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EU imports regulation amended

In the last issue of TOS it was announced that the list of certification bodies (CBs) recognised as working in equivalence with the EU Regulation had been extended.

The news was made official by the Regulation (EU) No. 508/2012 of 20th of June that amended Regulation (EC) 1235/2008 on imports.

The new regulation updates the status and scope of the approved third countries and lists the 53 equivalent CBs, specifying the prod-

uct categories and countries of operation that are approved for each.

All CBs have been assigned a control code, a different one for every country where they operate, and some CBs have control codes in both categories (as a CB from an approved third country and as an equivalent CB). ■

Source: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:162:0001:0045:EN:PDF>

EU and China have a roadmap

On 12 July the EU and China agreed to open negotiations on a mutual recognition of organic products. The agreement was made between Agricultural Commissioner Dacian Cioloş and the Chinese Minister Zhi Shuping.

China and the EU will examine their respective legislations. In addition, the controls applied to organic production will be assessed in order to seek an agreement that facilitates trade in organic products and builds long term cooperation. The discussions will start at a technical level with the objective of promoting mutual understanding, trust and bilateral

cooperation, and to working towards a mutually beneficial reciprocal arrangement on recognition of each other's organic laws and regulations.

EU exports of organic products to China increased significantly in 2011, and seem likely to increase in the future. The EU is the main importer of Chinese organic products. Global organic production area is estimated at 37 million ha, of which 9.2 million is in the EU, with an average growth rate of 10%, and 2 million ha in China, with a current growth rate of 30%. ■

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/newsroom/82_en.htm

TOS looks at sustainability – part II

Last month TOS investigated the relationship between sustainability and organic systems and standards. In this issue the topic is explored further.

Where does the buck stop?

'Passing the buck' is an English expression. It means letting someone else take care of a problem or take on the responsibility. The former US President Truman famously had a sign on his desk saying that "the buck stops here". Clarifying that he was ultimately in charge.

Who is really in charge? Who is to blame? These are questions that come to mind when reading the European Court of Auditors' report on the EU system (see page 17). Some of their conclusions could have been drawn directly from earlier TOS leaders.

The EU system is built on competing national certification bodies – in some countries up to thirty certification bodies – with oversight by a plethora of national and sometimes regional authorities, accreditation by national accreditors (only one per country because they have been granted monopoly by the European Union) and oversight by the European Commission. The system has developed not based on the needs of the sector but on the needs and habits of the governments. That is the only reason why authority for approval of certification bodies follows the divisions of the governments. And it is why in

some countries regional authorities are in charge and in most countries several authorities are in charge.

Because of an unfortunate reference to EN 45011 (ISO 65) in the EU Regulation back in 1997, national accreditation bodies came into the game, bringing little added value, but increasing cost and increasing focus on rather unimportant procedures. As they were given a monopoly of accreditation, they also swayed the EU that they should have the monopoly of interpreting EN 45011, a rather outrageous claim.

All the actors in the system have resource constraints, and will only do what they are forced to do. Most of them also lack competency. Some of the authorities are even hostile to the organic sector despite it being within their mandate to supervise and approve the certification bodies. How does that make the certification bodies and producers feel? The EU has rarely

conducted any supervision of what the Member States do. And the 'transaction costs' of keeping everyone in the system up to date and informed are astronomical. But the biggest problem is that nobody takes responsibility. A concerned consumer in an EU country or a food processor that suspects you're a competitor that is cheating, has nowhere to go with a query because nobody is in charge.

This mess is likely to lead to calls for more controls and more supervision, probably by strengthening the Commission's oversight, and increased reporting upwards by all concerned. But that is the wrong way to go.

What the system needs is rationalisation and fewer actors. There are several options for this. By integrating organic controls into the normal food control system, like in Denmark, both certification and accreditation can be eliminated, and accountability is clear. The same can be accomplished by having a national monopoly for certification, like in the Netherlands. By recognising one international accreditation system for all certification bodies, such as the IOAS, certification bodies could operate freely within all the European territories. In any case, the national approvals of certification bodies are antiquated and could be abolished; if a certification body is approved in one country it should be allowed to operate freely in the other countries.

This is not the place to draw up the blueprint for a new system, but any new system should be built on fewer actors and fewer layers and clearer lines of responsibility, and as much as possible responsibility should be at the 'lower' levels, i.e. with the producers and the certification bodies. ■

did you know?

What can be done in the name of sustainability

There is an American company called Bright Farms that uses a vocabulary very similar to the TOS vocabulary. Terms associated with the concepts organic and sustainable – environmental sustainability, carbon footprint, fuel and water consumption, healthy diets, local food and freshness – are all used by Bright Farms.

But their understanding of these concepts is very different. Bright Farms designs, finances, builds and manages hydroponic greenhouses on grocery retailers' rooftops.

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The organic movement pursues sustainability

A young initiative, the Sustainable Organic Agriculture Action Network (SOAAN), aims to define sustainability based on the 'Principles of Organic Agriculture'.

Repositioning organic

Virtually everyone nowadays agrees with the objective of sustainability. The very fact that everyone talks so much about it is prima facie admission that what is broadly happening in the world is NOT sustainable.

The organic sector is not immune to this discussion. Organic standards are often seen as having too limited a scope to fully address issues of sustainability. Organic is often seen as a 'niche' or 'top tier' type of production system, not for the mainstream. Unless these attitudes are challenged and overcome, the organic movement risks being marginalised by competing approaches.

The organic movement thus resolved to take action and reposition organic as the mainstream strategy for a sustainable world – not the 'top' but rather the basis, the core around which sustainability is built. The action took place at the 2011 IFOAM Organic World Congress in South Korea in October. Part of the IFOAM General Assembly's resolution (GA Motion 57) called for IFOAM to create an Action Network to serve these ends. Early in 2012, IFOAM, with support from FiBL, launched the Sustainable Organic Agriculture Action Network (SOAAN) with the aim to define and describe what sustainability is and how to achieve it. This Action Network's founding member organisations were IFOAM, FiBL,

Navdanya, ICROFS, Rainman Landcare Foundation, CEDECO, WWF, SOCLA, INOFO, the Leading Organic Alliance, and the International Association for Partnership. Since its initial launch at BioFach in Nürnberg in February 2012, SOAAN has also been joined by Louis Bolk Institute, Coalition of Farmers Ghana, Rural Advancement Foundation International, and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation. IFOAM coordinates SOAAN and serves as its Secretariat. SOAAN continues to seek and invite interested parties to participate.

Inherent in the mandate to reposition organic two main approaches were identified:

- The elaboration of new technical content that encompasses a broadened scope of 'sustainability' activities that are currently not covered by most organic standards (eg social, energy, waste, fair trade)
- The deepening of practices commonly described in organic standards to make them more sustainable (e.g. polycultures, minimising tillage, organic seed and breed development).

It was felt that the first job for SOAAN should be the drafting of a reference document of best practices

that comprise sustainability – a task made complex by a wide range of ideals, issues, interests and realities.

