

Harmonization & Equivalence

THE NEWSLETTER OF GOMA

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GOMA Launches its Website and Publishes its First Newsletter

Welcome to Issue #1 of the GOMA Newsletter, *Harmonization and Equivalence*. GOMA's success will depend on the interest and participation of stakeholders from governments, intergovernmental institutions and the private sector. One of our workspaces in the project is communication. The Steering Committee will endeavor to keep you informed of its work and to be accessible for your project ideas and other feedback. Our main communication instrument is this newsletter, which will be updated 3 times annually. If you are on our stakeholder list, you will receive email notices of each new issue and a link to the newsletter, which is embedded in our website. When you link to the newsletter, you can pick and choose which articles to read. We will also communicate updates on GOMA through IFOAM, UNCTAD, and FAO publications and as well at key events. You are on the GOMA stakeholder list if you were a member or stakeholder of the former International Task Force (ITF), or a member of IFOAM's Certification Body Forum, or identified as a stakeholder by the GOMA Project Manager/Steering Committee.

We have divided the GOMA project into workspaces, which you can view on the GOMA website [by clicking here](#). Several of our workspaces focus on the adoption and implementation of the two equivalence tools, IROCB and EquiTool, which were produced by the ITF. We are also fostering the development of harmonized regional standards, promoting our work and conclusions to ISO and Codex Alimentarius, conducting ongoing analysis of the situation for enhancing trade by reducing trade barriers, and assessing and revising our tools as needed. The 3-year project started in June 2009 and will end in 2012 with a major conference on harmonization and equivalence, probably at BioFach Nuremberg.

Our newsletter is published in cooperation with *The Organic Standard*, published by the consulting company, Grolink. Although *The Organic Standard* has a broader scope than Harmonization and Equivalence, both newsletters cover topics of interest to GOMA. Since the topic has a relatively small group of stakeholders, we considered it better to partner than to compete. The partnership means that you will see some articles in this newsletter that are reproduce or adapted from *The Organic Standard*, and vice-versa. We will also endeavor to find other ways to expose readers to *The Organic Standard*, because we consider it to be a relevant

and even necessary publication for many organic government regulators and certification bodies.

The GOMA website, www.goma-organic.org, is designed to share information about the project and to provide an overview of the state of harmonization and equivalence of organic standards and regulations. Eventually we will add two website features, Equivalence Tracker and Harmonization Tracker, to fulfill the latter aim. But for now, we are building the basic information and communication tools on the website. In addition to finding information about our work and projects, you can check for News and Views (the GOMA Project Manager's blog) and also hear the "Voices" of various stakeholders about the challenges of organic trade and the solutions offered by GOMA. For historians, researchers and others who would like to delve into the past history of this project, we provide a link to the ITF Website, which you can find in the "About" section of the GOMA website.



Central America Cooperates on Regional Standards

GOMA and the Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación Agricultura (IICA) are partnering to support six Central American Nations plus the Dominican Republic to complete the development of regional organic standards. GOMA is providing 35,000 Euro in financial support plus technical support; IICA is facilitating the project in the region. The resulting regional standard is expected to facilitate regional cooperation in certification and trade and also equivalence with other standards in the region and hopefully with the major importing nations in North America and Europe. The cooperating nations, with input and assistance from their respective organic movements, will finalize the draft standard at a meeting in Panama in late March and then consult this draft in their respective countries from May through July. A final draft is scheduled for approval and distribution in late 2010. For more information on this project, contact GOMA's Latin American Coordinator, Patricia Flores, patriciafloresescudero@gmail.com. Future issues of this newsletter will feature in-depth accounts of this project from those implementing the project in the region.



