Formally recommended that for import approvals, governments use Codex Alimentarius Guidelines and IFOAM Basic Standards as the basis.

International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies

The ITF agreed to continue with the development of an international requirement that will serve as a benchmark for equivalence, a catalyst for convergence on a single international requirement, and for direct accreditation as possible.

Guidelines and Criteria for Equivalency

The ITF agreed to commence with developing a tool for equivalency of organic standards and technical regulations, for use within and among private and government systems.

Common Objectives of Organic Standards Systems

The ITF progressed toward finalizing a document on common objectives that will serve as a reference for partners wanting to embark on a CRO process, for equivalence determinations and for countries drafting regulations.

Effect of Equivalency

Participants agreed that the ITF will prepare a review on the effects of equivalency on operators, and another on the potential negative impacts of equivalency in the regulatory system.

Consumer Research

A review of consumer research related to attitudes and values about organic agriculture, products and standards, including references to key studies, was finalized to serve as a resource for interested parties worldwide.

Multi-lateral Agreement (MLA) Among Organic Conformity Assessment Bodies

Comments were given for the finalization of a Terms of Reference that can be available for future work in this area.

Cooperation

1. A guidance paper for developing countries on government organic regulations is now offered from the ITF as a resource.
2. Information on Participatory Guarantee Systems has been received by ITF and is available as a general resource.

Communiqué

A communiqué on ITF's work and achievements will be published with the aim to engage other stakeholders in the solutions that the ITF has identified and on which it will move forward.

ITF Recommendations and Commendation

The ITF approved the following recommendations:

- that IFOAM proactively seek to evaluate the equivalence of government organic regulations with the IFOAM Basic Standards
- that a platform for cooperation between accreditation/approval bodies for organic certification is created.

The ITF also welcomed IFOAM's efforts to establish an international Forum of Certification Bodies.

The following recommendations will be on the agenda of the next ITF meeting:

- that norms (ISO, IFOAM) should allow the delegation of certification decisions to partners in MRAs.
- that governments allow for delegation of import approvals for organic products to certification bodies, based on their cooperation in mutual recognition agreements of otherwise

Timeline of the ITF

At the conclusion of the meeting, ITF members agree to hold a Seventh Meeting in Autumn, 2007 and also to aim to finish the ITF work and end the Task Force in 2008.

**Report of the Sixth Meeting of the ITF in Stockholm, Sweden
10-13 October 2006**

OPENING

Welcome from KLSA and Organic Farmers Association

Mr. Åke Barklund, General Secretary of the KLSA, which provided the meeting facility, welcomed the participants and gave an overview of KLSA and its work. Founded in 1811, KLSA provides a forum for discussion and debate on important issues for the agriculture and forestry sector among and beyond its distinguished membership.

Inger Källander, president of the Organic Farmers' Association of Sweden, also welcomed the participants and described the healthy situation of the organic sector in Sweden, including strong political support and policy-oriented goals for organic agriculture. Targets for the organic sector include to have 20% of Sweden's agriculture under organic production by 2010 and a 25% market share for organic products. Cooperation of the various stakeholders in Sweden has been successfully coordinated for many years by KRAV, which maintains a private organic label that is highly recognized by Swedish consumers.

PROGRESS REPORT FROM STEERING COMMITTEE

The ITF Steering Committee gave a progress report based on the ITF goals, objectives and work plan. According to its Terms of Reference, The ITF work is planned and implemented in Phases, including a review phase, a proposal formulation phase, and a phase to advise stakeholders and provide information on developments following the discussions of the proposals. The Steering Committee announced the second ITF publication, "Strategy on Solutions for Harmonizing International Regulation of Organic Agriculture"; and it also plans to publish four more papers that were recently finalized.

The elements of ITF strategy were reviewed. These include:

- Production standards equivalent to a single international standard
- Mechanisms for the judgment of equivalence to the international reference standard
- One international requirement for organic certification bodies
- Common international approaches for recognition or approval of certification bodies

Items of the ITF work plan that are on the agenda of this meeting were put into the context of the four strategic elements.

UPDATES FROM CODEX ALIMENTARIUS AND IFOAM

Codex Alimentarius Commission

It was reported that the Codex Alimentarius Guidelines on Organically Produced Foods have been fully developed except for the revision of the list of substances used in organic food processing. The framework established in Codex that applies for the international trade of food products, including standards, inspection/certification systems, and traceability of products was also presented. Regarding equivalence, GL 26-1997 references the

equivalence of inspection and certification systems. Committee work on Guidelines for the Development of Equivalence Agreements Regarding Food Import and Export Certification Systems referencing Technical Barriers to Trade was suspended but resumption could be requested by a member country.

IFOAM Organic Guarantee System

IFOAM presented information on the revision of the IFOAM Organic Guarantee System, and in particular on IFOAM Basic Standards. IFOAM's revision of the Basic Standards aims to make the norm a more suitable tool for equivalency, the objectives being to produce "standards-for-standards" based on the principles of organic agriculture, which differentiate organic from not-organic and allow for regional variations. Participants were informed that ITF members would be included in the stakeholder consultation process for the revision.

