



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

DISCUSSION PAPER

STEWARDSHIP AND OWNERSHIP OF IROCB

Prepared by Diane Bowen, ITF Secretary

ITF - Secretariat:
Diane Bowen Secretary
d.bowen@ifoam.org
phone +1 414 352 5789
fax +1 253 669 7921

Matthias Fecht Coordinator
m.fecht@ifoam.org
phone +49 228 926 5018
fax +49 228 926 5099

Introduction

This paper supports the ITF's discussion of the stewardship and ownership of the IROCB. The ITF aims for IROCB to serve as a practical reference norm and tool for equivalence of conformity assessment systems. As with any norm, it will need both immediate and long term stewardship, including revision in the long term. The ITF has agreed that long-term, the document should have a permanent owner. But also, ITF has concluded that it may not be possible in the short term to arrange a good and rightful owner, and therefore interim caretaking should be decided. This discussion paper takes up both long-term and short-term scenarios.

Long Term Scenario – Ownership

A long-term owner would be responsible to administer, protect and promote the document, and to ensure its long-term viability. This probably means revising the document from time to time. Because this is an international document, the owner should be able to provide the appropriate process for an international multi-stakeholder revision. The owner should have a status that confers credibility to the IROCB in both the private and government sectors. The owner should also have the expertise and the motivation to keep the document relevant over time. A significant challenge is that the ITF process is a public private partnership aiming for a solution that can be applied across both government and private systems.

The 2007 workshop on IROCB included the following suggestions for ownership criteria:

- If the governments are to use this, it would need a certain type of absorption into the system of the governments.
- Owner should be able to carry the weight and importance of the document.
- It should be an existing body or organizations.
- It should be an organization that itself is dedicated to the organic sector and can be a permanent caretaker.
- Ownership should not exclude or de-motivate anyone from participating in the development and continuation of it.

Criteria for long-term ownership

- a. Status as an international organic sector actor;
- b. Can own an international norm;
- c. Ability/likelihood to assign priority to IROCB stewardship;
- d. Institutional recognition/investment from national governments;
- e. Institutional recognition/investment from the private sector;
- f. Capacity to conduct an inclusive and balanced international multi-stakeholder revision process.

_____ Suggested owners

ITF participants have suggested some options for long-term ownership. Also, stakeholders were asked to comment on the ownership issue during the IROCB consultation process. These discussions and consultations yielded the following suggestions:

- WHO/FAO Codex Alimentarius Commission;
- FAO (apart from CAC);
- UNCTAD;
- UNECE;
- IFOAM;
- ISO.

_____ *Indicative Scheme for Evaluating Potential Owners (for review at 7th ITF meeting)*

A logical approach to the discussion is to assess potential owners against criteria. A ratings system can be used to evaluate the current situation. However, because the situation regarding any actor is nuanced, comments are also important. Due to the nuances, numeric scoring seems not that promising. Therefore it is suggested to assign from zero “0” to three “x” marks for the match of the organization to the criterion, with three being the strongest match. This provides a basis for discussing the relative strengths and weaknesses, but the ratings themselves are not intended to directly yield a decision.

For the sake of starting the discussion, a preliminary rating exercise is offered, with the expectation that the ITF members will modify the ratings and comments. It is recommended that the ITF works on this table at its forthcoming meeting in November 2007.

	a. international organic actor	b. can own an international norm	c. assigning priority to IROCB	d. government recognition	e. private recognition	f. fully inclusive international stakeholder process.
Codex	x	xxx	x	xxx	x	xx
<i>comments</i>	<i>Covers food only (e.g. fibres and cosmetics excluded).</i>		<i>Would require strong advocacy from member states</i>		<i>Private systems acknowledge CAC only because of its recognition by governments</i>	<i>In the case of organic, private inclusiveness is possible due to the Organic Working Group in CCFL. Otherwise, private participation is very limited.</i>
FAO	x	x	x	xxx	x	x
<i>comments</i>	<i>FAO has many other priorities an its agenda, and other FAO interests can threaten involvement on organic agriculture</i>	<i>Very long process and unlikely when organic standards are dealt with by CAC</i>				<i>Governments only for decisions, and occasional civil society consultations. Unlikely to be able to run a stakeholder decision process for IROCB.</i>
UNCTAD	x	0	x	xx	x	?
<i>comments</i>	<i>UNCTAD agenda is trade for dc's and organic a</i>		<i>Priority would depend on the UNCTAD</i>	<i>Not seen as a norms setting body</i>		

	<i>sub-theme to that agenda</i>		<i>agenda for meeting its trade development goals.</i>			
UNECE	0	?	0	XX	0	X
<i>comments</i>				<i>May not be recognized by governments outside of Europe</i>		<i>It is European, although it invites participation from other countries</i>
IFOAM	xxx	xxx	xxx	0	xxx	X
<i>comments</i>				<i>Three governments have recognized IFOAM system, but that is still insignificant in the larger scheme.</i>		<i>IFOAM invites governments but participation is mainly from private sector. Only members can vote on norms.</i>
ISO	0	xxx	X	XX	XX	X
<i>comments</i>	<i>Currently no organic standards or conformity assessment, although organic sector uses ISO 65. Currently no sector specific ISO 65 guidelines</i>		<i>Only that IROCB could influence ISO 65 revision. But not as a ?</i>	<i>Governments do sometimes reference ISO standards and conformity assessment e.g. requirement in EU for ISO 65</i>	<i>Some private sector organic actors subscribe to ISO 65.</i>	<i>Access to decision making limited. No public comment process. Works through committees. Limited government participation</i>

It may not be possible to identify a suitable owner from only this exercise. For example, the international government institutions may not currently assign enough priority to the organic sector, or any specific sector to qualify for full consideration to own and care-take this document. For another example, the private institutions may not have sufficient recognition from governments. But in this case the exercise can be used to identify advocacy strategies for ITF aimed at changes that would cause organizations to fulfill the criteria more fully.

Short-Term Scenario: Caretaking

It is expected that before it comes to an end in late 2008, the ITF will be able to approve the IROCB and begin to advocate for its adoption by governments and private sector. There is no problem until then because ITF is caretaking the document. However, it will be very important for advocacy to continue, as well as the quest to arrange appropriate long-term ownership of IROCB.

The logical short-term solution is for the three convening organization for ITF – FAO, IFOAM and UNCTAD – to agree to delegate authority to IFOAM to “house” the document and act as a clearinghouse for processing queries related to modifications to the content or use of the document in the medium-term. Considering that the IROCB will not be modified in its first years of absorption and likely implementation, IFOAM would be asked to promote it and ensure its long-term ownership and viability.