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East African mark launched

East Africa takes an important step towards developing a thriving organic sector.

The East African organic products standards and the East African organic mark were launched at the East African organic conference in Dar es Salaam on 28 - 31 May, attended by 240 persons. The Prime Minister of the United Republic of Tanzania, Edward N. Lowassa, officiated at the launch, which was extensively covered by the East African media.

The event was also attended by the Minister of Agriculture of Tanzania, the Minister of Trade of Uganda and many high level officials from the region. Development partners such as the Swedish, Swiss and Austrian development agencies, the African Development Bank, the US African Development Foundations, regional organisations such as East African Community, the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as well as international organisations such as United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Trade Centre (ITC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements

(IFOAM) were also represented.

The East African Community has custody of the East African organic products standard. The East African Organic Mark is owned by the three organic movements in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, which signed an agreement at the event for how the mark can be used and how it will be jointly managed. The mark will be accessible to producers that are certified by a recognised certification body in the region (AfriCert, EnCert, UgoCert and TanCert) or by a certification body approved under the IFOAM, US, Indian, Chinese and EU systems for organic certification. In addition, producers that are within an approved Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) will also have access to the mark. The mark is backed up by a comprehensive information campaign developed within the framework of the IFOAM OSEA project, supported by the Swedish International Development cooperation agency.

The stakeholders believe that the power-sharing represented by the chosen model can be dynamic and will ensure that no single party can hijack the organic agenda, be it government or private sector. ■

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