GOMA Focuses on Asia: Workshops Planned in Thailand and China

Tigers and lions of organic trade are on the move in Asia. Strong participation from Asian countries in the International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture (ITF) and the rate of organic trade inquiries coming from Asia to IFOAM, FAO and UNCTAD reflect the rising role and even greater potential for Asia to affect markets and trade for organic products worldwide. Recognizing this demand and potential, The GOMA Steering Committee is preparing a study for Asia on strategies for harmonization and equivalence. Key input for the study is expected to come from two workshops in 2010. Workshop results will be rolled up into the study. GOMA has invited government and private sector representatives from countries in the greater Mekong region to a workshop on 4-5 February in Nonburi Province, Thailand. Participants at this workshop will give input on the relative merits of harmonizing organic guarantee systems, recognizing their equivalence, and fostering other forms of private-public sector cooperation. One topic at issue is how to facilitate cross-border trade between

regulated organic markets, eg. China, and unregulated markets, eg. Lao, Cambodia and Vietnam. A second workshop is planned for 24-25* May in Shanghai in connection with BioFach China. The China workshop will be open to participation from all Asian countries. Those interested in receiving an invitation to the China workshop should contact Zhenye Zhang, z.zhang@ifoam.org. For updates on the workshop planning and results, please consult the “News and Views” section of the GOMA website, www.goma-organic.org.

GOMA is seeking information for the study on current organic trade flows among Asian countries and exported from the Region and we appeal for information on data sources. Information on domestic market organic sales in Asian countries is also sought. Contact GOMA Project Manager, [Diane Bowen](#).

* tentative dates

EquiTool is Slated for Enhancement

The GOMA Steering Committee has decided to replace the EquiTool Annex on Common Organic Objectives with a comprehensive and more practical annex for assessing common objectives of organic standards. “We have recognized the opportunity to streamline the process of equivalence assessment by moving toward comparisons of common objectives to either replace or assist the line-by-line comparisons that are commonplace now,” noted GOMA Project Manager Diane Bowen. Although we included an Annex on Common Objectives based on studies done for the International Task Force (ITF), we now realize that its contents are not detailed enough to serve a practical purpose.” The Steering Committee will oversee the preparation of a new Annex, which will take as a starting point the work done by IFOAM on *International Requirements for Organic Standards*. This draft document, which had been envisioned for use IFOAM’s revised Organic Guarantee System, is a topical series of principles, objectives and requirements for organic standards. It could be adapted as a normative reference tool for common objectives. The development process for this new Annex is scheduled during 2010 and will include consultation of GOMA Stakeholders.



GOTS Adopts IROCB and Explains Why

The Global Organic Textile Standards Program (GOTS), an international quality assurance system for organic textile processing, has adopted the International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies (IROCB) as its normative reference for accrediting certification bodies.

The Global Standard, GmbH, which administers the standards program, licenses operators who have demonstrated compliance to GOTS textile. Operators must be certified against the GOTS standard by an approved certification body. Approval is based on a formal accreditation process, conducted by the International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS), which has an agreement with Global Standard GmbH to use IROCB as its reference norm for the certification process.

“We are very pleased with the adoption of IROCB in the GOTS Program, declared GOMA Steering Committee member, Sophia Twarog. “Although the main aim of IROCB was to provide

a tool for equivalency of requirements for the organic certification process, we also envisioned that it could be adapted quite easily for direct accreditation.”

Marcus Breugel, Technical Director for the International Working Group on the GOTS provided insight into the decision to adopt IROCB as its norm for the certification process. “In our research work for a suitable basis for our accreditation program we identified IROCB as most appropriate for various reasons, he stated.” It is specifically developed for worldwide harmonized and equivalent quality assurance of organic products. Compared to ISO 65 it is therefore much more specific, focused and appropriate to meet the specific requirements in certifying organic products and accrediting organic certifiers. However it is still based upon ISO 65, the widely recognized industry standard for accreditation in the field of product certification. Furthermore, it is developed by reliable organizations with UNCTAD, FAO and IFOAM involved. And it is flexible and accessible. It explicitly offers to be adopted by governments and private sector organizations at their convenience, without need to request permission for use ; and also it offers the opportunity to modify, amend and specify the given criteria where needed, in this context we added textile sector-specific and GOTS specific requirements to get a most appropriate tool for GOTS.”

