

Harmonization & Equivalence

The Newsletter of Goma

Canada and EU Achieve Full Bilateral Equivalence (but unlevel playing field?)

2011-08-05 13:08:21 Zhenye Zhang

The Canadian Government and European Commission have exchanged letters acknowledging that their organic regulations are considered equivalent. Unlike the Canada-US agreements, there are no additional requirements on either side. Organic products certified according to the regulations of one country and traded to the other country, will have market access without additional verification of additional requirements.

However, there appears to be one big caveat. Canada is added to the third country list as of 21 June 2011, but the language of the revised regulation restricts the scope to raw and processed products fully originating from Canadian agriculture. It would appear that processed products with ingredients from outside Canada, even small amounts of herbs or spices externally sourced, may not be included in the agreement. European and Canadian authorities are expected to provide guidance on this and other issues in the coming weeks.

Article 1 of Commission Regulation 590/2011 states that:

“(1) after the text relating to Australia, the following text is inserted:

‘CANADA

1. Product categories:

- (a) live or unprocessed agricultural products and vegetative propagating material and seeds for cultivation;
- (b) processed agricultural products for use as food;
- (c) feed.

2. **Origin:** products of category 1(a) and organically grown ingredients in products of category 1(b) ***that have been grown in Canada.*** “

There appears to be no corresponding restriction on the country of origin for products traded from the EU to Canada. The letter to the EU from CFIA states that, “Subject to the conditions as set forth in Appendix 1, agricultural products produced and processed in conformity with the European Organic System will be deemed equivalent to those products produced and processed in accordance with the Canadian *Organic Products Regulations*, 2009 and Canada’s Organic Program and may be sold, labelled or represented in Canada as organic, including by display of the Canadian organic logo as well as the organic logo as set out in Commission Regulation (EC) No 889/2008.” Appendix 1 does not contain reference to the origin of products.

“This agreement puts Canada at the forefront of global organic trade: the only country in the world that has an organic standard recognized by the two largest organic markets,” said Canada Organic Trade Association Executive Director, Matthew Holmes. “We believe there is room and precedent for this agreement to include our manufactured products, some of which include ingredients that support organic farmers all over the world. Canadians trust the European system is verifying the ingredients in its manufactured products, whatever their source, and we hope this trust is reciprocated to Canada’s organic oversight and enforcement as well.”

The 21 June amendment to add Canada to the third country list also extended the listing of Costa Rica and New Zealand indefinitely. Those listings would otherwise have expired in June 2011.

China Market Access Update

Chinese organic agriculture began in the late 1980s, driven initially by environmental concerns and later by export opportunities. The latest estimate, from 2009, was that there is 2 million hectares of certified organic farmland, while total organic production was valued at about US\$ 2.4 billion in 2008. There are 27 organic certification bodies active in China. By 2005, compulsory organic standards and supervision systems were introduced for organic certification bodies operating in China. 'The future of the organic market is promising in China given strong consumer interest. However, the lack of mutual recognition between the Chinese organic regulation and other major markets makes exports to China potentially costly for poorer countries.' says Alexander Kasterine, Senior Market Development Adviser of the ITC.

A recent report from the International Trade Centre (a joint UNCTAD/WTO initiative based in Geneva) gives the most comprehensive overview of the Chinese organic market so far. By the late 1980s, some local governments in China began promoting what was known as 'ecological agriculture'. Meanwhile, seeing opportunities in the growing global demand for organic foods, other government bodies began to promote organic farming. One such agency was the Nanjing Institute of Environment Science (NIES) of the State Environment Protection Administration, which became a member of IFOAM in 1989. The first certified organic product was tea certified by a Dutch organisation and exported to Europe in 1990. The main drivers of modern organic agriculture in the early period were Chinese enterprises, both state-owned and private, which were contracted by European, Japanese and American importers. The first local organic certifier was the China Organic Food Development Center (OFDC), which was established in 1994 by the NIES.