COUNTRY REPORTS

Reports from the following countries on the status of their organic regulations and related programs were received from the following ITF members: Thailand, Philippines, Argentina, Brazil and the Dominican Republic. Participants also heard updates from the European Union, China, Costa Rica, Canada and UNCTAD. Written reports and presentations received for the meeting from countries will be posted on the ITF website and can be here:

[Reports](#)

[Presentations](#).

PAPER: INTERNATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ORGANIC CERTIFICATION BODIES

[Download the Paper here](#)

It was explained that this paper is based on the first paper on this topic, presented at the 5th ITF meeting. The main objective is to develop a common international set of requirements for conducting organic certification.

The Terms of Reference for the second paper requested a detailed comparison of the certification requirements of ISO 65, IFOAM, Codex, USDA, NOP, and Japan. This comparison was the basis for constructing the main element of the paper, which is a table of recommendations for international requirements for organic certification bodies. The table of recommendations also takes into account the request to provide flexibility relative to the scale and stage of development of the certification bodies. The table also takes into account the concept from the first workshop, where all the requirements in organic guarantee systems can be visualized as falling into three boxes (categories), where box 1 is the production requirements, box 2 is the specialized requirements for the organic sector, and box 3 is the general competency requirements for certification bodies (ISO 65). The table in this paper puts the general competency (ISO65) requirements into the second column, and the sector-specific essential additional requirements into the third column. Some of the items in the third column list sector-specific requirements that are linked to the organic standards and inspection scheme; and other items add detail to the general competency requirements. A fourth column provides flexibility for scale and stage of development by listing time-limited "progress requirements"; and a fifth column

recommends whether a requirement should be considered “minimum” or could be deleted or could be a progress requirement.

The presentation raised several issues:

1. Is it appropriate to drop any ISO 65 requirements?
2. What should be done in cases where the ISO 65 text does not appear to be sufficient to address the competency requirements in organic certification?

Report on the 11 October Workshop

The Steering Committee reported that the approach of the document was very much appreciated by the workshop participants. Participants supported that there could be progress requirements and some participants thought that there could be more of these. The recommended deletions from ISO 65 were generally supported, but it was recommended to call them “non-applicable” or another similar term. The workshop discussions included: the various ways that product acceptance are handled; the responsibilities of the operator; whether ISO 65 is the best starting point; clearer rules for market surveillance; potential of progress requirements to undermine acceptance of the document; appropriate language style of the document; relationship to PGS systems; balance between outcome-based and descriptive/prescriptive content of the requirements.

The main issue of the workshop discussion was the nature of the document. Should this be developed for actual use in accrediting and approving certification bodies (in which case it should be rather detailed) or should it be guidance for equivalence? It was concluded that it might be hard to sell on adopting new criteria, the paper fell more along the lines of an equivalency tool, and creating another, perhaps competing, international norm in addition to IFOAM Accreditation Criteria for use in accreditation. The workshop proposed a new title, “Requirements for Conducting Organic Certification: Guidelines for Establishing Equivalence”. It was then questioned that, if this will be a guideline, then whether it should become more outcome-based and less reflective of the ISO 65 elements. Concerns about re-positioning this document to guidance were that it would be less useful as guidance for writing new regulation and may not be practically useful to any stakeholder. It was also pointed out that the process for this document must include careful consultation and an eventual determination of the document’s ownership. It was requested that participants at this meeting take a clear decision on the role of the document before taking other decisions on it. Questions to be addressed in deciding the role should include: Will anyone use it directly for accreditation/ approval? How difficult to “sell” it? Could it lead to less harmonization? How to give guidance for developing new regulations? Is there political will to solve the problems? Will responsible authorities and the other users put enough energy into it?

Discussion

The discussion was centered on two topics – the nature of the document and the inclusion of progress requirements in it.

Regarding the Nature of the Document

Comments supported both the role of the document as guidance and its role as a norm. Arguments in favor of the guidance role included that: in order for an MLA to work, a guidance document is needed; it is unrealistic to expect the established government and private systems to replace their current requirements with a new one from outside their

system, at least in the short term; countries have their own requirements related to sovereignty and their government systems. Arguments in favor of the role as a norm included that: it should be possible to have one global norm for certification body requirements, unlike standards where regional differences matter; the current document is largely based on the ISO 65 Guide anyway; it is very important to have an organic sector interpretation of ISO 65. To have it written as a norm would also mean that countries developing new regulations could have a ready-made basis for their own regulations, or simply refer to it in the same way as is done with the ISO 65. Participants also discussed the prospect for the document to serve multiple roles. It was pointed out that an outcome-based document is not necessarily restricted to guidance and could also be used for accreditation/approval. The document could have short-term and long-term roles. In the short-term, it could be adopted by countries developing new systems and also as equivalency guidance, whereas in the long-term it could also become a harmonized international norm. It was reasoned that governments that have implemented their own requirements may not be willing or able to adopt the international norm for their internal use, even if they would use it for accepting foreign systems. However, once they revise their own requirements they would be more likely to move towards alignment with an international norm. In the short-term the document could be positioned as a sector-specific ISO 65 or a sector document based on ISO 65, and in that role it could also serve the purpose to give input to the revision of ISO 65. It was pointed out that ISO 65 is not optimal for the sector, and this could be a first step to move away from it. It was noted that the document should include some of the background description from the earlier paper on the international requirements, so that readers would understand why the document was produced.