GOMA Invites Proposals for Equivalence Projects Using GOMA Tools

GOMA offers technical assistance to countries or private accreditation/certification bodies to use GOMA Tools to assess equivalence with other organic standards and certification performance requirements. The project may be either pilot projects on equivalence or formal equivalence negotiations between parties. Assistance may include providing expert consultation and funding the equivalence process including analysis and meetings between interested parties. Send proposals to the GOMA Project Manager, Diane Bowen, d.bowen@ifoam.org.



Grolink Publishes a Free Promotional Issue of *The Organic Standard*

Grolink believes that tasting samples is the best way to discover delicious things. It is therefore offering a free issue of *The Organic Standard*. Delicious topics in this issue include an examination of whether sustainable agriculture initiatives really deliver, and whether accreditation is really valuable. Also on the menu is Part II of a long treatment of organic fraud. Download your free issue by clicking [here](#). GOMA is entertaining an arrangement with Grolink to offer free subscriptions to *The Organic Standard* to stakeholder organizations who, due to low resources, do not otherwise have access to it. Interested and qualified organizations should contact GOMA project assistant, Zhenye Zhang, z.zhang@ifoam.org to request consideration for this offer.

Around the World



OTA urges US National Organic Program to Prioritize Equivalence

On October 22, 2009 the Organic Trade Association sent the following letter to the US National Organic Program at USDA:

October 22, 2009
Miles McEvoy
Deputy Administrator
USDA-AMS-NOP
Room 4008 South Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-0200

Trade Agreements

OTA applauds the bi-lateral organic equivalence agreement signed between the U.S. and Canada in June 2009, and was pleased to provide technical assistance to USDA negotiators. Trade agreements allowing open international markets for organic goods will provide a predictable environment for producers and processors to invest in expansion and lead to growth in global consumption of organic products. OTA's 2009 Organic Industry Survey shows that just under half (45%) of organic operations surveyed currently export. However, 76% of organic operations plan or hope to begin exporting over the next two years. The smaller organic producers surveyed are much more likely to identify exports as an important future market. The importance of exports to the organic industry is increasing during the economic slowdown. Growers and processors are looking to overseas markets as an important part of the recovery. OTA encourages NOP to dedicate the substantial resources required to continue to negotiate trade agreements. The U.S. industry prefers equivalence agreements and appreciates negotiated export arrangements when equivalence is not feasible. Negotiations with the Korean government is highly time sensitive and could keep markets open for approximately 55 million dollars a year in U.S. organic exports. There will continue to be critical trade barriers requiring alleviation over the coming years and OTA suggests NOP develop measurable criteria for agreements reached.

Source: OTA Newsflash



USDA Deputy Secretary Merrigan Commends FAO's support for Harmonization and Equivalence

On 16 November in Rome, Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan opened the 36th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations – the first woman to hold this role and the first time the United States has chaired the Conference in 20 years.

As Merrigan welcomed top agricultural officials from throughout the world, she noted her past work for FAO to advance organic agriculture internationally, and urged her fellow leaders to build on past efforts and prioritize organic agriculture as one step to meet global ecological and environmental challenges. “It has been 20 years since the United States last chaired this ministerial conference. But, I am not a stranger to FAO. My association with FAO began 10 years ago, when, as an expert consultant, I assisted FAO staff in drafting the Committee on Agriculture paper on organic agriculture, adopted at the 30th session of the Conference.

Since that time, organic agriculture has grown substantially in my country and around the world. In the United States, more than 2 million hectares and over 10,000 certified producers are involved in organic agriculture. . . There have been some important efforts by FAO on organic agriculture, including the FAO–led organic standards harmonization effort and the 2007 FAO meeting in partnership with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements on organic agriculture and food security . . . As someone with a deep interest in this subject, I would like to see the importance of organic agriculture and its role in agro-ecology elevated within the FAO scope of work.”

