THE ORGANIC STANDARD

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Coping with the Taiwanese regulation 'Down Under'

Following the Taiwanese Government revision of their national organic regulation (See TOS 93, January 2009), the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) and Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) circulated new requirements for organic products bound to Taiwan.

In New Zealand, along with the usual NZFSA Standards and Technical Rules to be observed by all organic operators under the NZFSA Organic Assurance Programme, additional requirements include:

- Organic meat products exported to Taiwan must not come from any animal treated with antibiotics.
- A conventional dairy animal treated with antibiotics can be converted to organic by being under continuous organic management for one year prior to milk and milk products from the animal being sold as organic.

Regarding Australia, the Taiwan Agriculture and Food Agency (AFA) has indicated it is generally satisfied with the Australian system for managing certification for organic produce for export. The only outstanding issue is Taiwan has a zero tolerance for the presence of contaminants in organic produce, which is contrary to the Australian National Standard for Organic and Bio-Dynamic Produce, Section 3.1.9. AQIS is currently negotiating with AFA for an equivalence arrangement in relation to organic produce and Taiwan's requirements for zero tolerance can be achieved through:

- The issue of this Notice to all certification bodies requiring compliance to Taiwan's requirement.
- Inclusion of this requirement into the audit procedure conducted by Australian certification bodies or AQIS on certified operations.

The Australian Certified Organic (ACO), a certification body based in Australia, specifically required all its certified operators interested in the Taiwanese market to amend their quality manual or organic management plan to reflect this requirement. ■

Source: NZFSA and BFA

For more information please see www.nzfsa.govt.nz/organics/exporters/organics-export-to-taiwan.htm

Importing to Taiwan

According to the Taiwanese Council of Agriculture (COA), Taiwan recognises the regulations of 16 countries for the importation of organic food. These are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

However, Taiwanese companies are still required to apply to the COA for permission to sell certified organic products from those countries.

Source: The Organic Monitor (from the Central News Agency, Taiwan).

Traceability systems

Transparency in organic production and trade improved

In 2002, an enormous scandal exploded in Germany when some organic certified eggs and poultry were found to be contaminated with a prohibited carcinogenic herbicide named Nitrofen. It proved to be a huge challenge investigating the case and determining specifics such as which particular batch was produced by which farm, where were they stocked, who bought what, and finally which batches of feed were used by which farm. All those involved, including a baby food company where the contaminated food was found for the first time, the egg and poultry producer, the feed mill, the EU inspection agency and the certifier, were caught up in the inquiry.

The case was also extensively covered by the media aiming to prove that organic farms and traders were acting irresponsibly if not criminally, and that organic produce is not safe. The media attention increased the extreme pressure on all involved parties. As more than a hundred organic farms were affected, it took several weeks to find out the source of this contamination. Finally it turned out that the contamination occurred in a grain store that had been used as storage for plant protection chemicals in the former East Germany about ten years previously. No criminals, no fraud, just a historical gap in responsible management of this particular storage area and the knowledge of its forbidden use for animal feed.

An important lesson was learnt from that experience; that more and more organic products are following similar channels to the conventional ones. To be able to confront possible problems of contamination or fraud in this scenario, it would be necessary to:

- Develop better information exchange between involved parties. It was demonstrated that a good quality assurance system that included an emergency plan needed to be developed to include all stakeholders. A quality assurance system at each level alone turned out to be insufficient.
- Enable organic agriculture to follow certified products along the chain of custody. In cases of contamination, an inspection system based only on the inspection of procedures and documents is incapable of generating fast and specific results. A general monitoring system, including a professional risk assessment of potential contamination, would be necessary.

Two inspection bodies, Naturland and Austria Bio Garantie, and some commodity traders were seriously alarmed by the Nitrofen experience and decided to take an active role in developing a system that facilitates the monitoring of the product chain. Intact Consult GmbH in Austria was given the mandate by Naturland, Austria Bio Garantie and Bio.Inspecta to develop e-Cert, a software for certification organisations. Parallel to the development of this software it was obvious that a web based traceability system that could communicate with e-Cert would be necessary. Intact Consult GmbH took up this idea and invested in the development of a chain of custody traceability system, producing two quality management and traceability tools, NutriWeb and FlowWeb. Intact Consult, which positions itself as a developer of software applications for quality management, ensured that the tools were appropriate and applicable to the organic sector but also to any other agribusiness and food company. Organic Services GmbH joined as the international business development partner.

NutriWeb and FlowWeb

The programs, NutriWeb and FlowWeb, are tailor-made to answer to particular needs of the food industry, including all stakeholders, from producers to traders and from certifiers to accreditation bodies. Both software applications, each in their own way, add to the traceability in food production and manufacturing:

NutriWeb provides information about the origin of a product.

FlowWeb enables users to trace a single batch through the chain of custody, up, as well as downstream.

Both tools

- Enable organisations and companies to actively promote their market positioning.
- Enable efficiency in communication between producers, processors, traders and certification bodies about products and related data.
- Improve quality management systems and skills to prevent possible crises.

Both, NutriWeb and FlowWeb, are specifically designed to cover the needs of cooperatives, processors and marketing organisations. However, despite their similarities there are significant differences between

NutriWeb and FlowWeb. NutriWeb is laid out as an agriculture documentation system that provides relevant data for producers. It can set the basis for a comprehensive traceability system by linking processor data right back to the primary producer.

FlowWeb is a tool for tracing products back to the origin (or 'upstream') or tracking products 'downstream' to the consumer or finally to monitor the quantitative move of products across the supply chain. Quantity monitoring and documentation of all steps allows users to trace all the agricultural ingredients back to their source.

With FlowWeb, it is possible to identify the origin of a particular lot very quickly. For example, if a positive residue is found the concerned farmer(s) can be traced with a mouse click. Even when a problem is discovered in a mixed product coming from different producers (as in a silo full of wheat) FlowWeb can, by following each lot that has been mixed into a bigger batch, identify the source of the problem. This significantly facilitates the recall of the contaminated lot from the market or the prevention of further trade in such products.

NutriWeb and FlowWeb, especially when integrated with e-Cert, significantly reduce the time a certifier or an accreditation body spends on paperwork and on the phone collecting information. The same is true for the control of residue's sources, checking validity of certificates and checking that amounts sold correspond with amounts bought. But it is not only the certifiers and accreditation bodies that face such problems. Problems occur at all levels of the product chain, they just vary from the perspective of a producer, buyer or seller.

