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TOS calendar review 2003

New Year greetings

Dear Readers,

A lot happened in the organic world over 2003. On the regulatory front, the number of governments that have or are considering regulations continued to grow. So did the number of certification bodies (CBs): in the first worldwide survey published by TOS in August 2003, there were at least 364 CBs operating organic certification throughout the world. Whilst this all points to the growth of the organic sector in general, the growing number of regulations and CBs is increasingly being cited by operators as being the cause of a proliferation of unnecessary barriers to international trade in organic products. What is considered a foundation cornerstone for sector development, *i.e.* standards and regulations, may now be demonstrating the law of diminishing returns.

An encouraging development is the EU's willingness to listen and respond to the organic industry's opinion. An example is the incorporation of the IFOAM stakeholders' seminar recommendations in the EU *Guidance for Grower Group Inspections*. The EU also invited IFOAM to an informal discussion on cooperation in the implementation of the organic components of the EU Action Plan. Industry input towards the implementation of NOP regulations will hopefully also be enhanced in the US, following the USDA's acceptance of peer review. However, not all is well. In Brazil, for example, the movement is still lobby-

ing for more participatory development of national regulations. While, in some parts of the world, such as in Malaysia, public-private sector collaborations remain shaky.

Harmonisation of standards in the private sector is beginning to gain some momentum. The Organic Trade Organisation (OTA) updated its standards for fibre processing taking into consideration IFOAM's textiles standards. Four IFOAM accredited Italian certifiers, Bioagricert, CCPB, ICEA and IMC, decided to develop common certification standards. Cooperation between CBs is also increasing. For instance, a new Croatian CB was founded in collaboration with ICEA (Italy), DIO (Greece) and others. The European Organic Certifiers Council held a successful annual meeting during Biofach, and in a TOS survey on GMOs, CBs responded they were willing to exchange information regarding GMO contamination risks.

A worrying side is the declining number of farmers that registered as organic in Japan last year, the first year to have a decline since the implementation of Organic JAS in 2000. The future of the sector is also threatened by the weak EU guidelines on co-existence between GM and non-GM crops, as well as legislation on labelling of GMOs.

Positive trends developing in 2003 include the rise of other sectors into the organic standards arena, such as organic cosmetics and catering. In