There were some 2,500 certified organic producers, with more than 100,000 individual farmers in 2007. Between 2 million and 3 million hectares of farmland is certified as organic, putting China among the world's top five organic producers, in acreage terms. Statistical data on Chinese organic production, however, vary from one source to another.

In 2008, the total value of organic production reached about 16 billion Yuan (US\$ 2.4 billion), with exported organic products exceeding US\$ 500 million and the domestic organic market reaching US\$ 1.1 billion. The remaining US\$ 800 million in organic products were sold as conventional products. Organic imports were estimated at about US\$ 20 million in 2009. China's domestic market in organic products began developing in the mid-2000s and has expanded rapidly, especially in the past few years in the light of an increasing number of food scandals. Chinese consumers are very concerned about food quality, which they define less in terms of appearance and more in terms of nutritional properties and safety. Retailers, especially supermarkets and speciality shops, dominate domestic organic markets. The major sales channel is through conventional and high-end supermarkets, which control more than 80% of retail markets. Speciality shops are growing in number, but their sales are limited. There is currently market saturation in some organic products, such as rice, fresh vegetables, fresh fruits, meat and green tea. Standards, certification and regulation There are three national agencies that are important for the organic system in China. The Certification and Accreditation Administration of the People's Republic of China (CNCA), is the national administrative body overseeing all types of certification and accreditation within China. CNCA covers food safety and food quality schemes, including 'Green Food' (another Chinese system for environmentally friendly agriculture production), good agricultural practices (GAP), good manufacturing practices (GMP), feed production, HACCP and organic products. The national accreditation body is the China National Accreditation Service for Conformity Assessment (CNAS). This body does technical conformity assessment and sets technical rules, such as the certification criteria for all certification bodies. In addition to the above, inspectors of all certification and certification training bodies must be approved and registered with the China Certification & Accreditation Association (CCAA), which was established in 2005.

The specific regulations and standards for organic certification were introduced in 2004 and took effect in 2005. The relevant items were:

- The organic standard, i.e. National Standard of the People's Republic of China: Organic Products (GB/T 19630.1-19630.4-2005), is based on international norms with added emphasis on contamination by pollutants and prohibited materials and quality management systems, especially record keeping and trace- ability.
- The Regulatory Measures on Organic Product Certification Management (also known as Decree No. 67 of State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine) defines organic certification and organic products, including the scope and requirements for certification bodies and inspectors. It also sets principles for organic certification, national organic labelling, import requirements and principles for international cooperation and supervision measures.

- The Implementing Rules on Organic Certification (CNCA 2005 No.1) regulates organic certification activities. It defines organic certification objectives, scope of application, standards, certification procedures, administration after certification, certificates, marks and logos, as well as certification fees. Under this complex system, rules and regulations are set by different agencies. For example, an organic certification body must first comply with rules set by CNCA on qualifications of certification bodies. Then the certification body must comply with technical rules set by CNAS so that it can acquire accreditation. At the same time, inspectors working for certification bodies must comply with CCAA rules and have CCAA approval. Currently, there are only 26 organic certifiers with such approval, and all are based in China.

Organic imports to China

The organic regulations of 2005 covered imports as well as domestic production. Article 36 of the Regulatory Measures on Organic Product Certification Management requires imported organic products to be certified under Chinese organic standards. All operational stages, such as farming, handling, processing and packing, must comply with Chinese organic standards, even if such operations have already been certified as organic for other systems. Imported organic products must also be inspected by organic inspectors registered with CCAA who have had CCAA-organised training, testing and interviews. So far, no foreign inspectors have been approved, a situation that obviously leads to high costs and other problems for market access.