The audit system e-Cert

e-Cert is a modular software package for professional inspection and certification bodies but it is also useful for bigger processors or handlers who have to administer and implement a wide range of different quality standards. Adherence to legal norms or organic label programmes, as well as internal company quality standards can be efficiently documented and evaluated with this system. The Customer Relations Management (CRM) as an integrated part of e-Cert is a practical option for all kinds of organisations and companies for tracking internal and external communications.

Among several other features, e-Cert permits efficient inspections and fast certification as it eliminates the time lag normally caused by searching for or sending loads of paper documents. At the same time it also offers a reliable, simple and non-bureaucratic handling of data, since all information is centrally stored within each operator's dataset and is available at a glance for all those with respective log-in rights.

The core functionality runs on internal servers where the whole inspection and certification process is managed. For use of specific parts of the data e-Cert offers several additional web modules and functions:

- The Online Supplier Management: Authorised certified clients (e.g. processors) can access e-Cert to manage their own suppliers entirely (production data, certification status of single farmers and products etc.).
- The Client Portal: Operators can access their own production and certification data.
- Product Approval Workflow: Processors can apply for approval of a new product directly in e-Cert. The certification officer receives the necessary information online and can react by sending an approval or rejection very fast.
- The Online-Infoportal: Data entries of inspections can be posted on the internet without accessing the certifier's network. This module meets the needs of those organisations that work with several inspectors and decide not to install e-Cert on each laptop.

An on-line example of a traceability system covering the complete product chain can be viewed (in German only) on the internet at www.bio-mit-gesicht.de (organic with a face). The traceability platform was initiated by the marketing organisation of Naturland. Regional German conventional retailers with extensive organic product lines, like Feneberg and Tegut, joined the initiative and now actively promote the concept of providing information about the origin of their organic products to the consumer. The system offers the facility to trace back each product to its origin according to a lot number printed on the product label. Consumers can explore the origin of the ingredients of even multi-ingredients products by clicking on the corresponding internet link. The system leads the consumer, step by step, through the product chain right back to the farm level.

For example: A lot number displayed on a beer label will take the consumer to the name of the processing brewery. Once there, the names of the farms that produced the raw ma-

The system offers the facility to trace back each product to its origin according to a lot number printed on the product label.

news shorts…

'Fair Milk' In EU

The European Milk Board (EMB), a lobby group representing dairy farmers across the EU, said that certified 'Fair Milk', which is already in shelves in Austria, would soon be available across Europe. EMB claimed that 'Fair Milk' will be labelled with a special logo, which will inform consumers that a farmer had received pay designed to meet their costs.

This effort is being introduced as a responce to the European Commission's decision to raise milk production quotas by 2% in November 2008, which caused dairy farmers to continue to suffer. In many European regions, prices paid to producers have already slipped well below the €0.30 cent per unit production cost which poses an acute threat to the dairy farmers' livelihood. In 2008, dairy farmers took part in a number of strikes in the EU to raise their concerns over meeting rising production costs in their operations. ■

Source: FoodProductionDaily.com

For more information please see www.foodproductiondaily.com/Publications/Food-Beverage-Nutrition/DairyReporter/Industry-markets/Fair-Trade-milk-soon-a-euro-reality-says-farmers-group

terials appear by clicking on 'product origin'. If consumers want to explore more details about a specific farm that, in this case, grows the barley, they can click on the farm name and a picture of the farm and information on its activities and the barley produced will come up.

Besides the specific traceability information some general information about the certification scheme and organic agriculture methods is also provided on the platform.

Integration of the three software tools

e-Cert, FlowWeb and NutriWeb are complementary and data can be transferred from one to another system. However, even if only one of the stakeholders use one of the software systems other stakeholders can receive its benefits because data can be transferred, and are compatible with other IT management systems or easily connected through interfaces. While the range of options from which clients can choose from meet most requirements all software can be customised on request to meet particular needs of a client without disrupting information flow.

Where an accreditation body runs e-Cert as its data management system its clients with differing databases will have to be integrated into e-Cert. To do this e-Cert offers several options for inputting the data:

- If a certifier runs a complex database system (like e-Cert or other such systems) data are transferred by an automated interface, a so called 'web-service'. The IT systems 'speak' directly with each other for the exchange of information.
- If a certifier runs a simple database system (like Access, Paradox or similar), a data export file of the CB can be imported into e-Cert.
- If a certifier runs a basic database system (like Word, Excel or other), all data like production data or certification results can be entered into a web frontend of e-Cert on the internet.

Importance of traceability

Traceability needs political and strategic thinking and the will to implement it to the better of the company and all partners involved in the product chain.

Frank Gerriets, the Director at Organic Services who is responsible for consulting with companies and organisations wishing to implement professional IT systems, is an expert in traceability issues. He points out that one has to accept the wishes of single players in the product chain to keep sensitive data protected. However, he adds: 'Trade was used to thinking in terms of "secrets" to maintain what they thought was their superior knowledge, sources or staff over a competitor. Introducing transparency to trade is like a red flag for many companies, not only in the conventional but in the organic sector as well! Very often it is not a technical problem to introduce a traceability system but a challenge to old style thinking and strategies to convince all parties that they will benefit with transparency. It will probably need more scandals before companies accept that transparency is an important issue that needs to be addressed much more seriously.' ■

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News on the EU Regulation

Import, conversion feed, yeast, enzymes and Easter eggs

At the end of last year four amendments were made to the EU Regulation. One of these changes was to allow traditional colouring of eggs with synthetic forms of iron oxides and iron hydroxides until the end of 2013. In the text it is stated that the eggs should be sold at a given period of the year, which can be read as Easter. The chosen wording is an attempt to be culturally sensitive by not specifically highlighting just a Christian tradition.

A more important change was that in-conversion feed from the second conversion year and originating from their own farm can comprise 100% of the total feed to the animals. Before the change feed was only allowed to contain 60% in-conversion feed . For a farm converting all its land at once this was a problem as the farm had to buy in certified feed for the remaining 40%. The only other option open to operators was to convert their farm in stages. A second, possibly more important, reason for the change was that the 60% rule, combined with the other exceptions on feed, led to complicated calculations. Allowing the use of a 100% in-conversion feed makes it simpler and more straight forward, both for the farmer and the certifier, to ensure the standards are fulfilled.

