



The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements

IFOAM's Organic Guarantee System

. . . Supporting the worldwide adoption of environmentally, socially, and economically sound systems based on the principles of organic agriculture.

The IFOAM Organic Guarantee System assures organic integrity internationally

In the rapidly growing environment of marketing and trade of products claiming to be “organic,” IFOAM provides a market guarantee of the integrity of organic claims. The Organic Guarantee System (OGS) unites the organic world through a common system of standards, verification, and market identity. It fosters equivalence among participating certifiers, paving the way for more orderly and reliable trade.



The IFOAM Organic Guarantee System enables organic certifiers to become “IFOAM Accredited” and for certified operators to label their products with the IFOAM Seal next to the logo of their IFOAM accredited certifier. More than 30 certifiers worldwide participate in IFOAM accreditation.

The OGS offers conformance assessment to accepted international norms

IFOAM Accreditation guarantees to buyers, government authorities, other control agencies, and the public that a product has been produced within a system that conforms to accepted international standards for organic production, processing, and certification.

The two pillars of the Organic Guarantee System are the IFOAM Basic Standards for Organic Production and Processing (IBS) and the IFOAM Accreditation Criteria for Certification of Organic Production and Processing (IAC). These two international documents are norms to which certifiers must comply when conducting organic certification. The IFOAM Basic Standards address the principles, recommendations and minimum standards which

guide operators in producing their organic crops and maintaining organic integrity in the further handling and processing of organic commodities.

The IFOAM Accreditation Criteria are based on the International ISO norm (Guide 65) for the operation of certifying bodies, and they are additionally developed to reflect the particular circumstances of certifying organic production and processing. IFOAM owns and develops these documents through further revisions that involve stakeholder participation.

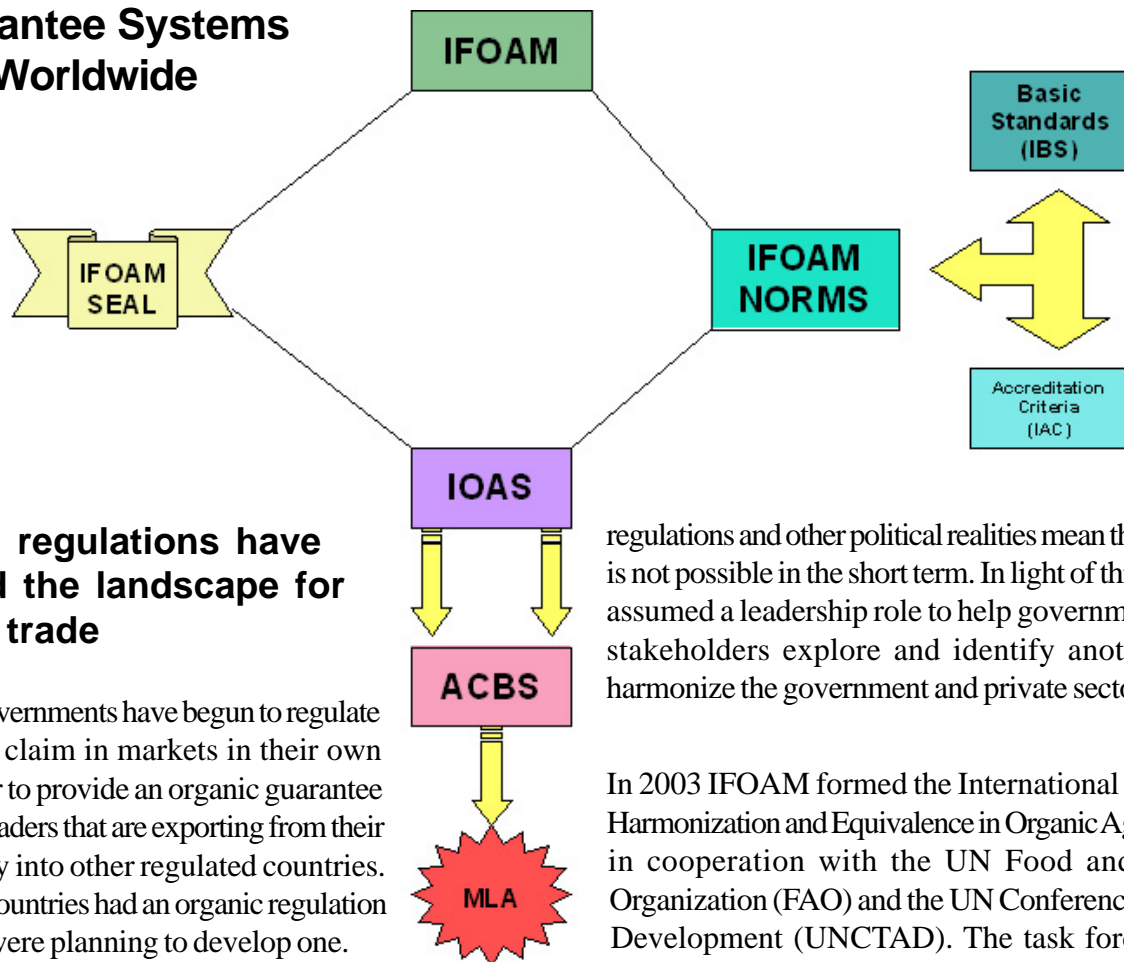
IFOAM's Basic Standards and Accreditation Criteria are generally respected as the international guideline from which national standards and inspection systems may be built; and they have been used as a reference by standard-setters and legislators in national and international arenas. IFOAM Basic Standards have had a strong influence on the development of Codex Alimentarius Guidelines for the Production, Labeling, and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods.