In September 2010, CNCA issued a draft report on 'Rules on Importing of Organic Products from Other Countries and Regions'. The document contained proposals that would allow mutual recognition between CNCA and regulatory bodies in exporting countries so that organic products certified outside China could be accepted into the country. At the time of the report's preparation, the draft document was under internal consultation. The rules were expected to be finalised and approved in late 2010 or early 2011. Currently, CNCA is in the process of negotiating with several governments for bilateral and multi-lateral agreements regarding organic regulatory recognition. Participating governments include the European Union, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia and Thailand. The negotiations are not expected to be concluded soon.

Source: Organic Food Products in China, Market Overview, ITC 2011

Asia Regional Organic Standards Advance to Second Draft

2011-08-05 12:08:26 Zhenye Zhang



The AROS Drafting Group meets in Vientiane, Laos on 28 -29 June

The Asia Regional Organic Standard (AROS) is being developed primarily to create a reference for equivalence of the government standards in the region comprising South, South-East, and East Asia. It will also be a reference for further development and harmonization of standards in the Region. This is part of an overall approach to building a framework for cooperation on organic labeling and trade in the Region. The scope of this standard is presently crops, wild production processing and labelling, which is appropriate for most of the current trade and trade opportunities in the Region.

The Drafting Group for the Asia Regional Organic Standard (AROS) advanced the document to a second draft during its meeting in Vientiane, Laos, in late June. Hosted by the Laos Ministry of Agriculture, the group made some key decisions on the draft after reviewing comments on the first draft.

- Conversion period: It was decided that the conversion period for this region should be 12 months for annuals and 18 months for perennials. Although conversion periods are typically longer in temperate climates, the region covered by this standard is primarily tropical and subtropical, so chemicals break down faster than in temperate regions. It was also concluded that the new conversion periods provide a time period sufficient for the organic system to become established without penalizing the farmer

financially.

- Seeds and planting materials: Flexibility is built in for use of non-organic seed in case organic and non-treated seed are unavailable. It was recognized that although there is aspiration to use organic seed, markets for such are not yet well developed in this region. Flexibility was also built into the language to accommodate restricted use of treated seeds in cases where there are requirements for such or in regions where alternatives are not available.
- Hydroponic production: Discussion revealed that there is a difference in certification practices and opinion concerning hydroponic production which otherwise meets the requirements of the lists of substances for use in organic production. The draft language prohibiting this type of production was left intact for now, subject to further commenting.
- Use of human excrement as fertility amendments: The first draft prohibited use on any crops for human consumption, but after discussing the issue again, the group changed the language to permit highly restricted use which excludes application on any leafy, tuber or root crops, plus measures to control pathogens.
- Lists of inputs: The indicative lists of inputs for organic production were modified to include plant-derived substances typical in the Region.

Comment Period for Second Draft

A comment period from 1 August to 30 September has been set for the second draft. Comment processes will be initiated by Working and Drafting group members in their home countries. In addition, a workshop on the Asia Regional Organic Standards will take place at the IFOAM Organic World Congress, Korea on 30 September from 14:30 to 16:00 at the venue “2nd City Hall of Namyangju.” A subsequent feedback period on the Standard will be provided after this workshop before the final Standard is completed.

Organic Agriculture in Laos

After the meeting, AROS Drafting Group members visited the Ban Phunphao Organic Vegetable project, which consists of production by 19 farming families to supplement their main activity of rice production. Most of the production is done under cover, which means that it can continue during the rainy season, and provide substantial supplemental income to these families, who sell their vegetables at the local market in Vientiane. Women in the families are empowered to manage the marketing of the vegetables.



Zambia: High Organic Exports Potential

2011-08-04 14:08:54 Zhenye Zhang

The Organic Producers and Processors Association of Zambia (OPPAZ) has said Zambia has a potential to earn more than US \$1.3 billion per annum under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) through exports of organic produce. □□OPPAZ chief executive officer Munshimbwe Chitalu said approximately US \$1.3 billion could be earned under the AGOA arrangement from groundnuts, another US \$25 million from honey and US \$50 million from pineapples. □□Mr Chitalu said in Lusaka in response to a press query that more income will be received from sales of vegetables, rice, beans and finger millet as