Regarding Progress Requirements

The comments on process requirements were mostly in support of including them in the document. However, some participants expressed skepticism, suggesting that that they would neither be accepted in the regulatory context, nor in the ISO context. Several participants compared this approach with the conditions applied to operators in the certification process, which must be met within a certain timeframe; and others pointed to additional precedents for the approach, including in the WTO. Also the EU regulation is trying to make flexibility work at the operator level. There was a suggestion to change the name to something that could be more marketable, such as “scale sensitivity.” It was also suggested to establish criteria for when to use progress requirements, some of which can be found in the introductory section of IFOAM Accreditation Criteria. Clear time limits would be important for making the process requirements feasible. An alternative to including process requirements is to set the baseline for the whole document at a lower level.

The ITF meeting decision on this topic is recorded under the heading “Meeting Achievements and Decisions.”

TERMS OF REFERENCE: FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A MLA

[Download the Document here](#)

A draft Terms of Reference for a feasibility study on establishing a multi-lateral agreement among accreditation and approval bodies was presented to the ITF.

Discussion

At the outset of discussion, a key question was raised; would the MLA be linked to a common or equivalent organic standard or not? Linking to a common organic standard was seen by some participants as essential for having a practical effect at the level of organic certification. An MLA would recognize that organic certification bodies accredited or approved by MLA signatories would be able to certify to the different organic norms without holding multiple accreditations and/or approvals. As an example, if USDA NOP and DAP (German National Accreditation Body) were signatories of the MLA, then USDA could accept the DAP accredited organic certification bodies without having to do their own evaluation. The level at which the MLA would function is important to decide; and one participant commented that it might be most realistic to make an MLA at the level of evaluation where it is accepted that one body can provide evaluation to another body's scheme. The sovereignty of governments and the limitations imposed on national accreditation bodies by the IAF MLA were raised as potential barriers to an MLA. However, a recent agreement between Philippines and Japan to mutually accept certificates was mentioned, although this is not in the area of organic certification. It was clarified that under these terms of reference, ITF would serve as the organizer of the MLA agreements. One participant expressed the view that establishing one international accreditation system would be a better solution than a MLA. It was generally agreed that the idea to explore how an MLA could be established is worthwhile, but any decision on this should be made when prioritizing all of ITF's work items.

PAPER: COMMON OBJECTIVES OF ORGANIC STANDARDS SYSTEMS

[Download the Paper here](#)

This paper follows up on a first paper presented to the fifth meeting of the ITF in 2005. The Terms of Reference for the current paper requested a proposal for what could be considered common objectives of organic standards and technical regulations. After reviewing the possible levels of objectives, the presentation outlined potential obstacles to the recognition and use of common objectives for judging equivalency of standards and technical regulations. The following ten objectives were proposed to be the set of commonly recognized organic objectives:

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

The presentation made recommendations for how the organic sector could or should function to fulfill these objectives, some of which were contested in the subsequent

discussion. The presentation concluded with recommendations for issues to consider and possible venues in the determination of a set of common organic objectives.

Discussion

Participants commented on the list of ten proposed objectives and offered many comments to the author's recommendations for how the sector should fulfill these objectives. They also took up discussion of whether and how the approach of common objectives should be developed as an equivalency tool.

Regarding the Proposed Objectives and Proposals for Fulfilling Them

One participant questioned why social justice and wild collection were not included in the list of objectives. Another participant remarked that while social justice has always been in the organic principles, it was not incorporated in any of the regulations and therefore it is not common to the various norms. It was suggested that the list of ten objectives be re-worked to follow more along the lines of the principles of organic agriculture rather than on politically popular topics, e.g. biodiversity. Comments about some of the presentation's recommendations to fulfill the objectives reflected a general opinion that organic norms and production should not be assigned the role to resolve all the issues and challenges of pollution, safety, and biodiversity; and that it is rather the role of other regulations and standards to protect public health. Some participants added, however, that organic systems make positive differences in such matters as promoting biodiversity and reducing food safety risks, citing such examples as the role of soil biodiversity as a foundation for the whole biodiversity, and control and verification systems in organic as reducing food safety risks. Other participants cited that consumer expectations, especially regarding food safety, can and do differ from those of the farmer and the standards developers. There is also the factor of many small producers whose perspective is economic and market access, and not necessarily either environmental or health and safety. A remark was made that some perceptions are "just there" and are not coming from the standards or even the principles. The paper's author stated that it could be considered to just make reference to relevant food safety regulations and guidelines. There was also discussion on the recommendation for organic standards to change from process-based to performance-based (also called outcome-based) with more metric indicators. One person related this question to the debate on whether environmental goods in the TBT should be list-based or criteria-based. One participant commented that a challenge with the performance-based approach is that the indicators may not be currently available, citing the current situation for biodiversity. Putting any objective criteria on the end product could be dangerous, according to another participant, because it could trigger a cascade of all kinds of these criteria, e.g. residue levels coming into the requirements. A question was raised whether the organic sector should be adopting approaches from other systems, or if they should be adopting from the organic sector. Bringing in big changes in approach would create confusion, especially in developing countries where stakeholders are just learning the organic perspectives. Another argument raised against changing the approach of organic standards was that it is incompatible with the how the organic standards and other food regulations, standards and guidelines (such as Codex Guidelines) are currently related to each other.