A third change was concerned with organic yeast. Council Regulation 834/2007 contained a paragraph on the basic requirements for organic yeast and a statement that more detailed rules will be developed.

This work was carried out so that Annex VIII of the Commission Regulation 889/2008 has a new section C listing nine permitted processing aids for yeast and yeast production. The substances are calcium chloride, carbon dioxide, citric acid, lactic acid, nitrogen, oxygen, potato starch, sodium carbonate and vegetable oils. Regarding the production of yeast, where organic yeast is not available, use of 5% non-organic yeast extract or autolysate will be allowed in the production of yeast until the end of 2013.

Before 2013 yeast will be classed as 'of non-agricultural origin' and, therefore, conventional yeast can be used in organic products. However, if a processor states that the yeast is organic it has to follow the requirements in the EU Regulation. After 2013 organic yeast shall be calculated as an ingredient 'of agricultural origin'. The consequence of this change is that when yeast is classed as 'of agricultural origin' it is included in the calculation of the percentage of organic ingredients in a mixed product.

The fourth change is that enzymes used as additives now have to be listed in Annex VIII section A of 889/2008. Most enzymes are used as processing aids and these will still not need to be listed. The distinction between additives and processing aids is not always easy to draw. Enzymes that could be counted as additives are lactose, rennet and pectinase.

All the above mentioned changes can be found in Commission Regulation 1254/2008.

The import guidance that was reported on in the December number of TOS now seems to have been finalised without any major changes. The Member States have confirmed that they support the guidance as an official document. It will be translated to all EU languages and will also be published on the Commission website (http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic/home_en). ■

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KRAV STANDARDS ARE LOCKED IN

KRAV has decided that from 1 January 2009, the KRAV standards would no longer be an officially available document on the KRAV webpage. For certified producers it is provided as part of the certification package in the same way as before, but operators will now be given a code to enter the standards section of the homepage.

Advisers and others can subscribe to the standard for a cost of US$35 a year. Consumers, students and journalists can get it for free but have to register and promise to not use the standards for commercial reasons. The official reason given by KRAV is that they want to know who is using the standards and want recognition that the standards have a value. The unofficial reason is that the KRAV standards are a practical interpretation of the EU Regulation in Sweden and are, therefore, also used for certification to the EU legislation and the EU logo which is seen as a competitor. ■

Air-freight: from ban to monitoring

In 2008, the Soil Association (SA) in the UK proposed an outright ban on air-freight produce [See TOS 83, March 2008]. However, the SA Standards Board recently to withdrew the earlier proposal, but will continue monitoring the amount of air freighted organic goods, especially those from Africa.

The SA Board decision to change from an outright ban to a monitoring process was based on a lengthy consultation period. Starting in March 2008 the Board heard from over 100 organisations, 200 individuals and, in addition, visited farmers and industry bodies in East Africa. The SA Board noted that requiring a plan to reduce air freight would be costly to implement and unlikely to contribute to a reduction in the use of air freight. They also observed that many businesses are already proactively trying to reduce the amount they air freight.

SA now plans to work closely with its African counterparts to explore options for addressing climate change and development issues identified during the consultation. Some of the activities proposed are:

- Development of a regional equivalent to Ethical Trade for Africa owned and administered by the East African organic organisation. SA Ethical Trade core principles will be used as the starting point.
- Capacity building sessions in terms of training, certification and inspection for smallholder farmers in order to reduce barriers to access the EU organic market.
- Joint advocacy works on improved food security associated with organic agriculture and joint campaign against genetically modified organisms.
- Identification of organic farmers' positive contributions in addressing the issues of climate change and actions to minimise further carbon emissions. ■

Source: Soil Association

SA air-freight monitoring decision criticised

In response to the Soil Association (SA) recent announcement to withdraw its proposal to ban air-freighted produce into the UK many supporters of the organic lifestyle believe that to come to such a decision it has given in to pressure from supermarkets such as Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose and Asda.

Whilst SA admitted receiving certification fees from suppliers of organic products that carried supermarket brands, it denied such allegations. SA claimed that its discussions with African farmers about the social benefits to the region had driven them to change their stance. The African organic farming organisations felt requiring such certification would impose additional and unnecessary burdens on their members without any added benefit.

SA added that during a consultation period conducted last year over 300 comments were received, only six of which were from supermarkets.

Source: DairyReporter.com

ORGAP results published

The European Commission-funded research project ORGAP, which ran from 2005-2008, is now been completed. It was developed to provide scientific support for the implementation of the European Action Plan and the evaluation of its long-term and short-term effects. In November 2008, ORGAP published results from the project which compiled action plans, implementation period, funding availability and quantitative targets of twenty-eight countries in the European Union.

Average length for most of the action plans devised by the countries or regions listed is around four years. Five countries reached the end of their implementation plan in 2008 with no further plans being developed. Five other countries have not specified target years in their action plans. Slovenia has the longest action plan, which runs for ten years starting from 2005 to 2015. Denmark was the first to implement an organic action plan which ran from 1999 to 2003.

The highest and the lowest budget among the plans listed are two administrations in Spain. The Andalusia region budget of 384 million Euros is the highest, while the Madrid region has the lowest budget of 3 million Euros. However, direct comparisons are difficult as Madrid is a small region with an agriculture sector that is comparatively very small. Excluding Andalusia, the average funding for all countries/regions is 25 million Euros, with a total of 282.6 million that has been allocated for organic action plans in Europe starting from 1999 to 2015. Nineteen countries/regions have not specified their budget allocation.

