



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

Draft Communiqué [to be completed in light of the 6th ITF meeting discussions]

We, individuals working in government agencies of nineteen countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Netherlands, Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia and USA), seven inter-governmental agencies (EU, OECD, FAO, UNCTAD, UNECE, UNEP and WTO) and fifteen civil society organizations and businesses (IFOAM, IAF, IOAS, Argencert, Ecocert, Ecologica, Green Net, Naturland, Horizon Organic Dairy, ISEAL Alliance, ICEA, JONA, Kawacom Uganda Ltd., Migros and Oregon Tilth) involved in organic agriculture regulation, standardization, accreditation, certification and trade,

Joined forces starting 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. We focus on opportunities for harmonization, recognition, equivalence and other forms of cooperation within and between government and private sector organic guarantee systems. We commission technical studies to fill information gaps and meet at least once a year to discuss and agree on next steps. We publish the results of our work in books and on our Website¹.

The Review Phase of our work (2003-05) analyzed the impact of existing government 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.

Now in the Solutions Phase, we have agreed on 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

¹ www.unctad.org/trade_env/itf-organic

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- Common international approaches for recognition or approval of certification bodies

We have 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 our actions towards cooperation at all levels: among and between governments (with or without an organic regulation), accreditation bodies and certification bodies.

We agree that solutions should provide for the continued growth of organic agriculture and the maintenance of 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; adherence to trade principles; consumer protection; context-sensitivity; stakeholder support and participation; market choice; transparency;

We are currently developing the following tools:

- an inventory of common regulatory objectives of government regulations, useful especially for new country entries
- a set of essential international certification requirements, as a basis for equivalence
- a guidance document for judging equivalency of organic standards
- [a mechanism for a multi-lateral agreement among organic accreditation and approval bodies]

In light of the progress achieved so far, we recognize 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. We however realize that having two international reference standards, from the public and private sector respectively, is an opportunity, provided that there is effective linkage between the sectors

The International Task Force (ITF) therefore recommends that:

1. Countries make every effort to utilize the ITF results – both information and tools – 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;

[The points below anticipate discussions of the 6th ITF meeting]:

4. When regulating imports, The International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies, being developed by the ITF on the basis of the IFOAM Accreditation Criteria and ISO65, are used as the single harmonized requirement for approval of organic certification bodies .
5. Equivalence of organic standards and technical regulations will be based on one set of criteria to judge their equivalence, which is being developed by the ITF.
6. Governments and private accreditation systems develop mutual recognition, which will be based on the International Requirements for Organic Certification and other mechanisms to be developed by the ITF.
7. Consideration is given to emerging alternatives to third party certification (e.g. Participatory Guarantee Systems);

With this Communiqué, we the ITF members commence the Political Support Mobilization Phase of our work. We commit to bring this Communiqué to the attention of our respective constituencies, with a view to sensitize our partners and seek political support for the take-up and implementation of our above-mentioned proposals.

Stockholm, October 2006