The OGS is a collaboration of IFOAM and other organizations

IFOAM Accreditation is administered by an independent organization, the International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS). The IOAS evaluates the compliance of certification programs with the IBS and the IAC through a system of document review and site evaluation, and execution of accreditation decisions by a committee with global representation and expertise. In 2004, 29 certification bodies worldwide are IFOAM Accredited within the Organic Guarantee System. Supported by this system, these accredited certification (ACBs) bodies are developing more and more functional equivalence with one another to streamline trade for their clients. This is done formally through a multilateral agreement (MLA).



Harmonizing Organic Guarantee Systems Worldwide



National regulations have changed the landscape for organic trade

National Governments have begun to regulate the organic claim in markets in their own countries, or to provide an organic guarantee service for traders that are exporting from their own country into other regulated countries. In 2003 60 countries had an organic regulation in place or were planning to develop one.

What started as government effort to standardize organic label claims and foster trade has in some cases inhibited standardization and international trade because of the proliferation of so many regulations with different requirements. Now governments are faced with the daunting task of working out bilateral equivalence agreements with one another. Unlike the IFOAM system, which provides a mechanism for multilateral equivalence among certification bodies worldwide, there is no international government mechanism for establishing multilateral equivalence of national organic regulations. And those countries without the capacity or political means to implement a national organic regulation have no governmental means to gain acceptance of organic products to be traded from their country into an importing country that regulates the organic claim.

IFOAM is addressing the challenge to harmonize organic regulatory systems worldwide

If all governments were to adopt the international IFOAM Organic Guarantee System for the purpose of regulating organic trade and markets, there could be complete harmonization. However, the state of current national

regulations and other political realities mean that this scenario is not possible in the short term. In light of this, IFOAM has assumed a leadership role to help governments and other stakeholders explore and identify another means to harmonize the government and private sector systems.

In 2003 IFOAM formed the International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture (ITF) in cooperation with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The task force consists of representatives of more than 20 governments, four intergovernmental agencies, and key stakeholders from the private sector. ITF serves as an open-ended platform for dialogue between private and public institutions involved in trade and regulatory activities in the organic agriculture sector. The objective is to facilitate international trade and access of developing countries to international markets.

IFOAM and IOAS encourage harmonization by providing other services to governments

IFOAM and the IOAS actively invite government involvement in the Accreditation Program, and encourage them to use our expertise and services. IFOAM welcomes the comments of governments during the process to further develop the IFOAM Norms. Some government regulatory systems use compliance reports prepared by IOAS for the IFOAM accredited certification bodies, for instance, on compliance with EU Regulation 2092/91. IOAS has also provided third party evaluation of a government certification programs and offers various other cooperative sub-contracting services to national organic regulatory agencies.

A Brief History of the Organic Guarantee System

In 1972, the founding members of IFOAM aimed to establish a communication network among organic agricultural communities that were emerging in multiple countries on several continents. In its 30 year lifetime, IFOAM has also come to provide an international system to define and document the integrity of organic production and processing, and to support the trade of organic products. This international system is now known as IFOAM's Organic Guarantee System.

IFOAM Basic Standards were the first element of the system

The first element of this system was the IFOAM Basic Standards (IBS), whose seeds were sown in 1978. After a long period of growth and development, the IBS came to real fruition in the mid 1980's, guided by the work of a technical committee. From then until now, the IBS have undergone periodic revisions, which have been approved by the IFOAM membership.

IFOAM Accreditation Criteria and the IFOAM Accreditation Program followed

In 1986 IFOAM launched the development of an evaluation program for certifiers, administered by IFOAM's "Technical Committee." Evaluation included visits to certification bodies and the generation of reports, which were then shared among participating certification bodies. The purpose of the evaluation program was to enhance trust between certification bodies. The next step was taken in the late 1980's, when the Technical Committee was turned into three committees. One of these was the Accreditation Committee, which was tasked to develop a formal Accreditation Program.

The next phase included the continued development of the IFOAM Accreditation Criteria (IAC) for organic certification bodies. The IAC were at first developed from "best practices" along with ISO Guide 65 (1994), and later with even more reference to ISO Guidelines (1998) This phase also saw the establishment of an accreditation structure within IFOAM, which included a Program Board and a staff Executive. The first IFOAM Accredited Certification Body (ACB) was announced in 1994.

Then, IFOAM founded the International Organic Accreditation Service

In 1997, IFOAM decided that the Accreditation Program was best administered by a third party organization, and It founded the International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS) for this purpose. The IOAS is incorporated in the US as a non-profit organization. By 2003 it had 6 internationally based staff members and accredited 28 certification bodies worldwide.

