



## Now there's an opportunity to create a clearer path.

There are now over 100 countries in the world exporting certified organic products. Organic trade is expanding at the rate of 15-20% per year. Over 400 public and private certification bodies now operate in the global organic marketplace. The many governmental and private standards and technical regulations governing organic production and certification

have placed a burden on producers and traders and created barriers to trade on many levels. There is a need for tools to be in place to support equivalency and harmonization in global organic trade. These tools are now available. With cooperation within and among government and private sectors we can streamline trade and reduce trade barriers.

## The ITF and its work on harmonization and equivalence

The organic market is confronted with hundreds of private sector standards and governmental regulations, two international standards for organic agriculture (Codex Alimentarius and IFOAM) and a host of conformity assessment and accreditation systems. Mutual recognition and equivalency among the systems is extremely limited. The multitude of certification requirements and regulations are considered to be a major obstacle for continuous and rapid development of the organic sector, especially for producers in developing countries.

IFOAM, FAO and UNCTAD decided to join forces to search for solutions to this problem. Together they organized the Conference on International Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture, in Nuremberg, Germany in February 2002. One of the key recommendations of the Conference was that a multi-stakeholder task force should be established in order to produce practical proposals and solutions.

Following up on this proposal, IFOAM, FAO and UNCTAD formed the International Task Force on Harmonization (ITF) in 2003. The Task Force consists of representatives of governments, intergovernmental agencies, and key stakeholders from the private sector. The ITF serves as an open-ended platform for dialog between private and public institutions involved in trade and regulatory activities in the organic agriculture sector. The objective is to facilitate international organic trade and access of developing countries to international organic markets.

Over the last five years the International Task Force has worked together to complete a

series of studies and proposals for its objective of helping to reduce organic trade barriers and to communicate these results to as many stakeholders as possible. Two main tools have been developed to streamline acceptance of products that are traded internationally. One tool is for recognizing organic certification bodies and the other is for determining the equivalency of production and processing standards.



The first tool, International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies (IROCB), is an international norm based on ISO65, but with language and additional requirements that make it suitable for the organic sector. The IROCB is offered to governments and private accreditation bodies as a means for accepting certification of products outside of their own system. IROCB can be used as an international reference point and "equivalence" benchmark for the requirements for certification of the product. If the product is certified to be compliant with or equivalent to production and processing standards by a certification body that meets the IROCB, then the product can be approved for import.

The second tool, the EquiTool is a set of guidelines, which include criteria that can be applied for deciding when a standard applicable in one region of the world is equivalent to a standard applicable in another region. This tool provides steps to ensure fairness, transparency and uniformity in developing equivalence agreements.

Now that these tools are available to navigate the maze of the Global Organic Marketplace, are you ready to choose the clearer path?

[www.unctad.org/trade\\_env/itf-organic](http://www.unctad.org/trade_env/itf-organic)



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on Trade and Development



International Federation  
of Organic Agriculture  
Movements



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

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## It can be a frustrating journey through all the standards and regulations of the global organic marketplace.



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## The world is embracing organic trade

- Organic farming has been shown to increase food production by up to 300% on individual farms in developing countries.
- Organic systems may be more stable and resilient in response to climate disruption based on comparisons with their conventional counterparts under stress conditions such as severe drought and flooding.
- Organic agriculture is practiced in almost all countries of the world.
- In 2006, 30.4 million hectares were managed organically by more than 700,000 farms.
- On a global level, the organic land area increased by almost 1.8 million hectares between 2005 and 2006.
- Global demand for organic products remains robust, with sales increasing by over five billion US dollars a year.
- International sales were 38.6 billion US dollars in 2006, doubling that of 2000.
- The global organic food industry has been experiencing acute supply shortages since 2005. Exceptionally high growth rates have led supply to tighten in almost every sector of the organic food industry: fruits, vegetables, beverages, cereals, grains, seeds, herbs and spices.



### Organic farmers

*Charles Kimani, Kenya*

"I could sell my organic products in more countries without having to get different certifications for each of those countries. If I have more market opportunity, I can truly support my family and feel more secure in life."

### Organic traders

*Norihisa Senda, Japan*

"Having one tool that can be used as an equivalency standard for many different markets would greatly simplify the process and lower my costs significantly in both sourcing and selling organic ingredients and products."

### Organic certifiers

*Felicia Echeverria, Costa Rica*

"We can lower costs and increase direct client services instead of spending time and money to get multiple accreditations for various international markets."

### Governments: exporting countries

*Ananto Seta, Indonesia*

"These tools would improve the access of my country's organic agricultural products to the world market, bringing us the opportunity for many new trading partners. It would reduce costs and provide economic opportunities for our citizens."

## Harmonization and equivalence can help connect everyone involved in organic trade.

Easing the barriers that now exist in the global organic marketplace is beneficial to everyone. From the farmer, who will have greater access to world markets and the opportunity to provide more easily for his family, to the trader who longs for a simpler way to source and sell

his organic products. Streamlining the process for both importing and exporting governments and organic certifiers means increased efficiency and lower costs. Greater selection becomes available for both the retailer and the consumer.

### Governments: importing countries

*Klaus Budde, Germany*

"This would streamline our process and allow us to increase our efficiency in regulating organic imports. It would bring a greater availability of products and improve our service to our constituents."

### Intergovernmental organizations

*Asad Naqvi, Switzerland*

"By increasing the worldwide organic marketplace, we improve the environment and contribute to alleviating poverty. These tools contribute to sustainable development"

### Organic retailers

*Pam Mehnert, USA*

"I am able to provide a far greater selection of products for my customers. And in the process, I can support a greater number of farmers in developing countries around the world who have joined the organic marketplace."

### Organic consumers

*Marla Rose, USA*

"More availability and choices in organic products make it easier for me to provide my family with meals that have been grown without the use of dangerous pesticides. Doing so makes me feel like a better mom, and I know that at the same time, I am helping to support another family who has made the commitment to grow food sustainably."

## How easing trade barriers improves the life of my family – a case study

We are the Kobbekaduwa family, and for many generations we have grown tea on our 3 hectares of land in the central mountains of Sri Lanka. Each day during tea harvest season, I go with my daughters into our mountainside tea garden where we pick as much as 15 kilograms of tea leaves a day. At the end of the day, we carry our baskets of tea leaves to our organic cooperative's processing facility.

Joining our local organic cooperative has given us the opportunity to begin to improve our income. The demand for organic tea is growing and they are able to

get good prices for our product. But for now, a large percentage of the cooperative's income must go to meet the high cost of certification in the international markets. All the different requirements and certification demands of the markets in the importing countries where our products are sold leave little profit for the growers and do not support the growth of our rural economy.

We need a clear path that allows us to maintain and grow our markets keeping more of our income to support our local economy and raise the standard of living of the families in our community.