Breaking out of the glasshouse

In addition to the technical issues, there is also the context in which the SOAAN reference should be used. An approach limited to just the marketplace could cause confusion with existing organic certification and/or compete with it. It would also create extra burden on operators – in particular farmers who are already overloaded with requirements of (sometimes multiple) supply chain compliance programmes. The reference was, thus, deliberately not intended to serve as a certification standard.

Even so, as the document delineates what are sustainable best practices, it is a useful exercise to assess progress against them, especially considering that almost nobody is likely to meet all of the best practices at the outset. (It is often said, sustainability is a journey, not an end.) Two aspects were considered particularly important: continuous improvement and actual performance.

The creation of indicators and metrics was, therefore, a considered component of the best practice reference. However, there has been much debate on the usefulness of such figures. Indicators are generally qualitative (e.g. visible earthworm activity) while metrics tend to be quantitative (e.g. amount of waste). But this is not always the case; either can be simply binary (yes or no; e.g. has the trader mapped his supply chains?), and either could show an increase or decrease over time. Use is further

Organic standards are often seen as having too limited a scope to fully address issues of sustainability. ■

complicated by questions about their degree of applicability or relevance across different actors or groups of actors, the subjectivity of how certain boundaries may be drawn (such as for a carbon footprint or a lifecycle analysis), and the overall consistency and validity with which they can be used and/or compared across product types, geographic regions, or agronomic systems. The drafting process seeks to clarify and simplify these challenges, and to encourage the creation of sets that can be used:

- (i) by individual operations to evaluate performance and progress over time
- (ii) to compare different operations
- (iii) to evaluate performance and progress across a given sector for any and all aspects discussed in the reference document.

SOAAN sees the need to link the practices it describes to outcomes that can be concretely shown to be advantageous. Concrete, reportable, sector-wide data can be used to support the organic position.

New market opportunities based on reporting performance against the best practices may exist for the willing. But even though the organic sector has voluntary market-based options, these avenues are constrained by a political superstructure that largely favours non-organic approaches. This superstructure is a metaphorical 'glass house' that confines the organic movement's efforts at global sustainability to a small space.

Spreading the adoption of best practices, building the body of proof and resulting impact of them, and conveying this information to the powers that be is part of the Action Network's long-term vision and charge. A reference document of best practices by itself, however, is un-

likely to provide a complete treatment of the deep and wide topic of sustainability. To supplement this foundational piece, SOAAN intends to create strategy and positioning briefs directly linked to the reference, to guide and coordinate the communication and widespread adoption of best practices, and as additional tools to break out of the glass house.

Rethinking the Triple Bottom Line

The expanded scope of an organic-as-sustainable model presumably would at least be comparable to other sustainability initiatives. Those initiatives are founded on the concept of the 'triple bottom line'. This is usually expressed in terms of a people-planet-profit, or social-environmental-economic platform.

But if the organic sector's approach was comparable to just these initiatives, what would be the point? In that case it would be simpler to just broaden the scope of existing organic agriculture standard requirements by adding what already exists elsewhere. What would make the organic way be seen as more impactful?

The Principles of Organic Agriculture point to the answers. They emphasise the idea that we are all connected, to each other and to our environment. Organic agriculture requires a different treatment of the environment than non-organic methods. The Principles acknowledge the interdependence and intrinsic value of the diversity among all living beings.

Discussions within SOAAN have thus far identified several qualitative differences between non-organic sustainability approaches and an

approach that would embody the Principles of Organic Agriculture. Two significant areas of consideration are emerging that reflect the interdependence, respect for diversity, and health of all living beings that the Principles affirm:

(i) Organised responsibility not organised irresponsibility

While each actor – farmer, processor, trader, etc. – should only be expected to be responsible for their own actions and systems, those actions do not exist in isolation from each other. The actions of every actor affects all other actors, and therefore begs for coordination and cooperation among them. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, whereby certain impacts are only possible through cooperative action. This creates a shared and organised responsibility, as opposed to an isolated or insular 'organised irresponsibility' where each operation only looks after itself. It is an attribute not addressed by other sustainability initiatives.

The discussion of best practices treats this issue in terms of proactive interaction among the players in any given value chain or community. Hot issues of discussion in SOAAN have included the topics of food security and food sovereignty, access to genetic resources, and what role and responsibility farmers and value chains should have in ensuring such things. Linked to these are ideas about food self-sufficiency and dependence on non-renewable resources (especially energy) – what roles can and should farmers and value chains play? What kind of coordination among them is needed? What is appropriate best

While each actor should only be expected to be responsible for their own actions and systems, those actions do not exist in isolation from each other.

news shorts...

PGS HAD A ROOM IN RIO+20

The United Nations Conference on sustainable development Rio+20 took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil last month in June.

At the IFOAM side event on 'Mainstreaming Organic Agriculture as a Means of Implementation' Mrs Loretta Dormal Marino, Deputy-Director General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the EC declared: 'for developing local and regional markets, especially in developing countries, alternatives to third party certification, in particular the participatory guarantee systems (PGS) developed and promoted in particular by IFOAM, offer a practical solution to move forward'. However, Mrs Marino added that 'PGS cannot be accepted for organic certification in the EU'.

Another event, organised by the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (MAPA), was entirely dedicated to PGS. The discussions covered the importance of PGS for the Brazilian organic sector in the global context. The Brazilian regulation on organic agriculture recognises PGS at the same level as third-party certification. Rogério Dias, coordinator of the competent authority noted that 'this system can be adopted not only for organic produce', and that the Government is considering possibilities for expansion.

Source: *The IFOAM PGS Newsletter*, June 2012

practice for an individual family farm versus a community or region (or nation), and how might this vary from one part of the world to another?

Pushing even further, the draft is to explore ways to influence consumer awareness and behaviour around sustainability issues. Although in many respects beyond the scope of the reference document, there is discussion about what sellers of products can do in the way of messaging and providing more sustainable choices. How much should marketers have to say about the relative sustainability (or lack thereof) of their products?

(ii) Culture

Building further on the triple-bottom-line approach, the Principles look for a way to honour and preserve the diversity of human society and its wealth of knowledge. In addition to the three dimensions of the triple-bottom-line, SOAAN has been inspired by some of its founding organisations to include a fourth dimension – that of culture. The Principles of Organic Agriculture recognise that an anthropological lens is necessary to properly value human societies' rich social and biodiversity heritage in addition to the scientific approach used for more technical aspects of production. Drafting of the best practice reference involves debate about how to best write in a language that preserves and strengthens cultural vitality, without external forces imposing ideals, dogma, or lifestyles on anyone. Specific topics include the processing and distribution of agricultural goods and its impacts on culture, rural economic stability and development, and the

impacts that global value chains have on local communities.

Putting the pieces together

The reference document of best practices for sustainability is meant to be applicable globally to all agricultural systems and the value chains that stem from them. Part of the drafting exercise is getting the technical description of any given best practice 'right', so that it makes sense to every type of producer in all countries. Equally important is to achieve this using a language and logic that respects users' needs, challenges, and sensibilities across cultural differences. Such a process requires and invites broad stakeholder input. The planned date for completion of a first working version of the best practice reference and its related strategy and positioning briefs is March 2013.