The Accredited Certification Bodies established mutual recognition

In 1999 the IFOAM Accredited Certifiers signed a Multilateral Agreement for mutual recognition and equivalency, aimed at streamlining the approval of products that are traded among their clients. The Agreement acknowledges the functional equivalence of these certification programs based on the IFOAM Basic Standards and Accreditation Criteria. Year after year, newly accredited certification bodies have added their signatures to this agreement.

An IFOAM Seal was added to the Organic Guarantee System

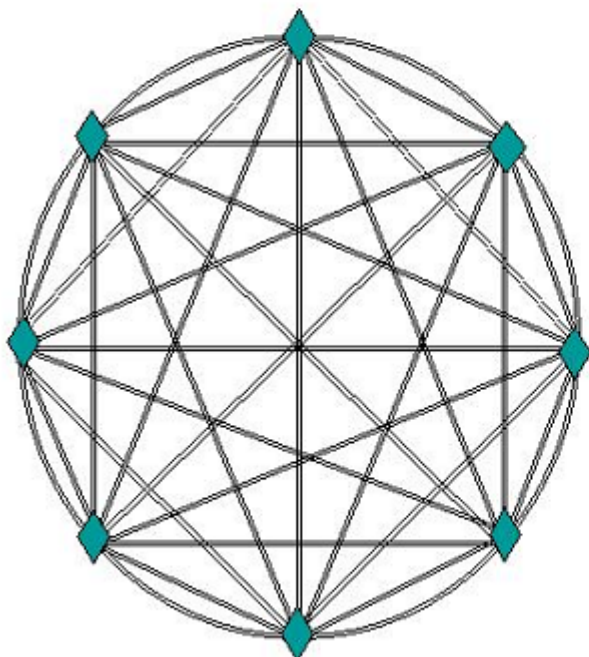
Also in 1999, IFOAM announced a program to sublicense an IFOAM Accredited seal to accredited certification bodies and their certified clients.

IFOAM and IOAS are currently working on quality management

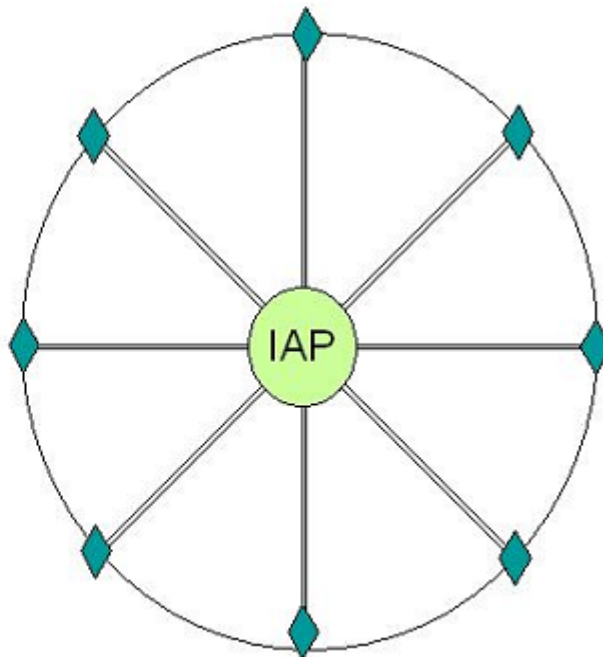
By 2000 the basic structure of IFOAM's Organic Guarantee System was well established. More recently, IFOAM and the IOAS have focused on continuously improving system quality, and on maintaining the relevance of the private guarantee system in light of emerging public sector regulations for the labeling and trade of organic products. In 2002, IFOAM instituted several new policies and procedures designed to enhance the efficiency and quality of the Organic Guarantee System.

Organic Guarantee Systems

Government Bilateral Equivalence



IFOAM Multilateral Equivalence



This figure compares the current mechanisms of bilateral government equivalence agreements and the private international mechanism for multi-lateral equivalence through the IFOAM Accreditation Program. The multilateral approach reduces the number of separate equivalency agreements required to just one.

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Standards Committee:

Chair: Rod May (Australia)

Email: capck@netconnect.com.au

Criteria Committee:

Chair: Ken Commins (USA)

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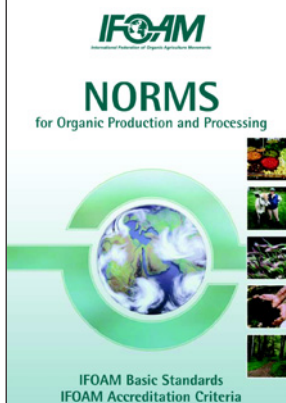
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IFOAM's mission is:

leading, uniting and assisting the organic movement in its full diversity. Our goal is the worldwide adoption of ecologically, socially and economically sound systems that are based on the principles of Organic Agriculture.

Order a Copy of the IFOAM Norms



A hard copy or CD rom of the IFOAM Norms can be ordered online or directly from the IFOAM Head Office for 19 Euros. They are also available to download on the IFOAM website, and are currently available in English, Spanish, Hindi and Arabic.

www.ifoam.org