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Canada explores paths to opening international organic markets

Canada was among the first countries to draft national standards for organic agriculture. However, despite this its position on the international stage has been unclear and there is a need to foster international acceptance of its products labelled as 'organic'.

In response to this situation the government ministry, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), recently unveiled its approach to developing international market access for Canadian organic products. The plan is based on revising the current National Standards by updating them and bringing them more in line with EU, USDA and Japanese standards, and with the Codex Alimentarius Guidelines. Once these revised standards, which will be voluntary, are adopted, Canada will present equivalency proposals to the EU, US and Japan. The plan also incorporates a voluntary process for certification of organic producers and handlers, and for accreditation of certifiers to the Canadian National Standard and the ISO 65 guidelines. Under this voluntary plan, the accreditation procedure would be performed by the Standards Council of Canada (SCC).

The Canadian National Standard and Accreditation System

In 1999, the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) published the Canadian National Standard for Organic Agriculture, which was developed over the course of several years in consultation with the Canadian organic community. The process followed the customary course of voluntary national standards development. As a government agency, CGSB is engaged in the production of voluntary standards in a wide variety of subject areas through the work of standards committees and a consensus process. Its technical committees, including the committee that developed the organic standards, are composed of industry experts and other stakeholders. CGSB develops standards according to the standards-setting criteria of the SCC, which is an ISO-based coordinating body of the National Standards System. SCC is a 'crown corporation' of Canada, a private federation that is designated by the Canadian government to coordinate the Canadian National Standard System. In addition, it is a member of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and serves as the national ISO

Despite Canada being one of the first countries to draft national standards for organic agriculture its position on the international stage is unclear.