SOAAN has planned for its sustained and sustainable growth beyond this initial phase. It intends to provide a platform that is a web-hosted continuous work space, where topic-specific technical content is built and exchanged. In addition, the website will offer a library of sorts built or referenced, where benchmarks are developed through experience, case examples described, news shared, and updates posted on how the objectives of the Action Network are being carried forward. ■

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Links

www.ifoam.org/growing_organic/Best_Practice_Program/index.php

Equally important is to achieve this using a language and logic that respects users' needs, challenges, and sensibilities across cultural differences.

Sustainability from field to fork

It has always been clear within the organic world that not only must organic production conform to organic standards, but that the overall system must also fulfil sustainability standards in the broader sense. How can this be shown to happen on the farm and along the chain of production right up to the fork on consumers' tables? And how should research results be used to impact the progress of improving the sustainability of food production processes?

Political and economic decision-makers are more and more recognising the contribution made by organic production methods in providing practical solutions to the challenge of feeding humankind, while keeping the world's natural resources intact.

In the early days of the organic market the issue of how the sector impacted food production and the environment as a whole was somewhat theoretical. What did it matter what a few percent of the whole system was doing? However, the growth of organic markets has not only raised awareness among consumers but also at the political level, influencing both political and economic decisions. What impact will an organic market that is 10, 15, 20% or more of the whole market have on the sustainability of food production? What other positive side effects are realistic. The fact that organic farming is often the method of choice to secure the survival of subsistence farming in developing countries is yet another strong argument. There is an urgent need to find solutions to how the dual issues of hunger and climate change based problems should be handled.

Rio+20 Summit:

Rio+20, the follow-up conference to the Earth Summit of 1992 took place in June. The criticisms – ‘a waste of time and effort’, ‘the glass is half full’, ‘colossal failure’, etc. – have tended to dominate the assessment of the conference. Markus Arbenz, Executive Director of IFOAM, commented while still at the conference: ‘Certainly no one can be satisfied; I personally am disappointed that more attention was not given to the man on the street and the People's Summit, and its call for agroecology.’ Although a defined paradigm change to organic agriculture as a recognised approach to a solution has not been formally reflected, Arbenz commented on the encouraging progress organic agriculture has made in becoming mainstream. No firm goal was mentioned in the final statement, however many key players, such as the European Union and the African Union have already incorporated organic agriculture into their strategic plans.

Dr Hans Rudolf Herren, President of the Board of Trustees of the Biovision Trust for Ecological Development¹ pointed out the encouraging fact that sustainable agriculture, which was not even mentioned in the

original draft 20 years earlier, was successfully – though a little diluted – anchored in the final document of the conference as ‘a clear commitment to the necessity for promoting sustainable agriculture’.

Organic ‘officially’ part of the solution – SAFA-guidelines

Sustainable agriculture could have a wider acceptance if its potential were shown and if it was implemented in individual countries under the direction of the Committee on Food Security (CFS). The relevant impulses have been generated together with the ‘Zero Hunger Challenge’ launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon.

To achieve this goal there needs to be a common language. With this in mind, and as part of its efforts for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), FAO built on existing knowledge and, through a transparent and participatory process, developed a voluntary Guidelines for Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture Systems (SAFA).

In its summary the Guidelines defined the goals and focuses as: ‘A SAFA is the rating of a company's or production site's sustainability performance. The Guidelines specify the procedure, principles and minimum requirements for a SAFA. They are goal-oriented and serve as a benchmark stating what sustainable agriculture entails... The SAFA Guidelines are meant to support a sustainability management that facilitates progress towards this vision all over the sector. The target audience of the SAFA Guidelines are agricultural producers, food manufacturers and retailers who wish to substantiate sustainability claims, as well as entities doing sustainability analyses on behalf of these stakeholders’.

The Guidelines are a globally applicable template for assessments of the sustainability of food and agriculture systems. It includes a generic set of core sustainability categories, possible indicators for performance assessment, and minimum criteria for sustainability.

The 'Nina Fedoroff-case'

The organic movement has to face the challenge of convincing the world that organic farming should be the sustainable production option for the future. At the same time it has to, from time to time, respond to experts, scientists and/or representatives of the specialised media who claim organic farming is dangerous for the environment and/or consumer health.

An example of the growing debate occurred in the Swiss media this spring. The 'NZZ am Sonntag', an important Swiss Sunday weekly, published an interview with Nina Fedoroff, a US biology professor known for her research in life sciences. According to her, the organic method is damaging the environment, possibly dangerous for consumers, and does not solve any problems. Her shallow and outdated arguments appeared to be an attempt to make the Swiss readers insecure about their usually positive view on organic agriculture. In the event, if this was the purpose of her comments it backfired as it stimulated a wider debate, headed by FiBL Director, Urs Niggli, IFOAM Executive Director, Markus Arbenz, and others, that discussed the performance of organic farming in the Swiss media and the German speaking countries.

Solving the real problems

At FiBL a research group is working on a 'Sustainability assessment', in cooperation with experts in various areas of consulting and commuica-

tion. The focus of the research programme is to investigate:

Research

- Effects of agricultural methods and food production of environmental, economic and social indicators.
- Production system and processing optimisation.

Development: Practice-oriented solutions for environmental, economic and social problems in agriculture.

Consulting: For farms, processing and trade companies as well as independent organisations and politics regarding sustainability issues.

Communication: Sustainability aspects to various stakeholder groups and the general public.

IFOAM EU Group

On 5 July 2012 the IFOAM EU Group proposed that further requirements for the environmental performance of operations involved in organic processing and trade should be introduced into the EU Regulation (EC) No 834/2007. The purpose of this measure is to make it possible for organic operators to live up to the organic self-conception of following a holistic approach capable of offering solutions for society's future challenges in a credible and harmonised manner. This proposal is expressed in a letter that the IFOAM EU Group has sent to Mr João Onofre, the new Head of the Organic Farming Unit in DG Agriculture. Relevant steps on this process are:

- To define relevant parameters (appropriate for each operation).
- To establish a system that enables the operation to measure and evaluate the results of the selected parameters.
- To have appropriate documentation in place.
- To have a strategy that guarantees continuous improvement of the environmental performance of the operation. ■

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Sources and further information

SAFA guidelines: www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/sustainability/SAFA/SAFA_Guidelines_draft_Jan_2012.pdf
The Nina Fedoroff-case (only in German): www.fibl.org/fileadmin/documents/de/news/2012/niggli-2012-replik-fedoroff.pdf
FiBL research: www.fibl.org/fileadmin/documents/en/themes/sustainability/flyer-sustainability-assessment.pdf
www.fibl.org/en/fibl/themes/sustainability-analysis/sustainability-assessment-fibl.html
Rio+20 Summit: <http://oneco.biofach.de/en/search/news/?focus=ccf885e7-b232-41a1-b3f8-f2b53e9e30a0>
www.infonet-biovision.org/
www.fao.org/cfs/en/
EU Bio – integration of sustainability: www.ifoam-eu.org/
www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/around_world/eu_group-new/positions/Papers/pdf/Letter_IFOAMEU_environmental_performance_5.7.2012.pdf

¹ Biovision was founded in 1998 by Swiss World Food Prize recipient Dr Hans Rudolf Herren, with the aim of sustainably improving life for people in Africa while preserving the environment as the basis for all life. Organic agriculture is one of the methods recommended by Biovision in order to reach this goal.