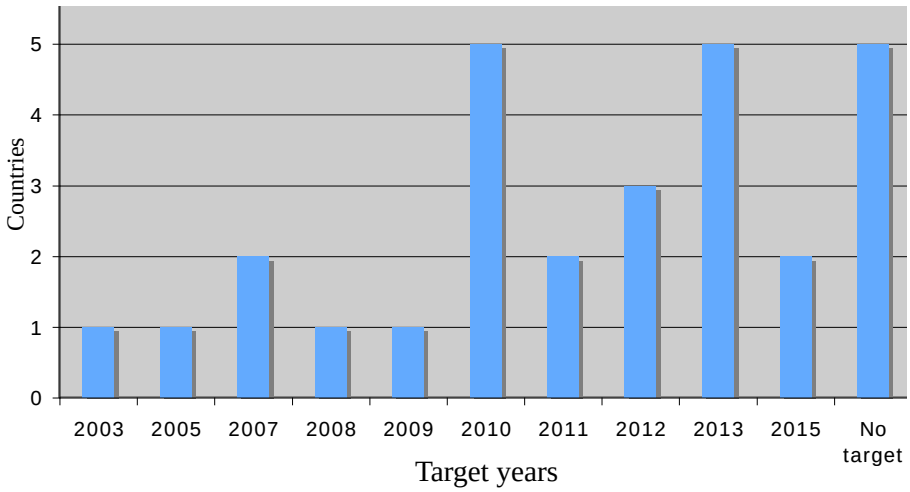
Four countries have set the target of 20% of their agricultural land to be converted to organic status by a specified year. However, thirteen countries/regions do not specify their target years for land conversion. The Netherlands is the only country that sets 5% conversion of its agricultural land annually into organic status during the action plan, which runs from 2008 to 2011.

Other targets set by the countries/regions in their action plans include percentage for organic food in government canteens, consumer spending, research and development funds, market share of organic products, number of organic farms, and proportion of organic food produced nationally. Slovenia set all these targets in its action plan. ■

Source: Organic Action Plan EU

For more information please see www.orgap.org/documents/action_plan_targets.pdf

EU countries organic plans target years



The Andalusian case

Between 2007 and 2013 the budget dedicated to the development of the organic sector – which is much higher in Andalusia than anywhere else in Europe – comes from the following financial sources:

DGAE (General Directorate of Organic Farming) ..... 102 million €
EU Agri-environment schemes ..... 215 million €
IFAPA (governmental institution for farming training and education, organic farming section) ..... 8 million €
Private investment (some subsidies requires a certain percentage of private investment to be granted ..... 8 million €

Total ..... 384 million €

Source: DGAE

news shorts…

China tops in quality certification

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) itself does not perform certification to its standards, does not issue certificates and does not control cetification performed independently of ISO by other organisations. However, it frequently receives requests for information on the number of certificates and this led the organisation to undertake the ISO Survey 2007, which is now in its 15th year.

Only certification bodies accredited by national members of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) were used as sources for the survey. The survey is based on the number of certificates issued by certification bodies and not numbers of sites covered by a single certificate nor individual organisations holding different certificates.

China was the country that received the highest number of ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 14001:2004 certificates among 175 and 148 countries respectively. ■

Source: ISO

For more information please see www.iso.org/iso/pressrelease.htm?refid=Ref1178

ORWINE project reaches conclusions

ORWINE, an EU project coordinated by AIAB, has been running since April 2006, and is now close to its end. The project's aim was to develop the scientific basis for the legislative framework of organic wine making. In the upcoming months the EU Commission will start discussions on the regulation of organic wine production, based on the results of the ORWINE project.

The ORWINE project (www.orwine.org) analysed the organic wine sector, from which some facts can be highlighted:

- Most producers and traders wish to have an EU Regulation on organic wine that clearly defines its identity.
- Consumers are attracted by the organic concept, but there is a general lack of knowledge on its differences from conventional wine and on wine making in general. Nevertheless, consumers clearly want organic wine to have fewer inputs, both in quantity and range.
- Organic wine must compete with conventional wine in the market place, therefore its quality must, at least, be comparable.
- A zero-input regulation (i.e. to prohibit the use of all additives and processing aids in wine-making) would impose an unacceptable commercial risk on producers.
- It is possible to significantly reduce the use of chemical additives through a coherent application of soft technologies (e.g. biological tools, oxygen and temperature management, physical treatments, grape selections etc.).

Starting from this basis, the ORWINE project will soon propose their recommendations on organic wine making to the EU Commission. Their recommendations will consist of scenarios based on different choices about:

- Limits on the use of some additives or practices that can impact the expression of variety and territory and influence wine healthiness.
- Limits on the levels of total sulphur dioxide in the final product, with respect to conventional wines.
- Prohibition of the use of additives that are considered as unsuitable for organic wine production.
- Listing of the acceptable additives and processing aids.

Before the preparation of the final recommendation to the EU Commission, the ORWINE project ran a web-based survey to gather the detailed opinions of stakeholders. The deadline for responses to be returned was November 2008.

The outcome clearly shows a difference in the organic wine concept between organic producers of major wine producing countries (i.e. France, Italy, Spain and Portugal) and the ones from Germany and partially

There was a clear difference in the organic wine concept between organic producers form major wine producing countries and those from Germany and Austria. ■

Fertiliser fraud in California

In June 2004, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) officials were notified by a whistle blower that California Liquid Fertilizer was adding ammonium sulphate, a synthetic product banned from organic farms, to its fertilisers. CDFA investigations were slow and the products were not removed from the organic market until January 2007. As a result, for up to seven years the company sold synthetic fertiliser banned from organic agriculture to organic farmers. While all that time, organic farmers considered the fertiliser to be effective, inexpensive, and approved by the organic regulators. By 2006 the company held as much as a third of the market in California. In November 2007, the distributor of another organic liquid fertiliser representing about 5% of the market pulled its product in the middle of another state investigation with rumours there would be another major fraud disclosure soon.

In the case of California Liquid Fertilizer, CDFA could have pursued harsher penalties against the company which carries fines of up to US$5,000 and it could also have referred the case to the attorney general's office for civil action as an unfair business practice. But CDFA did not pursue either course as it prioritised the removal of the products from the market. CDFA also claimed that the investigations took so long as it was a very complicated case.

Responding to the case, the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), which certified 80% of the organic acreage in the state, decided not to penalise farms that had used the products on the grounds that farmers did not know they were using an unapproved chemical. However, as a safety measure CCOF enacted the 2009 Liquid Fertilizer Approval Policy effective from 15 January 2009, including the following:

- Only liquid fertilisers listed by the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) or Washington State University (WSDA) will be allowed for used by CCOF certified operations.
- In addition to OMRI or WSDA listing, CCOF requires that by 15 August 2009, manufacturers of liquid fertilisers selected by CCOF must undergo third party on-site inspections and must demonstrate compliance with NOP organic regulations pertaining to farm inputs. Failure to do so will result in their products being prohibited for use by CCOF operations. Evidence of successful inspections addressing the points below must be provided to CCOF by 1 October 2009.
- In order to approve any identified liquid fertilisers for use by clients, CCOF requires each manufacturer to provide evidence of no fraud in formulation and no synthetic nitrogen infrastructure within 100 yards of the facility producing organic approved inputs as well as proof of successful audits performed.

