

Harmonization & Equivalence

THE NEWSLETTER OF GOMA

Volume 1, No. 5

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GOMA Conference Agenda is Now Available



Let the Good Products Flow!
Global Organic Market Access in 2012 and Beyond
13-14 February 2012 | Nuremberg Messe, Nuremberg, Germany

The provisional [GOMA Conference Agenda and Timetable](#) includes keynote addresses, thematic presentations and panels, and group discussions. Speakers on the theme of regional cooperation will related the value received from joining forces to develop harmonized regional standards and regulatory programs. Representatives from the organic regulatory programs in the EU, Canada and United States discuss the opportunities and responsibilities for increasing equivalence. Panelists from Brazil, India and China will offer perspectives on their emerging global roles in the global organic value chain. A special conference session will examine the burgeoning scope and detail of organic standards and assess the appropriate role of standards in organic sector development.

Several special announcements regarding the equivalence are expected at the Conference. Keynote speeches from United States Department of Agriculture, World Trade Organization, African Union, and EcoSocial Forum will bring unexpected perspectives and challenges into the discourse.

Conference registration includes the conference lunches and a reception on 13 February, with the opportunity to mingle with speakers and other attendees.



Philippines and Indonesia use EquiTools for Equivalence

Initial meeting on equivalence between the Philippines and Indonesia on equivalence of their respective organic systems held in 28-29th July in Bogor, Indonesia. The meeting was first mooted at the Global Organic Market Access (GOMA) Project meeting in Shanghai, in May 2010.

Indonesian and Philippine delegates then agreed to conduct an equivalence determination exercise of their respective standards according to the EquiTool, which serves as a guide for assessing equivalence of organic standards and technical regulations developed by ITF project, the predecessor of the GOMA project.

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The equivalence exercise between the Philippines and Indonesia had expanded to include their respective conformity systems with the objective of reaching a full mutual equivalence agreement. This is the first such initiative in the Asia region. It will pave the way for other members of the Asia Working Group, including India and China, who are involved in the regional multilateral equivalence initiative currently under discussion, facilitated by GOMA. It augurs well that the Director General of the Directorate of Quality and Standardization, Ministry of Agriculture, the lead agency for the competent authority of organic agriculture in Indonesia, addressed the meeting. In his speech he stressed that Indonesia's interest to progress in the harmonization and equivalence initiative is not just for Indonesia, but also for the development interest of the organic sector in the whole region.

Known as the rain city of Indonesia, it did rain hard during the meeting in Bogor, but that did not wash out delegates' effort to meet all key objectives. The Directorate of Quality and Standardization on well with the host Indonesian delegation, led the Philippine delegation, led by the Bureau of Agriculture Food Product Standards (BAFPS). It helped that some delegates were familiar with each other from previous engagements in ASEAN GAP (good agriculture practice) and other government work missions.

The meeting, assisted by a GOMA steering committee member and consultant from the region, reviewed ITF/GOMA documents, particularly the EquiTool, the Common Objectives and Requirements for Organic Standards (COROS), and IROCB. Also taking into consideration the Canada-USA equivalency process, the meeting managed consensus on a set of choices regarding: scope of equivalence; equivalence assessment process; choice of equivalence tools; supervision of certification; and elements and mechanisms to implement the agreement, including an action plan with deadlines and a confidentiality agreement.

Action Plan:

An exchange of Letters of Intent between the respective competent authorities is expected before the two parties proceed further. Delegates agreed to target completion of the process before the [GOMA conference](#) scheduled in conjunction with BioFach in February 2012.

Source: The Organic Standards (*Grolink AB*), September 2011

What is the Rightful Role of Organic Standards?

What is driving the development of organic standards?

Consumers and markets demand products that fulfill other requirements than the traditional core organic topics. Pressure also comes from inside the organic community, where activists work for their special interest topics to enter into and gain more clout within the realm of organic standards. These pressures include introducing into organic standards comprehensive requirements for social justice, climate change, animal

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welfare, biodiversity, and food safety. “How much more can one organic standard stand?” some asks. And how much more can and should producers take on in order to meet organic standards, which now in regulations have become the minimum legal requirement to trade? An example of this is the new set of requirements for animal welfare in the US National Organic Program (see related article in this issue). One member of the National Organic Standards Board, when commenting at its December meeting on the proposed new rule making on animal welfare, cautioned his colleagues on the Board to consider the paperwork burden that will be imposed for the producer’s organic system plan – easier for large operations with many employees and resources, but tough for the small producer, including poor producers in least developed countries who might never have market opportunities to export to the US under the provisions.

