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WORLD BANANA FORUM GOOD PRACTICES COLLECTION

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION OF BANANAS

Due to the requirements of organic production in terms of soil quality, water management, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation, the organic banana supply is naturally limited. However, demand and production have been growing in recent years, resulting in an 18% increase of the organic banana-cultivated area between 2008 and 2015.

In 2013, the International Federation for Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) estimated that organic banana production represented 850 000 metric tons, almost 1% of the global banana production area. In 2015, the countries that produced most organic bananas were the Dominican Republic (12 000 ha), Ecuador (11 500 ha), the Philippines (6 500 ha), Peru (5 500 ha) and Costa Rica (4 500 ha). Organic banana sales continue to grow worldwide, representing an opportunity for certified producers. Certifying bananas as organic involves assuring compliance with an accredited set of standards, as described below.

- **Certification** is the procedure by which an independent certification body provides written or equivalent assurance that a process or product conforms to the requirements of a specific standard.
- The certification body is a third party that has no interest in the economic relationship between the supplier and buyer.
- The certification process is based on a range of inspection activities which may include continuous on-line inspection, auditing of quality assurance systems and examination of processes and/or finished products.
- **Accreditation** is the procedure by which an authoritative body evaluates and gives formal recognition that a certification programme is in accordance with the standards of the authoritative body.

Organic standards can be developed by:

- Private organizations. The first voluntary organic certification was developed in 1946 by the Soil Association in the United Kingdom. Private associations in the United States started to certify organic producers in the 1970s. In 2014, there were more than 120 private organic standards. Private standards, whether local or international, are voluntary and include participatory guarantee systems. Recognized certifying bodies in the banana sector include BCS, Control Union, Ecocert, Bureau Veritas, SGS, among others.
- Governments. In 2014, 110 countries had an organic regulation: 69 fully implemented; 19 finalized regulations but not yet fully implemented and 12 countries in the process of drafting legislation. Every organic product that is produced or imported in these countries must comply with the binding national organic standard to be labelled as such. National organic standards are mostly based on the [Codex Alimentarius and IFOAM guidelines](#) as minimum standards.

National organic standards in importing countries

Europe, North America and Japan represent 99% of organic banana imports. To sell organic bananas in the main importing countries, producers must comply with local organic standards:

➤ **European Union:** The European organic standard defines the principles and aims of organic production and the rules for organic labelled products.



➤ **United States:** Following the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990, the United States National Organic Program (NOP) was created in 2000.