organic products. OPPAZ is an apex member-based business support organisation established in 1999 to unite, lead and coordinate producers, processors, traders, trainers and other stakeholders towards the development of organic agriculture in Zambia. He said that Zambia has the potentials for production of approximately 5,000 tonnes of organic honey, 164,000 tonnes of organic groundnuts and derivative products such as peanut butter, cooking oil, and groundnut seed cake. The sector has a potential of producing 50,000 tonnes of organic pineapples and several tens of thousands of organic beans, rice, finger millet, dried fruits and vegetables which remain unexploited. It is heartening to learn that there will be an AGOA meeting in Zambia this year. The organic sector sees the hosting of this meeting as an opportunity for meeting with external business drivers such as service providers, buyers, processors, financiers and equipment suppliers," Mr Chitalu said. The access of markets by small scale producers is being hampered by several factors and OPPAZ views Zambia's hosting of the forum as an opportunity to overcome change the scenario. Mr Chitalu said the organic sector has prepared itself to share the business opportunities available in the sector on the basis that Zambian environment is good and best suited for organic production. He said the meeting could lead to creation of business associations or linkages for production, processing and marketing of organic products. Most importantly, it is expected that the organic fraternity will secure agreements for joint production and marketing efforts of specific products and services. Among the services that are obvious are ecological agricultural tourism in the fringes of the national parks in Northern Zambia and production of natural oils from forests," he said. Mr Chitalu said the association envisioned the benefits of AGOA as employment creation, income generation and economic diversification especially since the products are produced by generally small scale farmers who are the most impoverished. In the second instance we see the development of a health nation with full sovereignty because the control of resources will be in the hands of its nationals," he said.

Source: Organic Monitor 31 March 2011

Participatory Guarantee Systems in Belize Use IROCB to position their system for international markets

2011-08-04 14:08:59 Zhenye Zhang

Participatory Guarantee Systems are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange (IFOAM, 2008).

Belize is now part of this group of initiatives. Belize is a Caribbean country with 22,966 km² and a population of 2 millions. With an important agricultural sector, Belize's significant production is focused on banana and sugarcane representing 40% of the GNP. Organic production in Belize is reported in 1,810 hectares (2008) basically organic cacao and cardamom.

Belize Organic Alliance is a group of organic growers and consumers, starting a PGS process in the district of Cayo. With the Ministry of Agriculture of Belize and IICA's (Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture) technical support, BOA is being trained on organizational aspects as well as on organic certification, inspection and practices. BOA growers have to comply organic standards based on international organic standards and the organization is structured to comply with IROCB to be able to make an easy transition for third party certification for international markets. This means that BOA's efforts are focused on training competent technical staff and stakeholders, advisory to growers is not done during the inspections, non announced inspections are carried out, while major improvements are being implemented for documentation and data registration. Reports are open and available to stakeholders as transparency is one of the core values of the PGS process.

Belize belongs to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and applies standards developed by the Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ). Recently, CROSQ has developed the CARICOM regional code of practice for organically produced foods.

If you want to know more about the Belize PGS, visit: http://ruta.org/redi-ao/images/stories/BOA_-_Organic_Certification_News.pdf

GOMA Seeks Recognition for East African Regional Standards

2011-08-04 14:08:29 Zhenye Zhang

The East African Organic Products Standard (EAOPS) was produced in 2007 by a community of public and private stakeholders from the countries of Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi and Rwanda, and it is owned by the East African Organic Community. It is adapted to the conditions of East Africa and its purpose is to serve as a single standard for organic agriculture production under these conditions. It is also written in a way that is easy for producers and others to understand. The comprehensive development and consultation process leading to the final standard included work by a public-private committee of experts, comparisons with international reference standards, workshops in the countries, and trial inspections to the standard.

