

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

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Outline

1. Introduction
2. objective
3. Organic standards
4. Organic certification
5. Certification process

Objectives

Understand organic standards, organic certifications, the certifying bodies, certification process and their benefits

Organic standards

Organic standards are sets of requirements that describe what practices can be considered organic. The aim of the standards are:-

1. To protect consumers of organic produce against misrepresentation and fraud in the market place and unsubstantiated product claims
2. To protect producers of organic produce against misrepresentation of other agricultural produce as being organic
3. To ensure that all stages of production, preparation, storage, transport and marketing are subject to inspection and comply with the standards

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4. To harmonize provisions for the production, certification, identification and labeling have organically grown produce
5. To provide international guidelines for organic food control systems in order to facilitate recognition of national systems as equivalent for the purposes of imports
6. To maintain and enhance organic agricultural systems in each country so as to contribute to local and global preservation

Organic standards

There are various organic standards on the private, national, regional and international level. The IFOAM Basic Standards and Codex standards provide a frame work for certification bodies and standard setting organizations worldwide to develop their own certification standards and cannot be used for certification on their own.

Organic standards

Organic standards address various aspects of organic production, namely:

- ✓ general farm production requirements and conversion periods
- ✓ crop production requirements
- ✓ processing and handling requirements
- ✓ Record keeping of production and sales records
- ✓ social justice requirements
- ✓ labeling requirements
- ✓ Undergoing periodic on-site inspections

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- ✓ Permitted substances for production of organic foods
 - Guidelines in codex and IFOAM Standards
 - Local substances for use

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- 1. Develop Mauritius organic standards????**
- 2. Regional standards??????** Local organic standards may meet or exceed the IFOAM or CODEX Basic standards but should take into account specific local conditions and provide more specific requirements
- 3. Private bodies standards????**

Be ware of critics of standards or lobbyists against organic standards??????????

Organic certification

Definitions:

- Organic certification is a system by which agricultural and natural products and the systems in which they were produced, processed, handled and retailed are assessed for conformity to set organic standards
- A defined procedure in which a certification body assesses a farm or company and assures in writing that it meets the requirements of the organic standards. The inspector transmits his findings to the certification body as a written report. The certification body compares the results of the inspection with the requirements of the organic standards. A certification committee decides whether certification may be granted or not.

Organic certification systems

Certification most commonly happens via:

- Individual third party certification by an independent certification body e.g Soil Association, ECOCERT or public bodies
- Group certification, whereby a group of farmers implement an Internal Control System (ICS) and are certified collectively by a third party certification body, which assesses the performance of this system.

Organic certification

- Organic certification confirms that a product is produced and processed according to specific organic standards.
- Labels and certification marks help the consumer to recognize trustworthy organic products easily.

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Importance of organic certification:

- Enables the consumer to have confidence that what he/she is buying has been produced organically in a way that he understands and appreciates
- Many consumers are conscious about quality of products (in terms of environmental and social issues) and therefore need to be guaranteed that issues have been taken into consideration
- It is a legal requirement. e.g to sell organic product in the European market it require that the product be inspected and certified according to the EU standards
- Certification ensures that the product is traceable back to source

Benefits of organic certification:-

- Consumers are willing to pay premium prices for certified products and this can increase incomes and improve livelihood of farmers. Consumers pay 10-40% above price for conventional product
- Production costs for organic could be much lower because of expensive inputs are not in use

Certification Process

- Enquiry/Information exchange
 - Producer enquires about certification
 - Producer provided with: -
 - »Description of procedure
 - »Contractual conditions
 - »Operator's rights and duties – including appeals procedure

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- Producer provided with: -
 - » Relevant standards
 - » Fee structure
 - » Application form

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- Applicant completes and submits application form
- Certification body appoints an inspector
- Inspector *visits* and *inspects* the unit as well as the records:
Fills an inspection report