Author's comment

Organic standards with integrated sustainability criteria beyond the farming processes are certainly an important step forward. Equally important is the support of best practice examples, benchmarking processes and networking among the organic scene and applied research programmes to analyse and improve the progress.

Monitoring organic principles

Most organic operators and consumers have a very similar concept of how they consider organic agriculture should be. However, the reality, as determined by standards, does not always conform to this idealised belief. But maybe it should.

Over a period of several years IFOAM has invested considerable time, thought and care into developing the 'Principles of Organic Agriculture' (see box). Although these principles have been widely accepted by the organic sector many of the issues regarded fundamental to the principles are still not fully covered in organic standards and legislation for organic production. For example, subjects such as sustainable resource use, economic impact, biodiversity and animal welfare are not generally covered by organic standards. And this is despite the fact that both organic farmers and consumers share the opinion that these are important issues in organic production.

The reason several of these areas – like biodiversity and sustainable use of resources – are not well covered is probably due to the style of the normal inspection method for organic production. The standard third party inspection system would be unable to inspect or verify compliance in all these areas very easily, and therefore if they were in the standards monitoring would have to be carried out differently.

The Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) Public Goods Tool Development is an initiative created to give farmers and advisors a method of assessing the 'public good' provided by organic farms. The tool should also give the basis for further

optimising the public good achieved through organic farming and the farm business viability. The topics covered by the tool are:

- Soil management
- Biodiversity
- Landscape and heritage
- Water management
- Manure management and nutrients
- Energy and carbon
- Food security
- Agricultural systems diversity
- Social capital
- Farm business resilience
- Animal health and welfare

The areas were carefully selected so that they would cover the relevant social, environmental and economic issues. They were also chosen to give sufficient in-depth information on performance on the farm while at the same time being straight forward enough so farmers would have the necessary information in their own records and that the assessment should not take more than 2-4 hours. The areas were also selected to give a balance between quantitative and qualitative measures.

The tool works by having a number of questions for each topic. Each

IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture

The Principle of Health

Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible.

The Principle of Ecology

Organic Agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.

The Principle of Fairness

Organic Agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities

The Principle of Care

Organic Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.

reply is given a score, and the average score for each topic is presented on a radar diagram (see overpage). Consequently, each farm has its own unique radar diagram, which shows the areas where the farmer performs well and which areas can be improved.

Dr Susanne Padel, Principal socio-economic researcher at the Organic Research Institute, presented two papers on the OCIS tool at the GOMA Conference, held at Bio-

Many of the issues regarded fundamental to the principles are still not fully covered in organic standards and legislation for organic production.

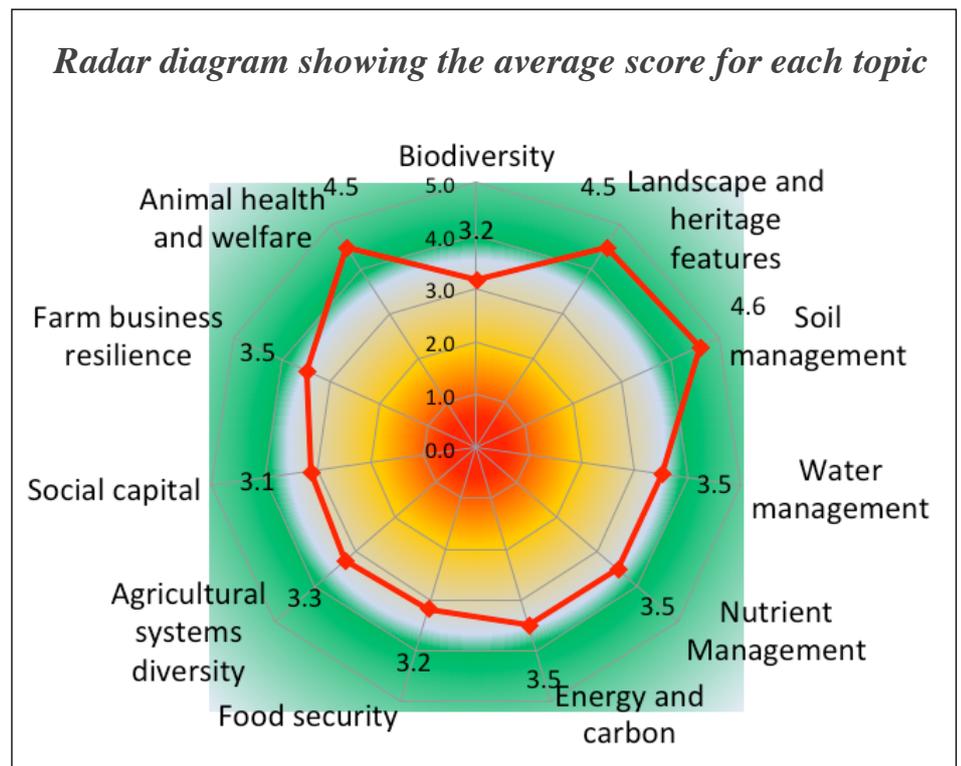
Fach last February. The papers were entitled 'OCIS Public Good Tool Development' and 'Acceptance of output based monitoring of animal welfare as a way to achieve improvements'.

Dr Padel explained that the OCIS tool was tested on forty farms in a pilot assessment. In the tests water management was generally awarded the lowest score, with a mean of 2.9; the highest scores of 4.2 were achieved on animal welfare and soil management. After the tests were completed various options for developing the tool were considered, and there are also suggestions to use it on conventional farms. The full report is available on the internet¹.

Animal welfare in certification

Another study looking at how animal welfare can be monitored as part of the CertCost project, a science project to study economic analysis of certification systems for organic food and farming. The study focuses on how organic operators can be encouraged to aim for the continuous improvement of their organic system and specifically of their animal husbandry in regard to animal welfare. The system has been developed so that farmers are able to evaluate their performance themselves. Thus it provides a way for a certification body to first test welfare aspects and handle aspects that are difficult to handle in normal certification requirements.

Five clearly defined animal-based welfare measures for each species have been developed. For dairy cows the measures are lameness, swollen hocks, skin lesions, cleanliness and body condition. For poultry, the measures are feather loss, comb colour, abnormal beaks, soiling of feathers and normal behaviour (dust bathing and ranging). During the inspection visit the inspector assesses twenty ani-



mals selected at random.

As part of the study ten dairy farmers and eight farmers with laying hens were interviewed. The dairy farmers generally expressed a more positive attitude to using the monitoring system compared to the poultry farmers. An explanation might be that the dairy farmers in the study had a much longer history with organic farming compared to the poultry farmers. The type of measurements the farmers were asked to make were new to many in the study, and some sort of training will probably be needed.