While all the aforementioned topics represent noble social and environmental ideals and goals, what is the rightful role of organic standards? Should such requirements be integrated into “organic” standards, should they be add-on modules or should they belong to the policies and image of individual market actors? If they were to be integrated into organic standard how can we support producers to meet them? How can we avoid increasing barriers to trade?

Are standards, even in the traditional topics, becoming overly prescriptive? Have standards reached a level of fine-tuning that the activity to develop and implement them represent the law of diminishing returns? Should each step of “how” to achieve an objective in organic agriculture be carved in stone, or should the producer be regarded as a manager of his farm’s agro-ecosystem and allowed to make his own plan about how to achieve broad objectives? Should standards reverse course toward the “old days” where there were a few things prohibited and a short list of desired outcomes?

Mainstreaming organic agriculture in trade and policy may make standards less useful as a tool to move us closer to the goals of organic. Are there other ways – in the market, through education or otherwise – we can stimulate or motivate producers to be “better”? Or are there other ways to reshape the standards to allow easier entry and still lead to continual improvements?

Participants at the GOMA Conference will engage in a discourse about these compelling issues and questions on the rightful role of organic standards. On the second day of the conference, three speakers, Mr. Bavo van den Idsert of the Dutch Association of Organic Producers and Traders, Ms. Susanne Padel of Elm Farm Research Center, and Mr. Thilak Kariyawasam of the Lanka Organic Agriculture Movement will address the role, impact and future development of organic standards, followed by ample time for discourse and opportunity to incorporate recommendations into the conference conclusion. This is just one reason not to miss the GOMA Conference.

GOMA Asia Working Group Decides to Aim for Multilateral Agreement

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At the GOMA-Asia Working Group meeting in Seoul on 26-27 September, 33 members from 15 countries in East, South-East and South Asia decided to lay groundwork for a multilateral recognition and cooperation agreement on regional organic trade and labeling. The participants were inspired by a visit from UNCTAD's Secretary-General, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, who expressed that organic agriculture is a "must" for a sustainable future, and also expressed his support for the work of GOMA to make organic products tradable.

Multilateral Agreement: The multi-lateral agreement will be based on confidence-building technical work using the EquiTool, in particular the Annex on Common Objectives and Requirements of Organic Standards (COROS) as a basis for assessing equivalence of standards, and the International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies (IROCB) as the basis for assessing equivalence of certification performance requirements. Assisted by GOMA, each country will prepare a self-assessment of its standard and where applicable, its certification performance requirements. A task force of the regulating governments (China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand) will also develop guidelines for peer review of government oversight of the verification process under the organic regulations. It is anticipated that willing countries will initially sign a letter of intent to work towards regional recognition. The recognition decision will require a process at the Minister levels of the governments and will often involve multi-agency review. Therefore each country should identify this process. It was estimated that this process would take two to three years. This extends well beyond the current GOMA project timeframe. Therefore, the Working Group issued a declaration stating the importance of its work and progress so far, and urging potential donors to consider supporting a continuation of the GOMA project.

Harmonized Regional Standard: The Working Group advanced the draft **Asia Regional Organic Standards** (AROS) development by reconciling the requirements on key issues. The standard will require soil-based production for terrestrial crops, effectively prohibiting classical hydroponic production even if done with permitted inputs. Use of human waste in crops, although permitted, is subject to further process requirements such as composting and fermentation. Two issues regarding conversion were debated and resolved. Traditional agriculture may be taken into consideration as long as there is a reliable means of verification. The minimum conversion time was established as 12 months for annuals and 18 months for perennials. The Steering Committee will begin steps to communicate with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) about its adopting AROS as a harmonized ASEAN standard. The Working Group will also explore what potential exists within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for a similar approach.

The next meeting of the GOMA-Asia Working Group is scheduled for 12 February 2012 in Nuremberg, prior to the GOMA Conference.