Regarding Whether and How to Move Forward on Common Objectives

Participants discussed whether or not to move this forward formally as an equivalency tool, or if the work should be further developed as a reference. It was proposed that a set of common organic objectives combined with an "ITF 65" could serve as the benchmark for

the dialogue with regulators on either the need for de-regulation or improving their regulations. To the question of how it would be moved forward as an equivalency tool came the remark that there is no natural harbor for convergence in the international context. There were suggestions that the Codex Committee of Food Inspection and Certification Systems, the UNECE (in collaboration with ITF), and the WTO could be possible venues for further movement. It was explained that there have been no organic cases in WTO, ruling it out as a resource for further development; and regarding WTO as a venue, it does not work at such a level of specificity. The ITF Secretary explained the Steering Committee's work since the fifth meeting to evaluate the prospect of using UNECE, and its conclusion that until now UNECE's work has been mainly useful for inventorying common objectives in various sectors, which the ITF has already done for the organic sector. Regarding the Codex system as a venue, it was mentioned that Codex tends toward food safety and not other issues. Some participants spoke in favor of revising the document to center it around organic principles, enabling it to serve as a good reference for the development of new standards and technical regulations. There was some question whether organizing around the private sector principles would be feasible to also encompass the governmental objectives in regulations. The chairperson summarized that the paper will be sent to the full ITF for written comments and then revised.

TERMS OF REFERENCE: TOOL FOR EQUIVALENCE OF STANDARDS

[Download the Document here](#)

A Terms of Reference for developing a tool for judging the equivalence of standards and technical regulations was presented. The draft ToR proposed to use relevant WTO and CAC guidance documents as a framework, and to examine the experience of governments with equivalence negotiations, case studies from other private sector equivalency agreements, and the IFOAM policy and procedure for approving other standards as resources for developing the mechanisms of the tool.

Discussion

It was explained that the tool could be used in various contexts – bilateral agreements, multilateral agreements, or regional trade agreements. It could leave open the reference to any international standard and could be used on its own for negotiations between parties without external reference. In response, a participant commented that different types of tools might be needed for multi-lateral, bilateral, and regional trade agreements; this would affect the ToR. Regional agreements are finalized in a very different way than bilateral agreements. It was also suggested that there should be separate tools for standards, which are private and voluntary, and for technical regulations, which are government and mandatory, because private and government regulations would not be negotiated as equivalent. However, it was also noted that although in some countries there are regulations where the technical requirements are self contained, in other countries the regulations are in the form of references to standards; so making a sharp distinction may not be so useful. Also, it is not a useful distinction for countries that have no regulations. It was also noted that Article 2.7 of the TBT is applicable for technical regulations, but the case of organic is not so clear – whether organic regulations are considered mandatory technical regulations or regulations on voluntary labeling. To date, no organic regulation has been notified to the TBT. Although there has been a request for a new clause in the TBT to apply to voluntary

standards, there have been objections to it as raising new barriers to harmonization. A question was raised about the relationship of this tool to the approach of common objectives, and it was recommended to make some choices here rather than trying to develop too many approaches. Keeping it simple, such as on the level of common objectives, may work better; and there should be a clear picture of our strategy and what tools to use. The Chair clarified that this ToR is about an equivalency approach whereas the common objectives path leads more toward harmonization. A caution was raised about focusing only on equivalency, when harmonization is a better long-term solution. Following on this, it was suggested that the ITF makes a note to deal with the risk of equivalency to perpetuate bad regulations. It was also requested to examine the impact of equivalency between two parties on the other affected parties. Developing an equivalency tool was supported by one participant, who further stated that the problems in equivalency negotiations arise from the details of the systems. It was mentioned that there is a mutual equivalency agreement on organic regulations between Switzerland and the EU. The ToR will correct the statement that there is none, and include this agreement as a reference for development of the tool. It was also suggested to consider ways in which the tool can be developed in the CAC or WTO/TBT framework rather than or in addition to the private one; governments can relate to and work in this frame. In response, it was noted that the CAC/WTO is currently only a frame and in order to make progress, details would need to be developed; and it might be good to start out by trying the integrated approach of the ITF (public and private) before rejecting it. There was a request to include input from tropical countries into the tool development. The chairperson stated that the whole ITF will be consulted and she concluded that the results of the discussion lead to the ToR remaining as proposed.

CONCEPT NOTE: IMPACT OF EQUIVALENCE ON OPERATORS

[Download the Document here](#)

A concept note for the Impact of Equivalence on Operators was presented. The history and development of this topic from the beginning of the ITF discussion until the sixth ITF meeting was explained. The topic started out as a question about the influence of operators on the standards and regulations; but now the ITF has moved beyond the phase of analyzing the situation and is in a phase of developing solutions. It is now more relevant to examine the potential impact of the solutions mechanisms and anticipate consequences for the ITF. The concept note describes a study that would consider the issue in the framework of fair vs. unfair competition.