The OMRI, an organisation working to identify fertilisers and other products that are permitted for organic use, also responded to the case by introducing new control measures including:

- A binding contract that forbids any company found guilty of product misrepresentation from reapplying for one year.
- Inspection to determine whether the facilities are capable of what they claim in their application.
- All clients are required to maintain and open their records to an OMRI auditor.
- On-site records must establish that the client has received and paid for sufficient quantities of compliant ingredients to make the amount of finished product sold and stored. ■

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Austria. The former strongly propose clear differentiation between conventional and organic processes (including sulphur dioxide limits), while the Germans and Austrians stated their difficulties in changing their wine making habits.

One of the last ORWINE events to take place was on 6 February in Siena, Italy, where a large number of organic quality wine producers discussed the practical aspects of organic wine production. Their experiences confirmed that it is possible, and in several cases already a reality, to characterise organic wine by a different approach in the vineyard as well as in the cellar that leads to a high quality product with low inputs.

The final proposal that the ORWINE project will submit to the EU Commission will be presented in the upcoming BioFach fair in Nurenberg, Germany this month. ■

Summarised by Nuria Alonso

Sources: www.orgap.org
www.aiab.it

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'Certified Organic' statement important for consumer awareness

Recent research has found that the majority of Australian buyers do not recognise the symbols used by organic certifiers in Australia.

A survey commissioned by the Organic Federation of Australia, the premier body for the Australian organic sector, has shown that there is very poor consumer awareness of most of the certification symbols. In addition, the words 'Certified Organic' were important in guiding consumer awareness about genuine organic products.

On average, regular organic food buyers recognised only one of the nine symbols that were tested. Half these buyers did not recognise any of the symbols. Even for the most widely recognised symbol, NASAA, which includes the words 'Certified Organic', only a minority of regular buyers recalled seeing it on food packaging and claimed to know it means 'Certified Organic'. For the other eight symbols tested, very few regular buyers (less than 5%) recognised the symbols and associate them with 'Certified Organic' goods. These results point to the simple conclusion that a symbol actually saying 'Certified Organic' will be helpful for shoppers and for improving consumer understanding of a symbol's meaning.

Around 30% of consumers claim to have seen at least one of the nine Australian certification symbols on food packaging. Among regular organic food buyers (i.e. those who buy at least once a month), 50% recognise at least one of the symbols.

By far, the most widely known organic symbol is the one used by the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture (NASAA). This was recognised by 21% of consumers and 36% of regular organic food buyers. This was followed by the National Certifying Mark for Australian Organic Goods, recognised by 11% of consumers and 19% of regular organic food buyers; and, the BFA/ACO and AUS-QUAL symbols, recognised by 8%, 7% of consumers and 15%, 11% of regular organic food buyers, respectively.

Beyond that, even among regular organic food buyers, recognition of the remaining five symbols was very low, ranging between only 4% and 7%.

Another very interesting result of the survey was that 72% of organic consumers said they would prefer to have one, new certification symbol used by all organisations, compared with only 14% who prefer to continue with different certification symbols.

Most of those preferring a unique organic symbol in Australia based their preference on the fact that organic certified products would be easier to recognise; that it would help to identify and to remember the meaning of the symbol and that consumers would find it less confusing.

Some also saw a single organic symbol as having a clearer and stronger meaning and providing confirmation of uniformity in certification procedures by certification organisations.

The OFA has started the process of consulting industry on the need for a new symbol when the new Australian Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Products is published. No firm date has been set as yet, but it is anticipated that the Standard will be published in mid 2009.

Despite having the best known symbol, NASAA recognises the benefits that one organic symbol would have for the organic industry as well as for consumers. NASAA has stated that it strongly supports the adoption of one organic symbol, which could be used alongside the certifiers' own labels.

The survey also revealed that 61% of Australian consumers buy at least some organic products.

A previous survey, conducted in 2003 by the University of Central Queensland, showed that 43% of consumers purchased organic products. This is a 50% increase in organic consumers in five years and confirms other data that 'organic' is a fast growing food category.

The Australian organic industry is emerging from a small niche to a significant part of the Australian food industry. A recent report showed that it is worth over AUS$600 million. By factoring in support industries, such as the compost industry, that is worth over $400 million, the organic industry is worth over a billion dollars to the Australian economy. ■

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The full survey can be found at the OFA website www.ofa.org.au

news shorts…

QAI + [STAR-K] = Organic Kosher

Quality Assurance International (QAI) and STAR-K Certification recently announced a new joint kosher and organic auditing programme, effective 1 January 2009. In the joint auditing programme the auditing process for both certifications is streamlined and certification costs are in general reduced. ■

Source: QAI

For more information please see www.qai-inc.com/pdfs/PR_01082009.pdf

New CEO at ACT

The Organic Agriculture Certification Thailand (ACT) has been considering the rapid changes that affect organic operators in the world, and has adjusted their structural management as a consequence. One of these changes has been the appointment of Ms. Panjaporn Sitbunloam as CEO. She has been the contact person for ACT since January 2009. ■

Source: letter from ACT, January 2009)

Choosing an Australian certifier just got easier

TM Organics, a business focusing on training, consulting and publishing, has completed a research project with funding from the Australian Government delivered via the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC).

In 2006-2008, TM Organics delivered the largest ever Australian organic training programme for farmers converting to organic production. Consisting of 32 hours of group mentored training and eight hours of one-to-one consulting, the programme worked with 130 participants from three states in a wide range of industries (beef, sheep, cereals, vegetables, orchards, honey, nurseries, viticulture etc.). TM Organics also continues to deliver shorter courses on conversion to organic status, and maintains other consulting clients that are in every stage of conversion to organic production, but were not part of the larger training programme. From the exposure to many converting operators, TM Organics realised that anxiety over choice of a certifier is one of the many non-production barriers to conversion.

Certifiers tend to price their services in a similar way to mobile phone companies. Their contracts are written in such a way that they are very difficult to compare. One offers a better deal on local calls, another on long distance calls, another makes special arrangements for frequently called numbers, some do not provide a service to remote areas, and so on. Direct comparison is difficult.

Through its work TM Organics became aware of several neighbouring certified growers, and in some cases brothers, certified by different agencies. Each claimed that their service was better and cheaper.