Adapted from FAO Press Release, 16 November, 2009



South Korea Extends Implementation of Organic Processed Foods Regulation

On December 31, the Korea Food and Drug Administration (KFDA) published its final revision to the Labeling Guidelines for Food Products, which included an extension of the labeling standard for organic processed food products until December 31, 2010. This was the last regulatory change necessary to finalize the one-year extension. On December 18, the Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MIFAFF) posted the extension for their new organic processed foods regulation on their website. The new MIFAFF regulation was to be fully implemented on January 1, 2010 and would replace the KFDA labeling guideline for organic products. The United States and several other organic exporting countries encouraged Korea to extend the deadline in order for certifiers to become accredited to the new regulation, and to work with MIFAFF to add language to the regulation to allow for recognition of foreign accrediting bodies and equivalence to foreign standards.

Source: US National Organic Program



USA and EU Renew Equivalence Dialogues

The long stalled discussions between the USA and EU have been started up again, with a mutual interest for a solution to be found. A difficult subject will be the use of antibiotics in the EU animal husbandry production as the NOP does not allow the use of antibiotics for products sold as organic.

Source: The Organic Standard #104, December 2009



Canada Forges Ahead on Equivalence

Canada and the EU are in the final stages of discussion on an equivalence agreement. Canada is now considering other equivalence opportunities. A meeting between Canadian and EU representatives took place in Ottawa in November, 2009. Information has been exchanged with other countries including Chile, Cambodia, China and Thailand. The US and Canada signed a bilateral equivalence agreement in June, 2009 and has established a working group to facilitate its implementation, including procedures for verification, communication and management of complaints. The first meeting of this working group was held in early December, 2009.

Source: Adapted from The Organic Standard # 103 and 104, December 2009 based on personal communication.



New Zealand Gains Equivalence with Taiwan

In November 2009, the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) announced that New Zealand's Official Organic Assurance Programme (OOAP) has gained equivalence to the new Taiwanese organic regulations. A few new requirements were added for some products that can be found in Appendix 4 of the current version of Technical Rules (version 7). Among others,

producers of organic meat must now not sell, label or represent any animal treated with antibiotics as organic. Conventional dairy animals for milk production treated with antibiotics, however, can be converted to organic by being under continuous organic management for one year prior to milk and milk products from the animal being sold as organic. Exporters are also required to obtain an export certificate from their third party agency (TPA) for each consignment of organic product to Taiwan.

Source: NZFSA and The Organic Standard #104.

For more information please see www.nzfsa.govt.nz/organic/exporting/page-10.htm#TopOfPage



Australia Looks for “Equal Reliability”

A working group is developing the equivalency options for the current revision of the Australian Standard. Options will be presented to the main standards committee in late February 2010. The two ITF tools are on the agenda as well as other criteria for determining the equal reliability of standards and their respective control systems.

“Australia will take a unilateral approach as we believe that allowing credible organic products into our country will help expand our organic sector” noted Andre Leu, Chair of the Organic Federation of Australia. “Currently over 60% of the organic products are either imported or are composite products of Australian and imported ingredients. This is particularly important for the rapidly expanding organic processed food sector. That sector cannot source all its ingredients domestically and needs access to products from around the world. Our primary concern is that all organic products sold in Australia come from credible systems. That is why we use the term equal reliability rather than compliance or harmonization.”

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Harmonization and Equivalence is the newsletter of the Global Organic Market Access Project, a cooperation among FAO, IFOAM and UNCTAD aimed at facilitating access to organic markets and reducing trade barriers. The newsletter is published in electronic format three times annually in January, May, and September.

For information or comments about this newsletter contact GOMA Project Manager Diane Bowen, d.bowen@ifoam.org.