Discussion

In the opinion of several participants, this is an important topic, which should be taken up. Specific supporting comments included that: producers are regarded as important to the acceptance of the equivalency process; producers are more sensitive to the differences in organic standards and technical regulations than consumers; although the structural aspect of the agriculture and trade system affects operators more, it would be nice to have a small paper to demonstrate the relative impact of equivalence in the context of all these other impacts and stressors on the producers. It was noted that a domestic example of impact of equivalency is the NOP, which by its structure and rules, removed all the differences among standards within its system. It was also suggested that if undertaken, the study should be sure to look at the gains for producers by relaxing restrictions. The development level of the

operator was offered as another facet to include in the analysis, as well as the level of the impact e.g. the farm level or the level of all operators in a given country. Another dimension was introduced into consideration – the impact of equivalency on private seals, which are related to operators and private standards, and whose revenues come from this system; and a related suggestion was made to be inclusive of the operators when designing the equivalence approach.

Participants also discussed how to prioritize and design such a study. It was speculated that doing a credible job is likely to be very costly, and that it must be weighed against the progress to actually facilitate trade. One idea is to convince a research institution to take it up, rather than the ITF itself. One participant suggested that one approach to illustrate the positive side of equivalence for operators without new research could be to examine the current research on impact of multiple certification on the operators; this data exists in several sectors besides organic. On the other hand, some participants suggested a more qualitative approach, including the following guidance: referencing existing conceptual studies; soliciting operator and other stakeholder comments on the issue, reviewing the existing information, similar to the consumer research review. It was suggested that whatever the decision, it should be prioritized in the context of the other work items. The chair summarized the discussion by concluding that the discussion leaned toward doing a limited survey focusing on whatever exists now; but that it will be finally decided when looking at the whole work plan.

INFORMATION SESSION: GUIDANCE TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON ORGANIC REGULATIONS

[Download the Paper here](#)

This paper falls within ITF's role to provide useful information rather serving as one of the solutions strategies for ITF's work. The paper provides guidelines for a developing country to determine if organic regulations are really needed in the country; and it also provides advice, in case regulations are needed, for how to develop good regulations. The paper reviewed a range of options for giving oversight to organic labeling and trade. A policy framework for organic agriculture is also included.

Discussion

A question was raised: Is it wise for a country to have a locally appropriate domestic standard and a stricter export standard? Speculating on the impact of this scenario, one participant expressed disbelief that there would be a flock of imports as a result. Some participants argued that there should be only one standard, citing the following rationale: the EU requires a uniform domestic and export program; local consumer trust is better with one standard; a separate domestic and export standard could induce foreign certification bodies to work in the country for the exports; the variances are more important to have in other aspects such as conformity assessment, exempting small producers with domestic markets from third party certification. According to one participant, the Australian market shows that you cannot have an export market without having a domestic one and vice versa – and now there is pressure for a government framework for organic market development, although not necessarily a regulation.

Participants also discussed the question of whether there should be any more organic regulations at all. Participants supporting the continued development of organic regulations cited the benefits, including that: the law is needed for the credibility; it is needed to motivate the participation of the big actors in the organic sector; regulations have a legitimate role to protect from fraud; a compulsory single regulation it is the original model. It was then mentioned that it is more important to focus on making a good regulation; and it should really try to follow the regional situation. Dissenting opinions was expressed about creating regulations, arguing that the first step is to build the most locally appropriate standard in the private sector and develop the market before turning to building regulations. Trying to make an export standard that meets all the export market requirements can make it impossible for the domestic producers. Another perspective offered is that regulations are one of several frames for developing organic agriculture in developing countries. Another is the indicator framework that is supported by the World Bank, and has potential to build the organic credibility and obtain subsidies for organic farmers. The Aid-for-Trade initiative is another avenue to support organic, and it might be considered to try to include organic agriculture formally in both these initiatives.

The author of the paper responded to comments, stating that the ideal is a standard adapted to the local conditions; but practically, there will then be no equivalency agreement and the exporting producers will end up getting certified to the standards of the importers. (An intervention here suggested that the previous statement should go into the preamble of the document). It is advised to try to think ahead, but also be realistic to the current situation. In Europe, all the other regulations work well without a link to a mandatory labeling regulation. There is fraud also in the regulated markets, although there are various ways to address marks.

INFORMATION SESSION - PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEMS

Download the background documents here: [PGS 1](#) [PGS 2](#) [PGS 3](#) [PGS 4](#)

The ITF received an information briefing from two presenters on a new concept for organic guarantee called Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), which is founded on the principle of social control. A movement to organize PGS has been started through the auspices of IFOAM, and a dedicated task force is now in functioning.

Reasons for starting a PGS system include the high cost for third party certification, education and empowerment opportunities, and to encourage community building and revival of traditional organic values. The system includes the stakeholders served, and builds on trust and openness. The basic premise is that farmers can be trusted, and the guarantee comes through this trust. Early steps in the movement organizing include workshops and publication of case studies (www.ifoam.org). Additional documents from the organizers are available on the ITF website, in the section on the Sixth Meeting.

Ecovida in Brazil is probably the most developed case of PGS. Motivation for the founding of this PGS came from the implementation of regulations in the importing countries, which were considered not suitable models for the development of control systems for organic in Brazil. The TBT provides a broad framework for conformity assessment; not just third party certification. Ecovida is a network of 2,600 family farmers including 10 smallholders and 30 NGOs, and 15 coops. Commercial channels are very diverse, ranging from street markets

to government procurement. Total sales for 2003 are \$1.2 million – two-thirds of this on the regional domestic market, and one third exported or otherwise sold as third-party certified from a group with an internal control system. Plans for further development of the system include preparing a norm for this type of conformity assessment.