The study concluded² that using animal-based welfare assessment has a clear potential. The farmers were

generally positive and for the certification body it offers a way to further develop the inspection and certification system. However, a factor that must be considered is that any assessment takes time, and inspection times are already quite long. Adding this assessment to an inspection will increase the time pressure on every inspection visit. ■

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¹ www.organicresearchcentre.com/?go=Research%20and%20development&page=Resource%20use%20and%20sustainability&i=projects.php&p_id=20

² The full report can be read on http://www.certcost.org/Lib/CERTCOST/Deliverable/D21_A.pdf

The study focuses on how organic operators can be encouraged to aim for the continuous improvement of their organic system. ■

news shorts...

CARBON NEUTRAL CERTIFICATION IN NORTH AMERICA

NSF International and the Carbonfund.org Foundation, owner of the CarbonFree® Product Certification Program, have created a partnership to certify climate neutral products. The certification is offered through NSF International's Sustainability division.

The CarbonFree® product certification programme uses Life Cycle Assessments (LCA) to determine the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over a product's entire life cycle. GHG emissions (expressed as carbon dioxide equivalents) that cannot be reduced or eliminated from the products' life cycle are offset or 'neutralised' with third-party validated renewable energy, energy efficiency and forestry carbon offset projects.

A carbon offset 'credit' represents a reduction of carbon as a result of a clean technology (e.g. wind, solar) or carbon reduction (e.g. forestry) project. The units of carbon removed from the atmosphere as a result of these projects are translated into 'credits'. These credits can be purchased by companies that want to offset or neutralise the carbon produced. Purchased credits are 'retired' so the carbon is essentially eliminated from use.

For more information see: www.nfsustainability.org.

Organic picks up full speed in Africa

'Organic agriculture is one of the best practices for ensuring environmental sustainability. It sustains the fertility of soils, ecosystems and sustains the health of people. It relies on locally adapted improved ecological processes and cycles, and natural biodiversity rather than the use of synthetic inputs and genetically modified materials [...]. I have no doubt that organic agriculture has potential to contribute to food security, increased incomes and generation of employment for our people.' With those words Emmanuel T. Chenda, Minister of agriculture and livestock of Zambia set the tone of the second African Organic Conference in Lusaka on 2-4 May 2012.

The second African Organic Conference held in Zambia last May was a milestone towards bringing organic agriculture into the mainstream in Africa. Around 300 people attended, including representatives of the African Union, FAO, IF-OAM, UNCTAD and the EU.

The main focus of the conference was on production, research and policy, with standards, certification and regulation playing a minor role. A special side event for the southern African delegates was the formation of the Southern African Network for Organic Development (SANOD). Work on a harmonised Southern African standard was considered premature and of a low priority, while the expansion of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) has a high priority. However, despite an upbeat tone, many presentations told a story of painstakingly slow development.

Reduced certification costs

The host organisation of the conference, the Organic Producers and Processors Association of Zambia (OP-PAZ) talked of their experience with using handheld computers in the field to collect data and store it in an online database, thus helping farmers gain organic certification. They have been using this system for several years, and now over 10,000 organic farmers, supported by the Dutch IICD (www.iicd.org) are connected to this system for organic certification through the use of smartphones. The technology has resulted in a 30% decrease in costs and time spent on obtaining national and international certification for the participating producers.

The long way to international recognition

Charles Walaga, retiring Chief Executive Officer of UgoCert, told the story

However, despite an upbeat tone, many presentations told a story of painstakingly slow development.

news shorts...

SUSTAINABLE COSMETICS INDUSTRY IN LATIN AMERICA

The first Sustainable Cosmetics Summit in Latin America will take place in Sao Paulo, Brazil on 24-26 September, organised by Organic Monitor.

Brazil was selected to host the Summit as it has the strongest beauty care industry in the region and the largest number of cosmetics companies using organic certified ingredients and making other sustainability claims. One of these companies is the the first Brazilian cosmetics manufacturer certified by IBD Certificações.

In 2011 Brazil had the biggest beauty care spending in the emerging markets and by 2014 the country is expected to become the second biggest cosmetics market in the world after the US.

Colombia is another important player in the region, mainly as exporter of natural ingredients for the cosmetics sector. The Colombian government is supporting a programme to assist cosmetics firms to further develop value-added products over the next seven years. ■

Source: Organic Monitor

of the long path from initiation to international recognition for UgoCert, the domestic certification body in Uganda. A training session for local inspectors, conducted by KRAV and IMO back in 1995, gave the first impulse towards establishing a certification body. Stakeholders met to discuss the establishment of a local organisation in 1999, but at that time they were not sufficiently united to agree on a way ahead. In 2001 the national organic movement initiated the development of local standards. Through the support of the EPOPA (Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa) programme, the standard was completed in 2003, and a task force was formed to work to develop a local certification capacity.

The strategy that developed included the following:

- A low cost model, based on using local inspectors already trained by KRAV and IMO during the late 1990s.
- Financial support from EPOPA to cover establishment costs, office furniture, office equipment, office rent, communication systems, technical support and accreditation costs.
- The registration of UgoCert in February 2004 as a certification company limited by shares with the key stakeholders as owners.
- Persuading the European based

certification bodies to sub-contract their inspection work in the country to UgoCert. The 'persuasion', carried out by EPOPA, was possible as EPOPA financed a very substantial proportion of organic certification in Uganda.

In 2004 the work to develop the quality system, recruit and train staff and inspectors, develop forms and a business plan commenced. A milestone was reached when UgoCert became IFOAM accredited in 2007. However, while the accreditation certainly consolidated the image of UgoCert and confirmed the certification body had matured into a fully functioning organisation, it did not deliver immediate tangible results as the main import markets still insisted on their own procedures and approvals. As a business strategy UgoCert developed cooperative arrangements with foreign certification bodies that were registered and/or recognised in Uganda and surrounding countries, so that they could offer certification services to clients wishing to export their organic products. But the ambition was always to gain their own international recognition. So in October 2009, UgoCert applied to the EU for recognition as a third country certification body. That recognition came through in November 2011; but for reasons unknown it only took effect in

The main challenges in the development of UgoCert

- The multiple accreditations a local CB requires to be able to offer a basket of certification services to clients, are very expensive to acquire.
- Competition for certification business in the region with European-based CBs is very stiff.
- Not all Ugandan organic operators believe a local CB is sufficiently committed to be able to provide a reliable certification service.
- Some local operators believe and expect a local certification body to be more lenient when verifying organic requirements.

PGS in South Africa and the standards they use

Bryanston Organic Market.....	Afrisco Standard
Umthombongashi.....	Own standard
Siyavuna (Kumnandi).....	Own standard (applied to IFOAM Family)
Green Road.....	Afrisco Standard
Rooiberg.....	Afrisco Standard
Eden.....	Own standard
Green Growers Association.....	Own standard (applied to IFOAM Family)

The 'Afrisco Standard' is a private standard adopted by the certification body, Afrisco; however, it is the same as the South African draft organic regulation from 2007.

July 2012! 'The EC can be painfully slow in making decisions', concluded Mr Walaga.

Lessons learnt

Leonard Mtama, Manager of TanCert in Tanzania, concluded that the main lesson they had learnt was that the process of developing a local certification body needs a high level of commitment and knowledge by the people and organisations involved. Also, international recognition for the services offered by a local certification body is costly in money, time and human resource, and demand for certification for the domestic market is low. Finally it is difficult to balance a certification system so that it is reliable, affordable and sustainable all at the same time.