The RIRDC funded project was designed to provide accurate and up-to-date data to allow growers to make comparisons relevant to their particular circumstances and the services they need.

The results of the project are published on the website www.certifier-choice.com.au. The website lists the services available and relative costs from each of the eight organisations undertaking organic certification in Australia. An interactive decision calculator is also provided, whereby growers nominate their income range in one of three categories and the services required such as the US National Organic Program (NOP) or the Japanese Agricultural Standard (JAS). The calculator then suggests the possible certifiers that can provide the service and the fee for each provider.

As well as assisting new entrants to the industry, the website will be used by already certified operators wishing to evaluate their current arrangements.

TM Organics will maintain the data on the website. However, TM Organics makes it clear that not all operators are expected to select their certifier based upon the cost of the service alone. For some growers, the preference of their markets, their allegiance to a historical provider and to other policies and activities of the CB will also be a factor in their decision-making. ■

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news shorts…

CANADA BELIEVES EQUIVALENCE IS ON TRACK

Through a communication with the Organic Trade Association (OTA), the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) in its recent newsletter announced that the Canadian Government is negotiating equivalency with the US and EU to determine whether the Canadian system may be deemed equivalent. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is reportedly optimistic that equivalency with the US can be reached before Canada's regulations are launched on 30 June 2009. ■

Source: WSDA

*For more information please see www.agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Organic/docs/QR_January_09_*

Certification experiences in East Africa

'Certification bodies should limit their requirements to what is really demanded.'

EPOPA stakeholder

The Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa (EPOPA), a development programme sponsored by Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) came to an end in 2008. The purpose of the programme, which started in 2002 and operated in Uganda, Tanzania and briefly in Zambia, was to improve the livelihoods of rural communities through exports of organic certified products; i.e. 'development through trade'.

Thirty-five companies from the three countries involved in the programme were part of EPOPA and had their products certified as organic. All projects had a group of farmers certified under a group certification scheme with an Internal Control System (ICS). Three international certification bodies (CBs) and two local emerging CBs were involved in the process of certification and/or inspection. The two local CBs, UgoCert and Tancert, received support and training from the EPOPA programme and are now both internationally accredited by IOAS against ISO 65 and IFOAM accreditation, and are able to work independently; they also conduct inspections for several international CBs.

The report

A report, 'Experiences with Certification in EPOPA' summarising EPOPA's experience in certification has been published. It explains, using vivid examples, some of the typical situations related to certification that occurred during EPOPA's life. It also contains interesting facts on the certification procedure by both local and international CBs and about the learning process of processors and farmers on certification procedures that they had to go through in order to become clients of these CBs.

The report was written to support operators in the process of getting certification, and to assist certifiers learning how to improve their work. For example, one of EPOPA's findings was that, generally speaking, CBs should improve the quality of information they give to the operators as well as their communication. The report also gives specific recommendations for exporters and CBs.

Requirements for exports

The report suggests that certification bodies should limit their requirements to what is really demanded in the standards and related documents, and not adopt an unnecessarily strict interpretation of standards. The international certification bodies want to guarantee market access for the products certified and a smooth process with import authorities. Consequently,

CBs should improve the quality of information they give to the operators. ■

news shorts…

India plans to be Japanese equal

The price of products exported to Japan from India are significantly higher as the cost of certification by Japanese certification bodies (CBs) is far more than by Indian CBs. The Agricultural and Processed Food Export Development Authority (APEDA) of India is planning to ask the Japanese Government to accord equal status to the Indian CBs. A final proposal is projected to be submitted within a few months to the Japanese authorities. India already has equivalence of standards and certification with the EU and recognition of accreditation by the US. Currently 17 CBs are accredited by APEDA in India. ■

Source: India Times

For more information please see http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/Economy/Foreign_Trade/Apeda_to_ask_Japan_to_give_equal_status_to_local_certification_agencies/rssarticleshow/3991215.cms

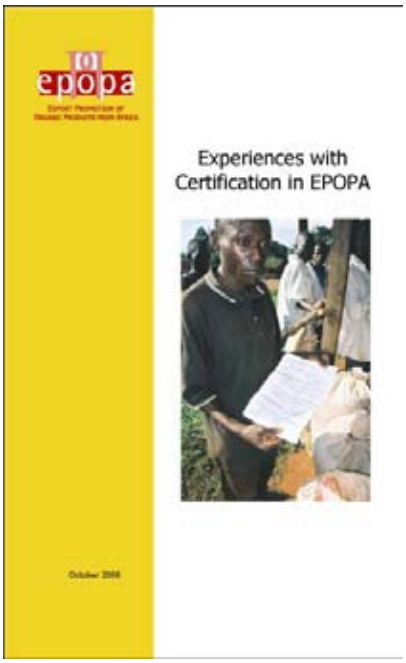
the interpretation of the standards may be particularly strict, and sometimes even stricter than when the same standard is applied in the area where the standard was created (e.g. inside the European Union). The report also covers the group certification system with interviews and a reflection on various points of view.

Certification costs and mutual understanding

The cost aspect of certification, as seen by the operator, is very high during conversion because they cannot get a higher price for their products. Once the product is certified and sales are good and volumes high, the cost of certification is a cost among others, and not such a big issue, according to the interviewed exporters.

Both the costs and the understanding of the certification process usually run smoother after a few years, but the beginning can be difficult for processors due to high costs and a poor or limited understanding of the CBs' and certification programme/s' requirements. At the same time CBs may also experience difficulties at the beginning with problems like getting paid, and get frustrated with the impression that operators are not taking them seriously enough.

To reach the 'smooth level' as soon as possible it is important that provisions from the CB to the operators are expressed in a simple and clear manner; but at the same time the operator has to be well informed of anything they may need to know. It is also important that obligations for both the operator and the CB are clearly stated in a written contract; and that the



Front cover of the EPOPA report

inspector, the only face that the operator usually sees from the certification process, is well informed so that he/she can transfer the information.

The report concludes, 'Cooperation, or competition, between certification bodies can support the development of smoother and more functional practices and procedures, but competition can also lead to the certification body with the lowest requirements and interpretation of standards winning the competition. Therefore, actors outside the certification profession, e.g., farmers' organisations, consultants, or authorities are more likely to be the ones initiating any changes in the system.' ■

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The full report can be downloaded from the EPOPA web page: www.epopa.info

It is important that provisions from the CB to the operators are expressed in a simple and clear manner.