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During the inspection: –

- A visit to facilities, fields and storage areas is undertaken
- Records are reviewed
- Areas that pose risks to organic integrity are identified
- Verification as to whether corrective actions have been taken is done

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- *Inspector Submits* report to the certification body for decisions
- *Compliance* form sent to applicant
- If in agreement, *fills, signs* and returns form and any requested information and/or document

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If all is well: -

- Farm is *registered* as under conversion
- *Certificate* of registration and schedule issued
- Unit is inspected *at least once a year*

During conversion: -

- ❖ One must only use materials and practices allowed in organic production
- ❖ The areas of land converted must be physically separate and identifiable from non-organic ones

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On successful completion of conversion: -

Applicant is allowed to use the Certification mark/logo/seal on product labels

This informs consumers that the production process is “*Certified Organic*”

Inspection and organic certification system and schemes

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Outline

1. Objective
2. Inspection
3. Record keeping
4. Organic certification system
5. Group certification
6. Processes of an Internal Control System (ICS)
7. Summary: Steps to certification
8. Organic logo and labeling
9. Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)
10. Questions for discussion

Inspection

Understand organic inspection process and procedures, the certifying system and schemes and their benefits, and participatory Guarantee system

Inspection

If an organic farmer wants his products to be certified, he has to undergo an inspection at least once a year. The inspector evaluates the performance of the farm activities with the help of the farmer's statements and records and by viewing the fields, animals and farm buildings. He or she checks whether the statements and records are correct and plausible. In case of doubt, the inspector can take samples for laboratory testing or later conduct an announced inspections.

Organic inspection:

Organic inspection:

- The physical verification and evaluation of compliance of the product and its production system to the set organic standards
- Involves: observations, judgments, measurements, gauging
The findings are put into a report which is evaluated by a certification committee and a decision is made
- The inspections are carried out by the organic certification body's staff or their contracted party. They are referred to as inspectors or auditors

Process of inspection

Process of inspection: When the auditor/inspector visits your farm or processing unit they will be looking at the following:-

- the types of crops to be clearly listed
- The organic plots should be marked out clearly. Their sizes must be clearly stated

The following issues should be looked into and developed or written out:-

- The soil management plan
- The rotation plan including a green manure crop
- Compost preparation, management, storage and application
- Sources of imported manure and treatment of animals from the source

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- Pests and diseases control methods
- Weed management
- Soil erosion control
- Other environmental issues eg tree planting, prevention of ground and river contamination
- Separation of organic and conventional enterprises (dedication of equipment, cleaning where equipment is not dedicated and marking of fields)
- Harvesting and handling of crop, including transport

Record keeping

- **Keeping records:-**The following records should be kept by the farmer:-
 - a map of the farm showing clearly the organic plots in relation to the rest of the farm and activities going on in the neighboring farms
 - Records on all farm operations. Dates of land preparation, irrigation, planting, harvesting, weeding and irrigation
 - sales records, input purchase records and input usage records

Certification systems

Certification most commonly happens via:

- Individual third party certification by an independent certification body e.g Soil Association, ECOCERT or public body
- Group certification, whereby a group of farmers implement an Internal Control System (ICS) and are certified collectively by a third party certification body, which assesses the performance of this system.

A high number of certification bodies offer organic certification services worldwide. The majority are private organizations e.g ECOCERT, SA

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Accreditation

In order to make sure that the certification program is competent to carry out inspection and certification, a third level of quality control is needed. Authorized bodies regularly evaluate certification programs and check their proper functioning according to certain criteria. In case the certification body complies with the criteria, they accredit the certification program. The competent authority is the official government agency having the jurisdiction of accreditation

Competent body means the official government agency having jurisdiction

Group certification

The group Certification system have in common the following:

