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The Organic Standard 2004 review

Dear Readers,

New Year greetings. There is never a dull moment in the organic world and certainly a lot happened over 2004, as covered by TOS. Governments continue to work on organic regulations, although the number of new initiatives is not growing as fast as before. An interesting organic legislation, which came on board at the end of 2003, is the Brazilian law that allows the recognition of alternative organic guarantee systems. This made Brazil the fitting location for the Alternative Certification workshop in April 2004, organised by IFOAM and MAELA, where the concept of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) was established. Meanwhile the number of ‘traditional’ certification bodies (CBs) continues to grow, increasing from 364 in mid 2003 to 383 in 2004 (*TOS Directory*, August 2004).

A diminishing return from increasing controls is precipitating the private sector to take action. The Italian common private standards initiative launched in 2003 was finalised. The IFOAM accredited certification bodies (ACBs) decided, as a group, to stop requesting additional requirements of each other except for legal requirements under their Multilateral

Agreement based on IFOAM Accreditation. Consultations on the revision of the IFOAM Organic Guarantee System (OGS), with an option to replace IFOAM Accreditation with a simpler registration procedure, pressed ahead. Regulators, on the other hand, further tightened inspection controls: the EU over storage and trade operators; and the Malaysian government scheme adopting a regime involving two separate inspections, to give just two examples. All such developments are expected to further increase certification costs in the organic supply chain. Complaints from operators and increasingly from CBs about the growing burden of regulatory requirements have apparently yet to reach policy makers’ ears.

Public-Private sector relations hit another low in the USA over the USDA April directives, which were later rescinded. The USDA has been instructed to rebuild relations with the industry but results remain to be seen. Court action has been taken by the US Center for Food Safety over the USDA’s refusal to supply information. The ANSI report on the NOP accreditation process is still to be released.

Bureaucracy aside, the big worry for the organic sector is GMOs. The

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