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UgoCert Applies for European Commission Approval to Use East African Organic Standard

UgoCert in Uganda is among the first 30 certification bodies approved to work in equivalence with the EU Organic Regulation (see related article in this issue). UgoCert's application to the Commission was made two years ago with the scope of a standard that is more-or-less a proxy for the organic production standards in the EU Regulation. Now UgoCert has taken a major step to assist the recognition by the Commission of the East African Organic Production Standard (EAOPS), a harmonized and regionally appropriate standard developed by five East African Countries and adopted by the intergovernmental organization, the East African Community in 2007. On 31 October, UgoCert submitted another application to the European Commission to add to its approval scope the EAOPS.

This was done after GOMA representatives determined in communication with the European Commission that it is possible for the same certification body to be approved for certification according to several equivalent standards. It is thus possible for those approved in the first round to submit a renewed application with the EAOPS as the scope. Evidence of equivalence of the EAOPS, which was prepared by the International Organic Accreditation Service included a traditional side-by-side equivalence analysis and also an assessment of EAOPS to GOMA's equivalence tool, Common Objectives and Requirements for Organic Standards (COROS). Submitting the COROS assessment will enable GOMA and the Commission to have more communication on the potential of this Tool to assist the Commission to streamline and internationally standards its equivalence assessment process in the future. Although the CB applications for equivalence have moved quite slowly through the process, it is hoped that a supplemental application such as UgoCert's could enjoy a shorter review and be decided in 2012. GOMA is exploring with other CBs working in East Africa, the possibility to apply for this expanded scope.

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BLE Germany Launched Database for Organic Standards

The federal office for Agriculture and Food in Germany (Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung–*BLE*) has launched a database that aims to allow users to search and compare different organic standards and regulations. The first three standards entered on the database are the EU Regulation on Organic farming, the National Organic Program (NOP) from the US and the Codex Alimentarius Guidelines on organic production.

The database offers full-text search as well as searches based on different topics with three languages possibilities: Spanish, English and German. With a pre-defined topic search it is possible to combine present search words or search areas. Subject areas that could be found include type of production, inputs, types of animal production, or parts of the certification system. People have to register before using the database, but this is a very simple procedure. In order to understand the outcome of the search, users should be familiar with the organic legislation.

Who will use the database?

Currently, with just three standards on the database there is clearly more homework to do until everything is in shape. There are many who check the EU Regulation to see how a certain topic is handled. However, the complexity of the Regulation makes this difficult – there are, for instance, several topics that are handled in several different places within the Regulation – and the database will make finding details on specific topics a lot easier. The negotiations between the EU and the US for recognition of each others' organic certification system are likely to generate more interest from both sides of the Atlantic to search each others' standard system. The structure of the two legislations is different so users not familiar with one or the other will find the database of great value.

It has to be remembered that the information on the database is just a copy and compilation of several bits and pieces of information and that the legally binding documents are elsewhere. This is also clearly spelt out on the homepage of the standards database.

As with all new projects there are many plans for improvement. The first is to get more present search areas set up, the second and maybe more difficult aim is to keep the database up to date whenever the EU Regulation or the NOP are changed. The third aim is to include more legislations and standards on the database to give users more opportunities to compare standards.

For more details of the database, please visit: <http://www.organic-standards.info/en/>;

Source: adapted from The Organic Standards (*Grolink AB*), November 2011

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Thirty Certification Bodies Are Approved to Work in Equivalence to EU Regulation

At its meeting on 25-26 October, the EU Standing Committee on Organic Farming (SCOF) voted to accept the procedures and a list of approved certification bodies (CBs). The list includes thirty CBs that have standards and certification deemed equivalent with the EU Regulation. The system will enter into force on 1 July 2012. The approval is valid until 30 June 2015, and covers specific categories for each CB, but does not cover in-conversion products.

This decision by SCOF is the conclusion of a long process that started several years ago. The process started with CBs submitting applications in 2009 to work in equivalence with the EU Regulation for certifying products from third countries. The undertaking to compile a list of CBs that are equivalent with the EU Regulation was a significant step forward in making the world of organic certification and trade a bit easier and fairer. In addition the scheme was open to certification bodies throughout the world, making it easier for producers certified by CBs based in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America to export organic products into the EU.