- A central body responsible for marketing the group's compliance to applicable standards (buyers, processors, or self organizes cooperative association)
- One single certification for all individual production as well as processing and handling registered within the group.
- Group members operate under contractual or binding membership requirements specifying the commitment to comply with applicable organic standards and permit inspection
- Presence of an Internal Control System(ICS) operated by the responsible central body or an external body contracted by the central body
- The group through the ICS mechanism decide on members compliance with to applicable standards

Processes of an Internal Control System (ICS)

- Contracting farmers
- Training of farmers on organic production
- Document profile of farms, maps, measure fields
- Technical advice visits and monitoring of farms
- Internal inspection of farms and harvest estimates
- Data processing
- Approval decisions for farms
- Bulking of products from individual farmers
- Supervise internal inspection activities
- Consolidation records, check traceability in processing, storage and sales

In summary, Steps to group certification

- Create awareness among producers
- Decide together to go for organic
- Producers commit themselves to follow organic rules
- Training on production rules
- Training on documentation requirements
- Formalization on Internal Control System (ICS), registration
- Contracting of producers
- Application for external inspection
- Internal annual inspection, compilation of findings, corrective action when needed
- First external inspection
- Complying with the corrective action requests
- Second external inspection; certification

Organic logo and labeling (FAO, 1999)

- The term “organic” is a labeling term that denotes products that have been produced in accordance with organic production standards and certified by a duly constituted certification body or authority (FAO, 1999)
- The logo and the labeling rules are an important part of the organic regulations. The main objective of the logo is to make organic products easier to be identified by the consumers. It gives a visual identity to the organic farming sector and thus contributes to ensure overall coherence and a proper functioning of the internal market in this field.
- The labeling refers to the name and/or code number of the officially recognized inspection or certification body to which the operator who has carried out the production or the most recent processing operation is subject
- The labeling rules facilitate controls by authorities and bodies designated or recognized in accordance with Regulations.
- In certain cases, it is also possible to use it on a voluntary basis.

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- Products of farms in transition to organic production methods may only be labeled as “transition to organic” after 12 months of production using organic methods
- The label should be very clear so that confusion with full products from farms which have fully completed the conversion period
- The word of such product must be accepted by the competent authority

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) 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

PGS represent an alternative to third party certification, especially adapted to local markets and short supply chains. They enable the direct participation of producers, consumers and other stakeholders in:

- the choice and definition of the standards,
- the development and implementation of verification procedures,
- the review and decision process to recognize farmers as organic

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Participatory Guarantee system(PGS)offers the following benefits:

- Improved access to organic markets through a guarantee system for small scale producers
- Increased education and awareness among consumers
- Promote short supply chains and local market development
- Empowerment

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Explain in your own words the concept of inspection, certification and accreditation.
2. The participants are divided into 4-5 groups associated with selected sections of the FAO Organic Standards (e.g. fertilisation, pest management, processing and labelling). The members of each group get copies of the respective chapters of the FAO organic standards. Each group shall read the concerned section and discuss its meaning. Each group shall summarize each standard requirement in their own words and practical relevance to Mauritius farmers (applicability)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. • „Who of you think that organic farmers should get a better price for their products than non-organic ones? Who don't think that?“
 - “Why do you think consumers should be ready to pay a higher price? Why don't you think they should?“ – Note down the arguments
2. How can you build trust relationship between consumers and organic farmers?:
 - if consumers and farmers are living in the same village
 - if consumers live far away, in an other town or even in an other country.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

3. Do you know of national organic labels or certification marks used in the Mauritius? Which foreign or international labels are used for export? If there is no national label yet, how should such a national label should look like. Is it needed at all?
4. What are potential advantages and disadvantages of private or government certification service?
5. Competent authority ie government agency to to accreditate inspection and certification of certification bodies

References

- IFOAM training manual on organic agriculture
- Training manual on certification and inspection systems in organic farming in India. A.K. Yadar
- IFOAM Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) policy brief
- FAO (1999). Guidelines for the production, processing, labeling and marketing of organically produced foods. 34pp

Thank you