Discussion

Regarding the comparison and linkage of Participatory Guarantee Systems and Internal Control Systems:

One participant wondered if planned improvements in the system potentially make it less simple and ruin it. Another participant asked how an organization can move its conformity assessment system from a PGS to an Internal Control System when the market demands third party certification for particular channels and transactions. The presenter responded that PGS is a group system to which the internal control system can be added. However, it was noted that a key difference between the two systems is where the decision takes place, which is the external body in the case of the Internal Control System and the farmers in case of the PGS. It was stated that this creates fundamental difference in the two systems and it could be a disservice to try to squeeze them into one framework.

According to one participant, there is a thriving PGS movement in India and the system is working there up to the farm gate, but not beyond that. The question of the level at which PGS is developed was raised, with the conclusion that the national level is the appropriate place for build-up of the system, but the local level must remain the location for the conformity assessment and decision. It was also noted that sanctions are important for this system, and that there are a variety of measures in addition to dismissal of an individual from the PGS group. Regarding credibility, the importance of getting full stakeholder involvement was encouraged, especially consumers, and to measurably demonstrate the credibility of the approach. The long-term economic viability of these systems was raised as a yet-unanswered question.

MEETING ACHIEVEMENTS AND DECISIONS

Participants discussed and agreed on the following achievements on the work plan for the sixth meeting.

International Standards¹

- The Steering Committee recommended that for import approvals, governments use Codex Alimentarius Guidelines and IFOAM Basic Standards as the basis.

The recommendation was adopted.

¹ The ITF also took up this topic when formulating its Communiqué, noting that “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.”

- It was also recommended that the ITF should recommend to Codex to revise the guideline along the lines of the revision of the IFOAM Basic Standards.

Discussion: The Codex Secretary responded that because this recommendation was not discussed in the meeting, it is difficult to take it up now. Also, the ITF has no authority to make a recommendation to Codex; only member states or IFOAM can make that recommendation. In response it was noted that the ITF agreed in Tunisia to bring recommendations to Codex based on the ITF results.

| The recommendation was adopted.

Common Objectives

Participants agreed that the paper will be sent for written comments and then a final revision and publication will be prepared. This should include a structural change to aggregate the 10 or so objectives within the Principles of Organic Agriculture. This document will then serve as a reference for partners wanting to embark on a CRO process, for equivalence determinations and for countries drafting regulations.

Guidelines and Criteria for Equivalency

Participants agreed to prepare a draft tool for the judgment of equivalency, according to the amended ToR.

Effect of Equivalency on Operators

Participants agreed to small review of the topic based on existing information will be prepared and brought to the next meeting. Related to the discussion of effects of equivalency, the ITF will also prepare a brief review on the potential negative effects of equivalency on the regulatory system.

Consumer Paper

The work is completed and will serve as an information document.

International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies

The ITF decided to continue to develop the current draft in its current format. It also decided that the next steps are for the members to provide written comment on progress requirements criteria and the sector-specific descriptions. The document will serve as a benchmark for equivalence, a catalyst for convergence on a single international requirement, and for direct accreditation as possible.

| Participants agreed that a consultation process needs to be defined by the Steering Committee and the issue of ownership should also be addressed in the consultation.

Discussion

Regarding the role of the document: Participants reviewed the discussion from the first meeting day and observed that: The workshop preferred the option for the document to serve as an equivalency guideline; the ITF discussion introduced some new ideas and some members stated a preference for the document to be available as a norm for use in accreditation/approval; still others suggested that there could be multiple roles. One participant expressed an opinion that the workshop was not the best approach, and would have preferred that the document was only discussed in

depth in the main meeting. It was generally agreed that there should eventually be a single normative document for direct use, and that the current document can be moved along to that aim. In the shorter term there are other needs and the document can fill these needs, including to have a norm available for use by countries that are implementing new programs (provided that it is rewritten in a format conducive to this use) and to influence the ISO 65 revision process as well as to demonstrate the insufficiency of ISO 65 on its own for the organic sector for the purpose of dialogue and convergence on an international norm. It was noted that an ISO 65-plus requirement is the current model for all the regulations and the private international systems – they all have additional requirements to ISO 65. There are still some major issues to be resolved in developing the document for the longer term, including whether this should be developed as a more outcome-based approach. It was also suggested to move quickly into a communication mode about this work.

Organic MLA

Comments to the ToR were received at the meeting. This ToR will be kept for potential future use.

Other Forms of Cooperation

The ITF was informed about PGS as an emerging system. The document will be posted on the ITF website.

The ITF agreed that Consideration is given to emerging alternatives to third party certification, such as Participatory Guarantee Systems.

Discussion: It is good to continue the work. It was suggested that the PGS movement eventually try to find a connection to the international market.

SUMMARY REPORT OF ITF WORK PROGRESS

[Download the Summary Report here](#)

This presentation reviewed what has been agreed by the ITF in the past, and also proposed some new ideas for the future.