While the standard is a platform for a common label and market development in the home region, it also formulates standpoints for international equivalence negotiations on the standard. The most critical aim for international recognition of the standard is in the EU, where there are many trade relations and opportunities. The GOMA project, in cooperation with the IFOAM OSEA II project, "Regional Cooperation for Organic Standards and Certification in East African" is exploring options for getting EAOPS recognized by the European Commission for organic products traded from East Africa to the European Union. Because the East African countries do not fully regulate organic agriculture (including conformity assessment) the option for the countries to be on the Commission's "third country list" is not available. Nor have certification bodies currently operating in the region requested approval as foreign certifiers with the scope of using the East African Standards, although some have applied for approval using standards that are proxies for the EU regulation. GOMA and OSEA are now talking with the Commission and certification bodies about a way forward to enable the EAOPS to be reviewed for equivalence through the certification body approval process. One big question is whether a certification body, if being approved for a given standard, can apply to expand the scope of approval to include another standard

Another activity undertaken by GOMA to facilitate the approval/recognition process is set of expert equivalence assessments between the EAOPS and the EU regulation. One such assessment was prepared using the new "Common Objectives and Requirements for Organic Standards" (COROS) which is promoted by GOMA as a kind of international clearinghouse tool for assessing equivalence among standards.

A workshop of the European Union and African Union on organic agriculture in Africa, held in Brussels in June, provided an opportunity for GOMA representatives and advocates from East Africa to explain the EAOPS and call for a solution to recognizing it for imports into the EU. Moses Muwanga from the National Organic Agricultural Movement of Uganda (NOGAMU) presented the standard. GOMA's Project Manager, Diane Bowen, presented on the role of international equivalence and the EOAPS in this context. Sophia Twarog from UNCTAD, and a GOMA Steering Committee member, provided a recap and appeal to the workshop participants to find a way forward for the EAOPS.



GOMA Steering Committee member, Dr. Sophia Twarog of UNCTAD, advocates the EAOPS at the EU-AU Workshop with Nikiforos Sevenas, Director International Affairs DG-Agri, and Dr. Abebe, Director, African Union.

Bilateral Equivalence Discussion Between Two Asian Countries Has

Started

2011-08-04 13:08:26 Zhenye Zhang

Governments of The Philippines and Indonesia have begun talks aimed at bilateral equivalence of their organic regulatory systems. The two countries held their first meeting in June wherein they agreed to use the GOMA Tools as the basis for their procedure and assessments of equivalence. They also agreed that the scope of organic agriculture covered by the agreement will be crop production, wild collection (including honey), and processing. Animal husbandry was not included as development of the sector in both countries is only just emerging and trade in organic animal products is not expected in the immediate future. The delegations expressed interest to complete the equivalence process in early 2012. These and other points will be included in letters of intent to be exchanged between the two countries to formalize the process. After the letters are exchanged, the parties will conduct self-assessments of their standards and certification requirements according to the EquiTool and IROCB respectively. GOMA is providing technical assistance for the process, especially for using the Tools to conduct and discuss the assessments.

“Let the Good Products Flow!” says GOMA, announcing its 2012 Conference

2011-08-04 13:08:26 Zhenye Zhang

For ten years, FAO, IFOAM and UNCTAD have worked in partnership to address and reduce barriers to trade of organic products resulting from the global proliferation of organic standards and technical regulations. At this high-level International Conference, scheduled for 13 and 14 February at Nuremberg Messe (just prior to BioFach) the partners draw together a distinguished group of public and private sector leaders to examine the past, present and future of organic market access relative to systems of organic standards and conformity assessment. The conference looks at emerging issues, such as the potential for organic standards to promote the growth of organic agriculture vis-à-vis their potential to stifle growth. Developments and challenges for dominant and emerging exporting/importing economies and for still-developing countries are highlighted and discussed. Models of public-private and regional cooperation are considered as potential pathways for global solutions to the challenges.