The conference declaration called for the EU to recognise as equivalent the East African Organic Products Standard (EAOPS) and that all possible steps should be taken to ensure that equivalency agreements among regulators of major organic markets directly improve the market access of organic products from Africa and other developing countries.

A long way for an organic policy
Organic stakeholders in South Africa

started lobbying the National Department of Agriculture (the Government ministry) for the development of a South African National Organic Standard back in 1994. Work on a National Standard was eventually initiated around year 2000, but progress has been painstakingly slow. The third draft of the legislation was closed for public comment on 15 February 2007. However, three parallel developments have been hindering progress. At this stage, the stakeholders were not convinced that they were best served with a regulation such as the one proposed, a mandatory organic regulation drawing heavily on the EU Regulation. In general, most stakeholders wanted a comprehensive policy rather than a controlling regulation. The South African Department of Trade and Industry had commissioned a study to investigate how best to develop the organic sector, which produced many recommendations, among others calling for a comprehensive policy rather than an organic regulation. Finally, it appeared that the legal basis for a

National Standard was disputed.

Kgomo Petje, from the National Department of Agriculture, confirmed that a comprehensive policy is now under development and that the further development of regulations should be done in close consultation with the organic industry to ensure that the regulation is enabling rather than controlling by nature. He also stated that regulations for local markets shall be based on local conditions, and not on conditions in the export markets, which had been the case of the earlier draft regulation².

Konrad Hauptfleisch, a previous manager of the Bryanston Organic Market in South Africa and currently at IFOAM, presented an overview of PGS development in South Africa where there are seven PGSs operating. The oldest is the Bryanston Organic Market (see box), which was established 2005. ■

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All papers, and the conference conclusion can be downloaded from <http://africanorganicconference.com/>

Source:
<http://africanorganicconference.com/>

Footnote:

- ¹ For more information on:
- The South African organic sector and the draft policy see the 'Study to develop a value chain strategy for sustainable development and growth of organic agriculture', October 2008, available on www.nedlac.org.za/research/fridge-studies/organic-agriculture.aspx.
 - The South African national policy on organic production see www.nda.agric.za/daoDev/sideMenu/plantProduction/doc/NationalPolicyOrganicFarmingDraft7.pdf.

The conference declaration called for the EU to recognise as equivalent the East African Organic Products Standard. ■

Multifunctional organic

At the GOMA Conference, held last February in Nuremberg, the last few presentations had sustainability as a common theme. The word was used in various contexts: integration of sustainability criteria into the organic standards, evaluating sustainability and sustainable development.

The paper presented by Bavo van den Idsert¹ talked on multifunctional organic sustainability and maintained that organic production started as a multifunctional management system. However, the introduction of organic legislation, which does not cover all the aspects of sustainability, resulted in some important aspects being excluded from the regulations. Many of these aspects, such as water and energy use, carbon reduction, social and ethical aspects, biodiversity, etc., are topics that most consumers would assume are consistent with the organic philosophy.

Mr. Van den Idsert considered that organic standards will eventually expand to include a wider range of sustainability aspects. However, he expressed concern that it is not clear yet how far the scope is likely to be extended and how it will be done.

Official regulations are always slow to incorporate new standards, and any new legislation on specific measures of sustainability is likely to come from elsewhere rather than the EU Organic Regulation. The EU Commission is currently looking at aspects of animal welfare and eco labelling, but this is under different fields and not within the framework of the EU Organic Regulation.

It seems likely that there will be a new era for private initiatives

from within the organic sector. Some private standards, such as Soil Association, KRAV and the Ecosocial Standards of the Brazilian IBD, have already started. But the danger is that the changes will be a series of separate initiatives; to make it possible for the organic movement to work towards these new challenges together 'new creative tools that guide organic farmers, traders, processors and

retailers to reinforce the basic principles of IFOAM into daily practice and strengthen organic as the most integral sustainable food and farming system' are needed.

What tools?

This is the question.

Bavo van den Idsert suggested that more certification and control is not the most likely way to enforce the multifunctional sustainability development. He continued, 'What the organic movement needs are flexible self assessment tools. Tools that

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GOTS AND TE HARMONISE THEIR CERTIFICATES

It is often claimed that better harmonisation of organic control, and more specifically harmonised certificate templates, would reduce fraud. This is especially important for those processors and retailers who purchase certified goods from various suppliers, controlled by different certifiers and to different standards.

The textile organisations, Global Organic Textile Standard and Textile Exchange (TE), have taken a definitive step in this regard by developing harmonised policies and templates for transaction and scope certificates.

The new templates provide a unified layout, format and text for both certificate types used by the different certifiers and standards. From 1 September 2012, all GOTS/TE approved certifiers will be required to use the templates for any scope and transaction certificates issued.

More information at GOTS website.
www.global-standard.org

Source: GOTS News, July 2012

give organic farmers and companies information about their sustainability footprint, the strengths and the weaknesses, so they know what can be improved. We need learning tools how to become champion of the sustainable decathlon.'

In the meantime the organic sector will continue to be seen as a niche, not as a mainstream solution. Bavo van den Idsert believes that it can become a very big niche instead of a small one, when the multifunctional approach is integrated in an inspirational way for farmers and companies, and made transparent for consumers.

The main objectives of the multifunctional organic approach are presented in the pie chart below. The objectives are strongly related to the four IFOAM EU principles. Bavo van den Idsert explained that in 'the next decade we have to bring the principles back into daily practice of the organic farming, processing, trading, retailing and consuming'. And this is quite a challenge'.

One of the key projects of Bionext,

the Dutch umbrella organisation for the organic sector, is to establish a new multi-sustainable assessment system for organic farmers, processors and retailers. Probably in October, Bionext will start a close cooperative arrangement with Stichting EKO Keur² to develop the self-assessment tool for organic farmers, processors, traders, retail and restaurants. The former national Dutch EKO-label will be the logo for all organic farmers and companies who develop in the direction of multifunctional organic sustainability. ■

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Sources:

GOMA Conference documents:
www.goma-organic.org/conference/download-documents/
Interview to Bavo van den Idsert

Footnotes

¹ Bavo van den Idsert is the director of Bionext, the new Dutch chain-organisation for sustainable organic farming, trading, processing, retailing and consuming (www.bionext.nl). Bavo is also Vice President of the IFOAM EU Group.