Aiming to be the world's organic trade hub

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates has very little arable land and none or very little of their own produce is actually exported. So how can the country be a trade hub?

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has recently updated their Organic Regulation, entitled 'Regulations of Production, Processing, Manufacturing & Marketing of Organic Products United Arab Emirates'. Based on the EU Regulation, the UAE Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries explains the purpose of these regulations is to assist the UAE to enter the category of countries producing and exporting organic products to other countries. Currently, the UAE imports, processes and exports large quantities of non-organic products; and the Regulation is intended to help the UAE be the trade hub for organic as well as other goods.

Saudi Arabia is also developing an organic regulation, which has undergone several revisions and will now soon be published. Like the UAE, the regulation is based on the EU Regulation, but also includes regulations on water management as water is a critical issue in the region.

Saudi Arabia and UAE have a strong organic sector when compared to the other Gulf States, such as Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar. 'Organic is a trend in Saudi Arabia' says Tobias Fischer from BCS ÖKO-GARANTIE, a certification body in Germany. 'The Minister of Agriculture has an organic certified farm and the local population seems to be well aware of the fact that organic is good for your health. Organic certification is definitely increasing in the region', says Tobias Fischer.

The Gulf region has a potential to be a main supplier of organic dates. Currently, about 30% of the world's dates are produced in the region. Saudi Arabia is the largest producer of dates with 15% of the world's production.

Certifiers present

International certification bodies have no or very little activity in the Gulf region. According to The Organic Certification Directory 2008, the region has only one International certifier, BCS Saudi Arabia, present with an office. There are no local certification bodies in Saudi Arabia or the UAE.

Certification bodies relevant to the region:

BCS ÖKO-GARANTIE: has a regional branch office in Saudi Arabia and is the certification body with greatest activity in the Gulf region. They have around 40 companies certified ranging from 2 to 100ha in size. BCS cooperates with GTZ (German development cooperation agency) to certify a number of organic farms in Saudi Arabia. They certify products such as dates, vegetables, fruits and citrus.

CERES: very little or no activity.

Center for Organic Agriculture in Egypt (COAE): has around 20 clients in Saudi Arabia, two clients in UAE, and just starting up in Kuwait.

Ecocert: their Romanian office is in charge of all Ecocert activities in the region. It has ten clients in Saudi Arabia, six clients in UAE and one client in Kuwait. Ecocert has no physical offices but is planning to open an office in Saudi Arabia.

ICEA: certifying one farm and has initiated talks on certifying a new organic supermarket. ■

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The Ministry of Agriculture in UAE presented this logo for organic during the Middle East Natural and Organic Products Expo in November 2008.

The Regulation is intended to help the UAE be the trade hub for organic as well as other goods. ■

AquaGAP by IMO

On 22 January 2009, the Institute for Marketecology (IMO) announced that quality farming, according to Good Aquaculture Practices (AquaGAP), can now be used to certify all species raised in aquaculture systems worldwide. After many years of consultation with stakeholders a number of farms and processors are already under assessment.

The AquaGAP assures in its system:

- Transparency of origin.
- Quality and food safety at each stage of production.
- Good aquaculture farming to maintain or improve the health of surrounding ecosystems.
- Principles of corporate social responsibility and commitment towards local communities.
- Animal welfare.

Some of the specific requirements in the AquaGAP are listed below:

- Complete conversion within the first three years of certification.
- Conversion must be completed to only source quality feed containing fishmeal and fish-oil from identified sustainable sources.
- Quality larvae/fry from controlled hatcheries.

The AquaGAP standard is open for public consultation until 28 February 2009 and feedback will be listed on the AquaGAP website (www.aquagap.net). To participate in the consultation comments can be sent to publicconsultation@aquagap.net. ■

Source: IMO

For more information please see www.aquagap.net/Docs/IMO%20press%20release%20AquaGAP%2021%2001%202009_en.pdf

AquaGAP
QUALITY FARMING
CERTIFIED BY IMO

WSU identifies Washington's organic producers

The Washington State University (WSU) recently published the result of its survey on certified organic producers in Washington State. The survey, conducted between October and December 2007, included 670 producers are certified by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) and 14 by Oregon Tilth. After excluding ineligible replies the response rate was 56%, or 356 respondents involved in the project.

The survey showed that Washington state's certified agriculture producers are involved in organic farming mainly for economic reasons. However, the majority (74%) feel their operation contributes more to environmental and social sustainability goals than to economic goals. In contradiction, reasons to farm organically included factors such as organic price premium, consumer demand and economic viability ranked highest.

Slightly more than half of the respondents said they had converted from conventional to organic methods, while 41% indicated that they have always farmed organically. On average, respondents had 111 acres devoted to certified production, 23 acres in conversion, 93 acres organically-managed but not certified and 228 acres conventional.

In 2007, 69.7% of the respondents reported gross farming receipts, i.e. organic and conventional, of US$250,000 or more. When asked for the total farm sales derived from sales of certified organic products, 68.2% of the respondents reported sales were 51% or more. Considering this and other reasons, almost 95% of the respondents said they intend to maintain organic certification for the next five years at least.

Of those who said otherwise, the most often cited reason for dropping certification was that it is not necessary to retain their customer base. Factors like high costs of organic inputs, high labour costs, labour shortages and variable or low crop yields are among the top challenges to successful organic farming. ■

Source: Washington State University

Survey details and additional results can be found at http://crs.wsu.edu/facstaff/goldberger/organicsurvey/index.html.

For more information please see http://cahnrsnews.wsu.edu/reportertools/news/2008/organic-survey-2008-11.html

Almost 95% of the respondents said they intend to maintain organic certification for the next five years. ■

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SWEDISH NATIONAL ACCREDITOR DECIDES ON GROUP CERTIFICATION INSPECTION

For the last few years, the Swedish standards body, KRAV, has allowed group certification of restaurants with an internal control system. While the KRAV standards do not stipulate an inspection frequency of individual group members, the certification bodies certifying to KRAV's standards do include in their certification requirements a request for 10% reinspection.