The following proposals for recommendations and other actions were presented:

IT IS PROPOSED THAT:

• *The ITF recommends that governments allow for delegation of import approvals for organic products to certification bodies, based on their cooperation in mutual recognition agreements of otherwise*

Discussion: It was suggested to change the wording of this proposal to something such as “government approval of certification bodies include acceptance of their approvals for organic products based on their Mutual Recognition Agreements.”

Decision: A brief paper and proposal on this will be brought to the next meeting.

- *The ITF recommends that norms (ISO, IFOAM) should allow the delegation of certification decisions to partners in MRAs.*

Decision: Put this on the agenda of the next meeting.

- *The ITF recommends IFOAM to proactively seek to evaluate the equivalence of government organic regulations with the IFOAM Basic Standards.*

Decision: To adopt.

- *The ITF welcomes the initiative by IFOAM to convene an international organic certification Forum*

Discussion: There was a request that the ITF be provided with feedback from these meetings.

Decision: To adopt

- *The ITF recommends that a platform for cooperation between accreditation/approval bodies for organic certification is created.*

Discussion: The ITF workshop was originally intended for this type of thing, and it may be more appropriate for ITF to be the platform. It may be difficult to get attention from the IAF at large due to the workload of the IAF. It was suggested that ITF could invite all the National Accreditation Bodies dealing with organic to the ITF and ITF workshops. It was also suggested to build on the interest from the Australia/New Zealand accreditation body for participation. It is however clear that the ITF itself cannot provide a permanent platform for these bodies. Following the ITF initiative they should continue their cooperation by own means.

Decision: To adopt

- *Regarding communication and promotion:*

- *the ITF Steering Committee shall develop a communication strategy*
- *the ITF will seek opportunities to present its results to decision makers.*
- *The ITF information, process and results are presented at relevant international and regional meetings*
- *The ITF produces supporting promotional materials.*

Discussion: One participant observed that the ITF is not fully aligned on some of the topics; it is important to focus communications on the clear agreements. However, it was also urged that communication should be high priority in the work plan. There was a request to have some materials in other languages. ITF members are encouraged to translate the materials into their native languages themselves. It

was stated by one participant that while ITF is trying to achieve harmonization, in the meantime one of the harmonizing activities is to promote the multiple purpose evaluations. The ITF Steering Committee should consider ways to foster this and bring it forward further. Finally, ITF members were encouraged to alert to the ITF to opportunities for strategic communication.

Decision: To approve

COMMUNIQUÉ

[Download the Draft Communiqué here](#)

A communiqué drafted by the ITF Steering Committee was presented to the meeting for comments. Participants decided to amend the title of the document to indicate that the communiqué is issued from the sixth meeting of the ITF. The list of organizations with which all active ITF members are affiliated will come in as a footnote, and KRAV, Tanzania, and Uganda are to be added to this list. Names of participants at the sixth meeting will be included at the end of the document. Input from participants about improvements to the wording were taken into the draft document during the discussion. The amended draft document will be circulated to the full ITF membership for comment. Once finalized, the Communiqué should be taken by ITF members to their constituencies with the purpose of seeking engagement. The Communiqué will be issued in English, French and Spanish languages.

NEXT STEPS & SCHEDULE

The following next steps for ITF were reviewed by the chairperson:

Tools

- Revise paper on International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies
- New paper: Tool for Judgment of Equivalency (of Organic Standards and Technical Regulations)

Reviews and References

- Revise paper on Common Objectives of Organic Standards Systems
- Revise paper on Guidance to Developing Countries on Organic Regulations
- New review paper: Impact of Equivalence on Operators
- New review paper: Negative impacts of Equivalence (e.g. on perpetuating weaknesses)
- New briefing paper: Delegating Certification Decisions and Import Approvals to CBs

Communications

- Finalize and publish ITF Communiqué
- Develop Communication Strategy (including ownership, consultation, outreach, mainstreaming)
- Publish ITF Volume 3

Discussion: A question was raised about whether resources can be conserved by not publishing printed volumes of ITF work and instead, maintaining them only in

electronic format. However, it was noted that there is an allocation in the current budget for the third ITF volume and Communiqué.

Important ITF Dates

- Member inputs due by 24 December
- Next meeting: Autumn, 2007
- End ITF: IFOAM Congress 2008 or at least by end of 2008

Discussion: Regarding next meeting location: Propose to meet in North America next time, even though visa is a challenge (WWF offered as venue). Or, South America, e.g. Brazil. Several people spoke in favor of exploring a location in the US; others did not want to lose members if visa risks are too high. Canada, and Bali, Indonesia were also suggested as locations.

Guidelines suggested by participants for decision on the location:

- Not too difficult or expensive to reach
- No travel restrictions
- Consider expense for self-funding members

Regarding End Date for ITF: It was encouraged that the end should be set now, and then ITF should not to bring any new work item on the agenda beyond a certain point, in anticipation of the end date. The end of 2008 may be more realistic than middle. The end date for ITF does not mean that the work cannot continue in other structures and by other avenues. ITF can recommend owners/managers for pieces of the ITF work (e.g. the International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies) to be carried on. The ownership topic will be on the agenda of the next meeting.