² See TOS 122, June 2011

The main objective of the multifunctional organic approach

Eco-efficient:

- Soil fertility
- Biodiversity
- Natural (i.e. not artificial)
- Climate neutral
- Recycling

Less is more (i.e., using less resources, energy, materials and less travelling time):

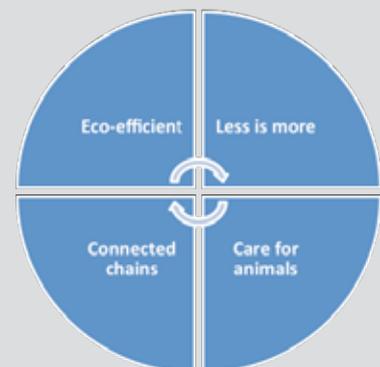
- Pure processed
- Natural health and taste
- Innovative

Care for animals:

- Animal welfare
- Healthy feed
- Respected animals
- Antibiotic free

Connected chains:

- Transparency
- Fairness
- Connection from farm to consumer
- Social aspects



National Organic Standards Board Spring meeting

A summary

The US National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) holds a public meeting normally twice a year to discuss key issues in organic standards and to listen to public comments. Its most recent meeting was held on 22-25 May, 2012 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. What follows is a summary of the key issues raised and decisions made at this meeting.

As is customary, Deputy Administrator, Miles McEvoy, provided an opening presentation. In addition to summarising the current status of the National Organic Program (NOP), its accomplishments and challenges, McEvoy gave a helpful summary of the role of the NOSB as an advisory committee under the Federal Advisory Committees Act (FACA), emphasising the statement, 'Federal advisory committees exist to advise and recommend – not to decide'. This is an important clarification that many who observe the process – and even NOSB members themselves – often do not understand.

Materials Review

The Crops, Livestock and Handling Committees all addressed only materials review issues at the meeting. This included decisions on relisting materials subject to a Sunset Review as well as whether or not to approve petitions for new materials to be added to the National List.

Only one materials issue was not resolved at the meeting. This was a decision on the use of vaccines from excluded methods (i.e., derived from genetically modified organisms), and

resulted in the vote being postponed by the Livestock Committee pending the collection of further information on vaccines that are available and whether or not they include GMOs. There was little problem approving the relisting of existing Crop and Handling materials, although in some cases changes were made to annotations that specify additional restrictions on use of these substances. Only one new material petitioned for inclusion on the National List – gibberellic acid for post-harvest use on bananas – was rejected. The Materials Committee presented a recommendation outlining a Research Priorities Framework, which was similarly uncontroversial.

The subject of materials review was also the focus of a recommendation by the Compliance, Accreditation and Certification Committee. The Committee's proposed Criteria for Material Review by Material Review Organizations, which extends the scope of the NOP to oversee organic

materials review organisations, was readily approved.

In a separate presentation Dr Lisa Brines, NOP National List Manager, provided an update on petitioned materials and the materials review process. Dr Brines also outlined the NOP plans to develop draft guidance on classification of materials, and provided an overview of their current thinking. Once the draft guidance is published, the intention is to provide at least 60 days for comments.

A number of new definitions will be included in the guidance, but will not be added to the regulation. The terms 'extraction', 'manufacture', and 'formulation' will be clarified. The NOP presentation also included explanations about the relationship between the different sections of the National List. For instance, substances classified as nonsynthetic in section 205.605(a) – nonsynthetics allowed for handling – are permitted as nonsynthetic crop and livestock inputs, unless specifically prohibited for crops or livestock.

Regarding significant and insignificant residues in processed products (like processing aids and other 'additives'), NOP explained that the guidance document will not define such levels but will include a description for review of materials including removal steps for processing aids that will address this issue. In addition, NOP provided clarification on the use of volatile synthetic solvents, noting that handlers cannot directly use such solvents in the production of their products. However, synthetic solvents used during the manufacturing of a non-organic substance are not gener-

A number of new definitions will be included in the guidance, but will not be added to the regulation.

ally prohibited. NOSB must evaluate their use when they consider petitioned materials and use annotations to address their allowed or prohibited status. The NOSB used this approach in a previous vote to permit the use of DHA and ARA in organic infant formula, so long as the substance was not hexane extracted. [See article 'They're at it again' in TOS 131, March 2012]

The publication of the draft guidance is intended to coincide with the publication of a Draft Permitted Substance List for Organic Crop Production (which will include nonsynthetic and synthetic substances allowed for use). Once this list is published, any nonsynthetic substances not on the list will need to be reviewed by the NOP before being added to the list.

Materials issues on the agenda for next meeting

The never ending saga of classification of materials may be nearing resolution with the expected publication of this guidance document from the NOP. This is good news for everyone who has to determine what materials are or are not permitted for use in organic production and handling. There is, however, one more wrinkle in the realm of processing materials that has yet to be resolved. That is the question of how to deal with the substances used to manufacture those nonorganic ingredients that the NOSB decides can be used in or on products labelled as 'organic' or 'made with organic ingredients'.

Currently, there may be conflicting determinations by materials review organisations as to whether a given proprietary version of the allowed ingredient is permissible, based on a review of substances used as carriers, stabilisers and antioxidants, among other technical functions. The recent

uproar about the supplements, DHA and ARA, that are approved in infant formulas, is a typical example of the conflict. In a memo last November the NOP asked the NOSB to clarify whether any restrictions are warranted for 'other ingredients' in substances included on Section 205.605 of the National List. Substances that are likely to include a range of such 'other ingredients' include enzymes, dairy cultures, nutrient vitamins and minerals and tocopherols. There is a similar question about formulations used for substances that appear on Section 205.606, which identifies nonorganic agricultural ingredients that may be used in the absence of commercially available supplies of the same product.

The NOSB Handling Committee has taken up this question, and intends to issue a proposed recommendation at its next meeting in the autumn. The Committee has asked for help from the Materials Working Group, an ad hoc collection of knowledgeable people who deal with such questions as organic product manufacturers, consultants, materials review staff, and ingredient suppliers. The controversy centres around whether or not a recommendation should be made to require that all such ingredients of ingredients – which are not required to be listed on the label of the final product – appear on the National List. These substances already need to be approved by the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) for use as food additives.

Many of these substances already are on the National List, but many others that would never themselves be allowed as ingredients in organic products would have to be reviewed by the NOSB under this scheme. Such substances are considered to be 'incidental additives' that end up in the final product in minute quantities, and may barely be detectable in parts per billion. It is hard to estimate the impact of prohibiting some of these substances on existing organic manufacturers, or of allowing them without further review on the organic integrity of their products.

The next NOSB meeting is scheduled for 18-22 October, 2012 in Providence, Rhode Island. It is again likely to offer a number of opportunities for lively debate.

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All printed information about the NOSB meeting, including Committee recommendations, discussion documents, and the agenda, is available at the NOP website.

All the NOSB's recommendations are available on www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5098503

The entire presentation given by Miles McEnvoy is available at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5098503>.

A video of the entire meeting is also available and can be viewed by agenda item.

Many of these substances already are on the National List, but many others that would never themselves be allowed as ingredients in organic products would have to be reviewed by the NOSB under this scheme.

Room for improvement

The European Court of Auditors has recently evaluated the control system of organic production and import to the EU. The report was published on 9 July 2012.

The evaluation conducted by the Court looked into the effectiveness of the control system and how the Commission, the Member States and the certification bodies (called ‘control bodies’ by the report) carry out their responsibilities. The evaluation covers both the handling of production inside the EU and import into the EU. The overall audit question the Court asked was: ‘Does the organic control system provide sufficient assurance that the key requirements for organic production, processing, distribution and imports are fulfilled?’