The following eminent keynote speakers (three confirmed and one invited as of this newsletter) are featured in the Conference:

- Harsha Singh, Deputy Director-General, World Trade Organization (confirmed)

Dr. Singh's scope of oversight at WTO is the Agriculture and Commodities Division, Trade and Environment. He has served in his post since 2005. Dr. Singh was also a member of several High Level WTO Committees and served as Chair of several high-profile WTO dispute settlement panels.

- Kathleen Merrigan, Deputy Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture (confirmed)

Dr. Merrigan works alongside Secretary Tom Vilsack to oversee the day-to-day operation of USDA's many programs and spearheads the \$149 billion USDA budget process. She serves on the President's Management Council, working with other Cabinet Deputies to improve accountability and performance across the federal government. Under an appointment by President Bill Clinton, Merrigan was Administrator of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service from 1999 to 2001, where she oversaw the development of the final National Organic Program regulation.

- Franz Fischler, President, Eco-Social Forum and former Commissioner of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, European Union (confirmed)

Franz Fischler, former Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries of the European Union, has been the President of the Eco Social Forum Europe since December 2004. He also runs his own consultancy business and is a lecturer in great demand. Dr. Fischler was recently one of the six candidates for the post of Director-General for the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

- Tumusiime Rhoda Peace, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture African Union Commission (invited)

The portfolio of Her Excellency Tumusiime Rhoda Peace, the African Union's Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture covers multiple sectors ranging from crop agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry, land, water, environment, climate change, climate services, disaster risk reduction to rural development. She has closely worked with other Pan African Institutions and Development Partner Agencies in all those areas to secure and provide support to AU Member States, increasing responses in the framework of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Programme (CAADP).

In addition to the keynote speakers, participants are afforded an opportunity to discuss key issues with distinguished government and private-sector speakers from Bhutan, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, China, Great Britain, France, India, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka and United States. Representatives of intergovernmental and international organizations such as The European Commission, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, International Trade Commission, International Organic Accreditation Service and Pacific Islands Community are also expected also contribute to the presentations and discussions.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Let the Good Products Flow!



Global Organic Market Access in 2012 and Beyond

13-14 February 2012
Nuremberg Messe, Nuremberg, Germany

featuring these keynote speakers:

Harsha Singh
*Deputy Director-General
World Trade Organization*

Kathleen Merrigan
*Deputy Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture*

Tumusiime Rhoda Peace
*Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture,
African Union Commission (invited)*

Franz Fischler
*former Commissioner of Agriculture,
Rural Development and Fisheries, European Union*

Global Organic Market Access in partnership with






for more information, visit www.goma-organic.org

Program information and registration

A detailed program and registration information will be available on the GOMA website in September. Inquiries can be sent to goma-conference@ifaoam.org.

Central America Moves Toward a Common Organic Regulation

2011-08-04 13:08:23 Zhenye Zhang

With continued support from GOMA, the competent authorities from Central American and the Dominican Republic have progressed considerably on the text of a common regulation for organic agriculture in seven countries – Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Dominican Republic. The scope of the regulation includes standards for organic production and processing, requirements for organic certification bodies, control and enforcement mechanisms, and import requirements. In July, 2010 a national consultation process was undertaken for the first draft of the regulation. Notices were placed in the main newspapers and stakeholders were invited by the competent authorities to workshops on the regulations. Most countries implemented the workshops in the fourth quarter of 2010. The results of the consultations were prepared by each country and submitted to IICA (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture), which GOMA's partner for implementing the assistance to the competent authorities. In February, 2011 the competent authorities (except Nicaragua)

plus three observers from the private sector met in San Jose, Costa Rica and reviewed a matrix of the comments compiled by IICA. The observers were two producers from Guatemala and Costa Rica and the president of the organic agriculture movement from El Salvador. Decisions were taken on the comments and the draft was amended accordingly during the meeting.

The next steps in process are some editing and reformatting to align the document according to standard requirements for such documents in Central America, and then submission of notification to WTO and an international comment period. Barring major objections in the WTO process, the regulation should be ready for announcement and distribution in the countries by the end of 2011. After this, those countries with current regulations will take steps to harmonize their country regulations with the regional one.