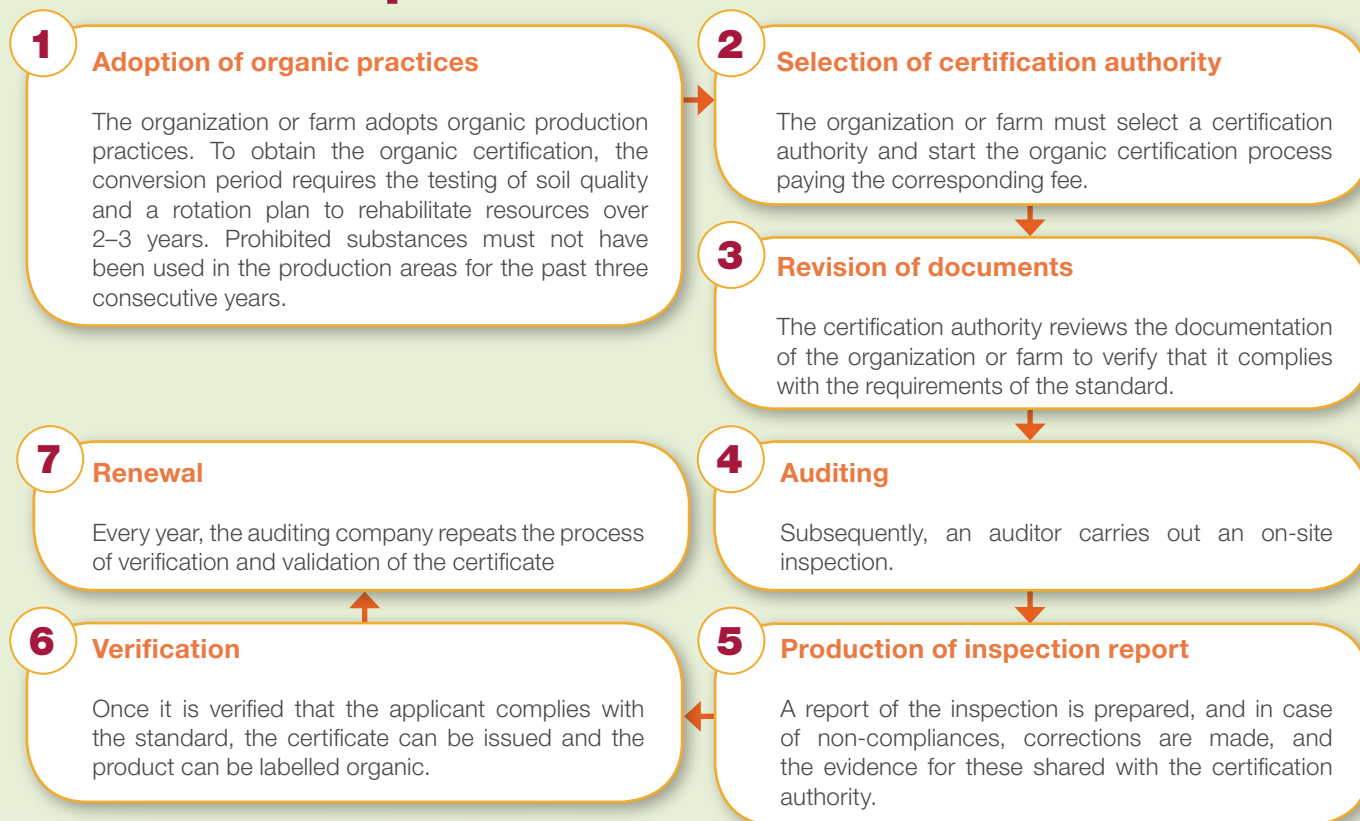


➤ **Japan:** The Japanese Agricultural Standard (JAS) was created in 2001.



There are specific **equivalence agreements** on organic production standards among certain countries, allowing the trading of products even when the applied standard does not conform to another country's certifying body. For example, the United States have signed such agreements with Canada, the European Union, Japan, and Taiwan. This allows a product that was produced and certified organic in the United States to be marketed in Japan with the same label, avoiding the costs of applying for another certificate.

Certification process



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The organic label on the product carries the name of the certification body and the standards with which it complies. In the case of a conventional banana plantation, to be able to market bananas with the organic label the plantation must comply with **a three-year transition period:**

- ➡ During the first 12 months in the period of conversion, the product cannot be marketed as an organic product.
- ➡ After 12 months, it can be indicated on the label of the product that it has been produced under a conversion to organic production process. However, most importing markets don't recognize this practice.
- ➡ From the inspection in the fourth year, a certificate will be issued certifying the organic production and the product can be marketed as such.

Benefits and challenges of organic certification:

Benefits for the farm and the producer:

- ✓ Improving soil condition.
- ✓ Protection of natural resources.
- ✓ Reduction of water source pollution and carbon footprint (although transportation is still the most central issue).
- ✓ Protection of biodiversity (agrobiodiversity and wild) and animal welfare.
- ✓ Protection of human health.
- ✓ Improved traceability.
- ✓ Increased access to local, regional and international markets.
- ✓ Support to local economies and potential for rural development.
- ✓ Access additional funding and technical assistance programs.
- ✓ Trade facilitation, allowing farmers to sell, label, and present products as organic.
- ✓ Improved consumer recognition.
- ✓ Group certification opens potential for cooperation and rural development.
- ✓ While organic certification does not ensure a minimum price set by the certification program, the market has historically determined greater profitability for organic over non-organic certified bananas.
- ✓ The higher price of organic bananas has also proven to be more stable than the price of conventional bananas.

Challenges:

- ➡ Difficulty in meeting the quality requirements of the standard.
- ➡ Limited range of agricultural inputs to control pests and diseases (especially since Black Sigatoka is in most organic banana producing countries).
- ➡ Certification costs associated with internal monitoring of the production process.
- ➡ Cost and difficulty to convert industrial plantations.
- ➡ Challenge of regional adaptation, and harmonization of standards to build equivalences and cooperation.



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