The outcome

In the course of the evaluation the Court of Auditors identified several issues that it considered to be unsatisfactory. These included the following:

- A number of competent authorities in the Member States do not sufficiently fulfil their supervisory role over the certification bodies under their authority.
- The exchange of information within and between Member States, and between the Member States and the Commission is not good enough to ensure the control system works adequately.
- Competent authorities have difficulty ensuring the traceability of organic products, both within their territory and particularly with products crossing their borders.
- The Commission has not given enough priority to supervision activities, including audits, to ensure the

proper functioning of the Member States’ control system.

- The Commission does not have sufficient information about control systems used in third countries to know whether they fulfil the regulatory requirements. There is also a backlog in assessing applications for equivalence from third countries.
- There are weaknesses in the system for granting import authorisations.

The Court also presented a range of recommendations to strengthen the system and overcome the above reported weaknesses. The Commission has had the opportunity to make comments on the report. It accepted many of the comments made by the Court and refers to its efforts to respond to the issues raised by the Court and what it has done and will do to get the system to function better.

The Commission also refers to the impending evaluation by the Farm and Veterinary Office looking into how the organic system is implemented in Member States and recognised third countries, and how this will improve the functioning of the control system. Another document which the Commission refers to is the control

system’s Guidance Document, ‘Working document on official controls in the organic sector – version 8 July 2011’ which was issued by the Commission last year. (See TOS 133 May, page 17.)

What the Court did – the audit approach

In its revision process, the Court went through the Commission’s files, including the review of documentation from third countries. Six countries – UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, France and Ireland – were visited, and in UK, Germany, Italy and Spain a specific region was selected. During the audits, documents were reviewed and competent authorities, accreditation bodies and two private certification bodies per country were visited. The Court also conducted visits to producers, processors and importers.

Traceability checks were carried out on 85 products to determine whether it was possible to trace products back to their origin, and to see whether all operators had a yearly inspection. In addition, laboratory tests – where the sampling and the handling of the test results were conducted by the certification bodies – were evaluated on a number of products.

The multi-annual national control plans were reviewed and the related annual reports from the Member States were checked.

Some issues in detail

The evaluation was thorough and the

The European Court of Auditors

The European Court of Auditors audits EU finances and the EU institutions that get public aid. Its role is to improve EU finances management and to report on the use of public funds. The Court has no legal powers of its own. If fraud is found they inform OLAF, the EU European Anti Fraud Office, an EU Commission institution.

news shorts...

ORGANIC DENMARK BACKTRACKS ON MANURE RULES

The Danish organic association decided in 2008 to phase out all use of non-organic manure on organic farms by 2021, through an annual reduction of the allowable limit to be used. Now, four years later, the organisation thinks the rules were too strict. It wants to focus on developing alternatives rather than forcing farmers to conform to rules that do not work. ■

Source: *Oekologi&Erhverv*

16 PERCENT ORGANIC IN SWEDEN

The organic area in Sweden increased by 9.5% in 2011, reaching 480,000 hectares. This corresponds to 16% of the Swedish agriculture area. The official target was that organic farming should have reached 20% by 2010. ■

Source: *www.ecoweb.se*

conclusions cover a wide range of issues. Readers who wish to go into detail on specific points are recommended to read the full report. Some issues, however, stand out as particularly important; these are described in more detail below:

Competent authorities' supervision of certification bodies

The Court found that in three of the six Member States procedures for approving, withdrawing or supervising certificate bodies were not sufficiently detailed. It was also found that some of the competent authorities accept the work of the accreditation bodies for assessing whether the annual inspection requirements are complied with. However, the report then concludes that the accreditation bodies rely on the description of the procedures used by the certification bodies rather than investigate what actually occurs in practice. This means their assessments are not useful, and the Member States, who are responsible, should be aware of the situation.

Risk assessment

The EU Regulation for organic production states that certification bodies should apply a systematic risk assessment of their operators. A high risk score, especially where the non-conformities relate to products and the business, should lead to additional visits. Seven of the twelve certification bodies did not take risk factors into account when deciding additional visits.

Residue testing

When the Court looked into residue

testing it found that most of the certification bodies had good sampling polices. However, five did not have a sampling plan that defined the minimum number of analyses. One of the certification bodies only took samples of final products even though it probably is easier to find residues earlier in the production chain.

Sanctions

In several Member States the competent authorities have not defined detailed categories of non-compliances and corresponding sanctions. Each certification body within those Member States can, therefore, define and sanction a non-compliance differently. The Court found that one specific non-compliance in relation to animal husbandry led to the withdrawal of organic labelling in Italy, while in France one certification body issued a warning, while another applied a request for corrective action. The sanctions in Italy led to producers not being allowed to sell their products, while in France they were allowed to continue selling. The Court also referred to the results of the CertCost project, which shows how different sanctions are applied by different certification bodies in different Member States.

Annual reports

The annual reports submitted by the Member States to the Commission were found to be incomplete and seriously delayed.

The evaluation checked the last available reports and found that less than half the questions were properly answered for the following issues:

When the Court looked into residue testing it found that most of the certification bodies had good sampling polices. ■

- Occurrence of non-compliances
- Risks arising from non-compliances
- Root causes of non-compliances
- Number of registered operators
- Number of annual visits
- Number of additional risk-based visits
- Number of samples analysed
- Number of sanctions applied

The question that was answered best was on the number of annual visits. With this question half of the Member States gave a complete answer. Only one Member State reported fully on the occurrence of non-compliances, and five gave a partially acceptable reply.

The Court made the following conclusion about the annual reports from the Member States:

- Information related to the organic control system in the annual reports is still very limited.
- The review of the annual reports by the Commission and its feedback focuses mainly on identifying missing information rather than on analysing the design and functioning of the control system.
- Reports by Member States are still of unsatisfactory quality.
- The Commission lacks basic information as regards to the functioning of the control system in Member States.

Traceability

Of the 85 products that the Court tried to trace back, after three months 60% of the products were traced back to the producer level and certificates were complete for around half of the products. After six months around 70% of the products could be traced back to the producer level.

Commission audits of the Member States

Since 2001 the Commission has not

made any audits of the Member States to verify that the control system is functioning and that Member States are fulfilling the requirements of the EU Regulation. There are no specific enforcement measures that the Commission could apply if a Member State does not comply with their responsibilities.

Third countries

The report showed that although there are 25 applications from countries that want to be accepted for equivalence, only eight have been examined. There are also several already recognised countries that have requested an extension of the scope of the equivalence.

Recognised countries submit an annual report, but the Court found that these reports are incomplete, lacking facts and do not conform to any standardised format that would facilitate the Commission with their evaluation. The Court report also states that the information provided in the third country reports are poor and, as the Commission has not visited any of the recognised third countries since the initial approval of the country's system, some countries have not been properly re-evaluated for many years. For example, the last visit to Israel was in 1996 and India in 2004. The Court evaluation has also found that the data in the Organic Farming Information System (OFIS) register on imports is not reliable and complete. In addition, the Court concluded that the Standing Committee on Organic Farming (SCOF) does not adequately perform its role for exchanging information regarding the functioning of the import authorisation regime. ■

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The report can be found on <http://eca.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/15290741.PDF>

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