The intent of this regulation is to facilitate a regional organic market and position the countries for equivalence discussions with other importing countries/regions.

Canada is a Willing GOMA Partner

2011-08-03 15:08:34 Zhenye Zhang

Having completed two bilateral equivalence agreements for organic regulations, one with the United States and the other with the European Union, Canada is eager for more. But, with requests from seven countries (Chile, India, Japan, Costa Rica, Australia, Korea and Brazil) on their table, Canadian authorities are seeking opportunities to gain efficiency in the equivalence assessment process. In late 2010 the Canadian Food Inspection Authority (CFIA) invited GOMA to inform it about the Tools for equivalence assessment (EquiTool and IROCB). It was agreed that after GOMA had completed its objectives-based EquiTool annex, COROS, Canada would work with GOMA to test the Tools. Financial support from GOMA enabled Canada to involve its stakeholder technical advisory committee to participate in the process. So in May, GOMA Project Manager, Diane Bowen met with CFIA and technical advisory committee representatives to provide some training for the process. The first step involves learning and confidence-building in the Tools. Therefore, Canada is assessing its national organic standards (called "Organic Production Systems: General Principles and Management Standards") against the COROS; and it is also comparing IROCB with ISO Guide 65 (which CFIA requires) plus additional requirements for organic certification bodies in Part C of the Canada Organic Office Operating Manual. The preliminary comparisons show high correlation between Canada's requirements and the Tools. An informative summary will be prepared upon the completion of the process, and Canada can then decide if and how to use the Tools in future equivalence processes with other countries. "Using these tools could potentially push Canada a long way ahead on international equivalence," noted Canada Organic Trade Association's Executive Director, Matthew Holmes, who is coordinating the process of Canada's technical advisory committee. "In any case, we are happy to play a role in testing these Tools and therefore enabling many other countries to take a closer look at their potential to facilitate trade."

Common Objectives and Requirements for Organic Standards (COROS) Makes Its Debut

2011-08-03 12:08:13 Zhenye Zhang

The last GOMA Newsletter reported on an initiative to develop an objectives-based reference for assessing equivalence among organic standards, essentially a revision of the current Annex 2 in EquiTool. The final result, COROS, was produced after consultation and adjustment, and is now being implemented by GOMA in several pilot projects (see related article, "Canada is a Willing Partner of GOMA"). In the final stages of development, COROS became a joint project of GOMA and the IFOAM Organic Guarantee System, which is using it to build its IFOAM Family of Standards.

The document was compiled on the basis of the IFOAM Basic Standards and Codex Alimentarius as the two pre-existing international reference organic standards, and through the review of a significant number of existing standards and regulations across the world. COROS articulates the broad objectives that the production rules in organic standards and regulations commonly seek to achieve, and presents common detailed requirements that relate to these various objectives. COROS contains only requirements that were commonly found in organic standards and regulations globally. It includes production requirements related to general organic management, crop and animal production, beekeeping, processing and social justice.

COROS is intended for use in international equivalence assessments of organic standards and technical regulations. As an annex to the Equitool it is proposed as a template to guide governments and other stakeholders in conducting objectives-based equivalence assessments of two or more organic standards for production and processing. EquiTool encourages equivalence assessments to be based on reference objectives, an approach that is consistent with WTO guidance for judging equivalence. By basing equivalence discussions and assessments on objectives and related basic requirements, parties may avoid tedious line-by-line assessments of one detailed standard against another. Instead parties can assess whether the details of one standard, although they may vary from those of another standard, meet common objectives and baseline requirements.

COROS is provided in the form of a standard document, which facilitates easy reading and comprehension of the objectives and requirements related to them. However, a high degree of functionality is provided in the form of an electronic spreadsheet version containing three worksheets: the first is for data entry; the second re-organizes the data for objectives-based assessment; the third facilitates a summary analysis.