



SPECIFIC QUALITY AND VOLUNTARY STANDARDS

Throughout the world, social expectations and consumer demand are leading to the development of agricultural and food products of **specific quality**, such as those produced by organic farming, fair trade, or having a geographical indication. This context represents **an opportunity in terms of rural development and food security, by providing producers with increased income, contributing to the preservation of local resources or encouraging social equity. This is particularly the case when a voluntary standard guarantees the sustainability of production practices through credible monitoring, and when the consumer is informed by labelling.** However, the implementation of specific quality initiatives requires a certain level of capacity at both institutional and production sectors, it is therefore important to realize careful benefit-cost evaluation. In addition, it is important to strengthen the capacity of small-scale producers to meet the standard requirements if they need. From a consumer point of view, a credible information and guarantees system must be established to enable consumers to make informed choices so to contribute to sustainable production and consumption systems. **It is therefore vital to have mechanisms that ensure the effectiveness of voluntary standard systems from a public goods point of view.**

Generic vs specific quality



➤ **Generic (or basic) quality** corresponds to the minimal requirements to be respected in order to market a product, in terms of consumer protection and respect for relevant market regulation.

➤ **Specific quality** corresponds to the combination of features that – once requirements in terms of generic quality have been met – allow a product to create added value and be differentiated on the market on the basis of a voluntary approach by the economic stakeholders.

Examples of public goods affected by food voluntary standards:

- › food security;
- › protection of consumers and their health;
- › environment;
- › conservation of heritage and culture;
- › local development;
- › social equity etc.

SPECIFIC QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY





What are FAO's messages?

- Inasmuch as voluntary standards have an impact on public goods, public stakeholders have a role to play in the standards functioning in order to assure preservation of public goods concerned.

- There are two approaches here:
- › implementation of *voluntary public standards* by governments as tools to support promising processes and encourage good practices;
 - › interaction of public stakeholders with the economic stakeholders or civil society.



EXAMPLE OF A PUBLIC VOLUNTARY STANDARD

The Argentinean food label (*Sello alimento Argentino, una elección natural*) is a public voluntary standard developed in the context of a national food differentiation strategy promoted by the country's Ministry of Agriculture. The label was established legally by Resolution 392/05 and is intended to facilitate identification of Argentinean food products and their specific features, thus allowing a better placement on the national and international markets. Apart from presenting specific features, the product must, where applicable, respect standards connected with good agricultural practices, good processing practices and HACCP.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS THAT PUBLIC STAKEHOLDERS CAN TAKE TO ASSURE PRESERVATION OF PUBLIC GOODS, ACCORDING TO THE STANDARD FUNCTION

STANDARD SETTING

E.g. participation in round table meetings where public stakeholders can influence the content of voluntary standards

ADOPTION

E.g. World Banana Forum, animated by FAO, allows definition of mechanisms to improve sustainability of banana production, including adoption of sustainable voluntary standards

ENFORCEMENT

E.g. regulations with an impact on the sector in question

CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT

E.g. public control built into the accreditation system

IMPLEMENTATION

E.g. public support and incentives that are conditioned by sustainability aspects

How does FAO build capacities in this connection?

- For some decades now, FAO has been developing knowledge and providing technical support to member States in response to requests for various specific quality and voluntary standard processes.

Currently, FAO is elaborating a document on the role of public stakeholders in defining and implementing of national approaches to use food voluntary standards to support public goals.