However, Swedac, the national Swedish accreditation body, has now forced KRAV to include the inspection frequency in its standards. The proportion inspected has also been increased from a yearly 10% to at least 20% of all units in the group to be inspected within the first 12 months. It also requires that within a period of eight years all the restaurants in the group are externally inspected. ■

RSPO's flexi certification system

The Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is now issuing certificates for palm oil produce under its system. The RSPO system accommodates different claims, offering a broader than normal definition of a compliant certificate. In one of the four models (below), RSPO certificates may be bought by manufacturers just to show support to the system but not necessarily use palm oil produced within the system. These certificates are also tradable. The four certification models are:

Identity preserved: This model assures that the RSPO certified palm oil and its derivatives delivered to the end user are uniquely identifiable to the mill and its supply base and is kept physically isolated from all other oil palm sources throughout the supply chain with 'Contains only RSPO Certified Sustainable Palm Oil' claim.

Segregation: This model also assures that RSPO certified palm oil and its derivatives delivered to the end user come only from RSPO certified sources. It permits the mixing of RSPO certified palm oil from a variety of sources with 'Contains only RSPO Certified Sustainable Palm Oil' claim.

Mass balance: The model monitors the trade of RSPO certified palm oil and its derivatives throughout the entire supply chain. It allows mixing of RSPO and non-RSPO certified palm oil at any stage in the supply chain provided that overall company quantities are controlled or volumes of RSPO certified product shipped, will never exceed volumes received by the end user. The permitted claim is 'Supports the production of RSPO Certified Sustainable Palm Oil'.

Book and claim: This model provides tradable certificates for RSPO certified palm oil to the palm oil supply base. The supply base may then offer these certificates on a web based transaction system to end users who choose to support specific volumes of RSPO certified palm oil and/or their derivatives with 'Supports the production of RSPO Certified Sustainable Palm Oil' claim.

In models one and two the user pays a premium to the supply base. Models three and four are constructed for end-users to show support to the mills operating sustainable practices by purchasing sustainable palm oil certificates from them currently traded at US$40 – US$50 each, representing one tonne of oil each. The end-users then source its palm oil through their normal supply chain which does not necessarily contain RSPO certified oil. End-users can claim to support sustainable palm oil production to a percentage corresponding to certificates held used in the product but cannot claim their products actually contain RSPO certified oil.

If all the mills that entered the programme eventually received certification, a total of 1.5m tonnes of sustainable palm oil could be available in 2009. In November 2008, the first shipment of around 500 tonnes of RSPO sustainable palm oil arrived in the United Kingdom from Malaysia. ■

Source: RSPO

news shorts…

USDA 'Naturally Raised' standard

On 16 January 2009, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced publication of a voluntary standard for naturally raised livestock and meat marketing claims. The standard, which will be published as a notice in the Federal Register, is titled 'United States Standards for Livestock and Meat Marketing Claims, Naturally Raised Claims for Livestock and the Meat and Meat Products Derived from such Livestock'. USDA analysed over 44,000 comments from stakeholders in the development of this standard.

To use a naturally raised marketing claim on products the livestock involved must have been raised entirely without growth promotors, antibiotics (except ionophores used as coccidiostats for parasites control) and have never been fed animal by-products. The new standard will establish the minimum requirements for producers who opt to operate a USDA-verified programme involving a naturally-raised claim.

Copies of the standard and more information are available by accessing the AMS Web site at: www.ams.usda.gov/SAT. ■

Source: AMS

For more information please see www.ams.usda.gov/

Biogarantie: terminus?

Will the new compulsory EU logo mean the end of Biogarantie?

For over twenty years, the Biogarantie standards and seal has ensured the visibility of organic labelling in Belgium and the strict compliance with its specifications. But with the arrival of the new EU Regulation, some people have seriously raised the question of its usefulness. Blaise Hommelen, Director of Certisys, is one of those in favour of keeping a tool that has proved its value.

Mr Hommelen argues the history of Biogarantie and the fundamental role it has played for the development of organic farming and consumption in Belgium is the reason it should be kept. The Biogarantie platform arose from an agreement achieved in the 1980s by different organic organisations in Belgium each using their own seal. They decided to use common standards and a common label; the Biogarantie label, which became an easily identifiable organic mark for consumers. In addition, Biogarantie has acted as an interlocutor with the Government and sector representatives, and has coordinated programmes for the development of organic production, etc.

For Mr Hommelen, the Biogarantie standards and seal will always have a place in the Belgian market. For example, when in the past the EU Regulation did not cover livestock production, Biogarantie had standards for livestock. Even now, though the EU Regulation scope is covering more and more aspects of organic production, Biogarantie can be more precise or stricter on certain issues. For example, Biogarantie has prohibited the use of nitrite salts in meat, which is considered an important issue by the Belgian organic sector.

However, some operators, especially those in the north of the country, consider that when the new EU logo is compulsory they will not need to use the Biogarantie seal any more, believing that the new logo will substitute organic recognition from consumers' point of view. One advantage of this for operators will be that use of the EU logo is free. To use the Biogarantie seal they have to pay a fee that covers the development of the programme and the standards as well as the promotion of the seal.

Leaving everything in the hands of the EU institutions, though, does have disadvantages as well. It will mean that the 'bio society' will lose its capacity to act independently as a civil power. For example, it will no longer be able to define certain standards more specifically, as in the case of nitrites mentioned above, as well as regulations on certain packing materials, etc. It will also lose the capacity to rapidly develop new standards for

Blaise Hommelen, Director of Certisys, is one of those in favour of keeping a tool that has proved its value.

new fields when needed, as is now the case regarding standards for catering, which are not covered by the EU Regulation.

A further consideration is that if the Biogarantie seal and standards disappear, the Ecogarantie standards for non-food products, such as cosmetic, washing agents and sea salt would also be affected, since both programmes are managed by the same organisation, Bioforum.

It is also important to keep the tools Biogarantie and Ecogarantie because of their role, which has played so well for many years, as a common platform to bring together all the different sector players such as operators, certification bodies and consumers. If these tools were to disappear, a current discussion table for the organic sector, working both at the Beligum and European level, would be lost. ■

Summarised by Nuria Alonso
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Source: interview with Blaise Hommelen published in BioInfo*, issue 84, November 2008*

Belgium's organic sector umbrella

Bioforum is a Belgian umbrella, non-profit organisation that manages the two registered trademarks Ecogarantie and Biogarantie. The Biogarantie label only applies to products produced from agricultural raw materials that are covered by the EU Regulation, plus pet food, catering and textiles. The Ecogarantie label can be used for products developed using both agricultural and non-agricultural, and currently covers cosmetics, cleaning products, sea salt and sales outlets.

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