Of the 73 certification bodies, which were said to have originally applied, 43 were not on the first list. Additionally, not all CBs were approved for every country or every activity that was included in their application. According to the Commission, these remaining applications have not been rejected, but rather they are still in a reconciliation process, and more information is needed to make an equivalence assessment.

With applications accepted every year (the deadline is 31 October each year) there are also new applications in the process, submitted by certification bodies in both 2010 and 2011. This includes an application, which would include the East African Organic Production Standards among the standards recognized as equivalent by the Commission (see related article in this issue).

The third Certification Bodies which are approved to work in equivalent to EU regulation is listed as follow:

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CBs approved for working in equivalence with the EU Regulation

CB	Country CB based in	Countries of approval
Organska Kontrola	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CCPB Srl	Italy	Croatia
Organic Food Development Center,	China	China
Certificadora Mexicana de productos y procesos ecológicos S.C.	Mexico	Mexico
California Certified Organic Farmers	USA	Mexico, USA
Organic Certifiers	USA	South Korea, Mexico, Philippines, USA
Australian Certified Organic	Australia	Cook Islands, Fiji, Falkland Islands, Hong Kong, South Korea, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, Thailand
Organic Standard	Ukraine	Ukraine
Ekolojik Tarim Kontrol Organizasyonu	Turkey	Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine
Organización Internacional Agropecuaria	Argentina	Uruguay and Brazil
International Certification Services, Inc.	USA	Mexico, French Polynesia, USA
Ecoglobe	Armenia	Armenia, Russian Federation
Quality Assurance International	USA	Mexico, Paraguay, USA
LibanCert	Lebanon	Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic
Instituto Certificazione Etica e Ambientale	Italy	United Arab Emirates, Albania, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Moldova, Madagascar, Mexico, Malaysia, Senegal, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Uruguay, Vietnam
Oregon Tilth	USA	USA
Caucacert Ltd.	Georgia	Georgia
Bio Latina Certificadora	Peru	Peru, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Honduras, Colombia, Guatemala, Panama, Mexico, Venezuela, El Salvador
The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia	Australia	Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Timor - Leste, Samoa
Organic Crop Improvement Association	USA	Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, El Salvador, USA
Organic Agriculture Certification Thailand	Thailand	Indonesia, Lao Peoples Democratic Republic, Thailand, Vietnam
Instituto Biodinamico Certificações	Brazil	Brazil, China, Mexico
IMO Control Latinoamérica Ltda.	Bolivia	Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Paraguay, El Salvador, Venezuela
Uganda Organic Certification Ltd.	Uganda	Uganda
Center of Organic Agriculture in Egypt	Egypt	Egypt, Saudi Arabia
Bolicert Ltd.	Bolivia	Bolivia
Washington State Department of Agriculture	USA	USA
Certisys	Belgium	Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Vietnam
Doalnara Certified Organic Korea, LLC	South Korea	South Korea
BioGro New Zealand Limited	New Zealand	Vanuatu

Source: Adapted from The Organic Standard(Grolink AB), November 2011

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NOP Converges with Other Organic Regulations on Animal Welfare

At its December meeting the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) passed several recommendations to amend the National Organic Program regulation, 7 CFR 205 to add animal welfare requirements in livestock production. The requirements would be subject to the US rule making process, including public comment. “Increasingly, consumers are demanding that livestock be treated with respect. This market trend has led to several different product labels with animal welfare certification,” stated the NOSB Livestock Committee in its introductory text to the proposal. “Ultimately, the Livestock Committee would like the organic seal to continue to be the gold standard, indicating the most nutritious food produced in the safest and most respectful manner.” The recommended new language in the regulation can be characterized as mostly “outcome based.”

The topic was apparently contentious within the Livestock Committee as evidenced by a lengthy minority opinion accompanying its proposal to the full NOSB. The minority opinion argued for many more prescriptive requirements, and significantly stricter stocking rate requirements for poultry and swine.

The NOSB final recommendation includes requirements and guidelines for animal stocking rates, restrictions on physical alternations to animals, and outcome-based specifications for animal living conditions including housing and outdoor access. A chart of specific space requirements for laying hens, pullets and broilers is included. The Committee intends to specify other species-specific poultry space requirements in the future. The NOSB also recommended new language on animal transport and slaughter, topics that the current regulation does not address.

Source: www.ams.usda.gov/nop