ADDENDUM 1 – PARTICIPANTS LIST

	First Name	Last Name	Organization	Country
Mr.	Christer	Arvius	Kommerskollegium/National Board of Trade	Sweden
Mr.	Margit	Backes	Federal Agency for Agriculture and Nutrition	Germany
Mr.	Miguel	Castro	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, National Organic Agriculture Program	Costa Rica
Mr.	Johan	Cejie	KRAV	Sweden
Mr.	Ken	Commins	International Organic Accreditation Service	USA
Ms.	Sasha	Courville	ISEAL Alliance	England
Mr.	Paddy	Doherty	IFOAM Criteria Committee	Canada
Ms.	Jane	Earley	World Wildlife Fund, US	USA
Mr.	David	Eboku	Uganda National Bureau of Standards	Uganda
Ms.	Felicia	Echeverria	Eco-Logica Certification Agency	Costa Rica
Ms.	Maria Fernanda	Fonseca	PESAGRO	Brazil
Mr.	Don	Gaidano	Horizon Organic Dairy/ While Wave Foods	USA
Dr.	P.V.S.M.	Gouri	APEDA	India
Ms.	Margreet	Hofstede	Department of Agriculture Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality	Netherlands
Ms.	Marianne	Joensson	Kommerskollegium / National Board of Trade	Sweden
Dr.	Mwatima	Juma	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements	Tanzania
Ms.	Inger	Källander		Sweden
Ms.	Samia	Maarer Belkhiria	Direction Générale de la Production Agricole Ministère de l'Agriculture	Tunisia
Mr.	Cristiane	Mascarenhas S. Sampaio	Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade	Brazil
Ms.	Eva	Mattson	Grolink/IFOAM Criteria Committee	Sweden
Ms.	Laura Cecilia	Montenegro	Argencert SRL	Argentina
Mr.	Asad	Naqvi	United Nations Environment Program	Switzerland
Ms.	Teresita G.	Oyson	Bureau of Export Trade Promotion	Philippines
Ms.	Peggy	Haase	Kommerskollegium/National Board of Trade	Sweden

	First Name	Last Name	Organization	Country
Mr.	Min	Pu	WTO/SPS Enquiry Point	China
Mr.	Alessandro	Pulga	Istituto per la Certificazione Etica ed Ambientale	Italy
Ms.	Radha	Ranganathan	International Seed Federation	Switzerland
Mr.	Stefan	Schönenberger	Federal Office for Agriculture (Bundesamt für Landwirtschaft)	Switzerland
Mr.	Ananto K.	Seta	Ministry of Agriculture	Indonesia
Ms.	Mildred	Steidle	Organic Services GmbH	Germany
Mr.	Maohua	Wang	Certification and Accreditation Administration of the People's Republic of China	China
Ms.	Wibulwan	Wannamolee	National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards	Thailand
Ms.	Na	Xu	China National Accreditation Service for Conformity Assessment	China

ITF Steering Committee

Mr.	Antonio	Compagnoni	Institute per la Certificazione Etica e Ambientale	Italy
Ms.	Selma	Doyran	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Codex Alimentarius Commission / Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme	Italy
Mr.	Gunnar	Rundgren	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements	Sweden
Ms.	Nadia	Scialabba	Food and Agriculture Organization	Italy
Dr.	Sophia	Twarog	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	Switzerland

ITF Secretariat

Ms.	Diane	Bowen	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements	USA
Mr.	Matthias	Fecht	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements	Germany

ADDENDUM 2 - AGENDA

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

Royal Swedish Academy for Agriculture and Forestry
Stockholm, Sweden
9-13 October 2006

Agenda

Monday 9 October 2006

9:00-17:00 Workshop on Requirements for Organic Certification

Tuesday 10 October 2006

08.00-18.30 Field trip for ITF members

IFOAM Criteria Committee Meeting

Steering Committee Meeting

Wednesday 11 October 2006

09.00-9.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome to the 6th ITF meeting (Swedish Ministry of Agriculture and Board of Trade)• Housekeeping items	
09.30-10.00	Progress report (Chair)	Presentation
10.30-11.15	IFOAM and Codex Alimentarius updates on international organic standards (Angela Caudle and Selma Doyran)	Presentations
11.15-12.00	Updates from ITF members	
12.00-13.30	<i>Lunch</i>	
13.30-15.30	International certification requirements (Mildred Steidle)	Paper
16.00-17.00	Feasibility of an organic MLA (Diane Bowen)	ToR
17.00-17.30	Consumers' research situation analysis (Diane Bowen)	Information document

Thursday 12 October 2006

09.00-10.30	Common Regulatory Objectives (Jane Earley)	Paper
11.00-11.45	Guidance for judging equivalency (Diane Bowen)	ToR
11.45-12.30	Impact of equivalence on competition among operators (Diane Bowen)	Concept note

12:30-14:00 *Visit and Lunch at the Swedish Board of Trade*

14.00-15.00	Guidance to developing countries on organic regulations (Gunnar Rundgren)	Paper
15.30-17.00	Participatory guarantee systems (Inger Källander)	Information documents

Friday 13 October 2006

09.00-10.00	Achievements of the 6 th ITF meeting (Chair)	Presentation
10:00-10:45	Synthesis of ITF work progress (Gunnar Rundgren)	Paper
11.15-12:00	ITF Communiqué (Nadia Scialabba)	Draft
12.00-13.00	Next steps (Chair)	