

Minimum Requirements for Small-scale Farmer Group Certification

IFOAM Guidance Manual for Producer Groups

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MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: these are minimum requirements for the ICS, i.e. in principle they must be implemented for organic certification. In case certain particular requirements can only be implemented gradually it is still up to overall assessment of the organic certifier to assess whether organic certification can be granted

* Minimum requirements with a * shall already be fulfilled at first inspection.

1 Brief Description Structure & Activities

1.1 Overview on farms

Policy: The Internal ICS manual contains some basic description of the organic project.

- *1. An overview on the organic project sites must be given
2. A general overview on the farming system and agricultural practises of participating farmers is needed.

1.2 Overview buying, handling and exports

Policy: The Internal ICS manual contains some basic description of the organic project.

- *1. There has to be a description of all the steps which take place from harvest till final sales of the product to another entity, incl. indication under whose responsibility the product is under at each step.

2 Risk Management

2.1 Basic Risk Assessment

Policy: Risks which might jeopardize the organic product quality at the different levels of farm production, transport and storing, processing and export must be known and taken into account in all internal control procedures.

- *1. An detailed initial risk assessment has to be done once
2. The risk assessment has to identify risks on farm level as well as during buying, processing or (export) transport, as far as the product is under responsibility of the ICS operator.
3. The ICS takes all measures to minimise the identified relevant risk.

2.2 Critical Control Points and Risk Management

3 Internal Organic Standard

3.1 Scope of certification

1. All organic regulations or standards according to which certification is requested need to be listed in the internal standard or the internal ICS manual.

All organic standards are based on the IFOAM Minimum Criteria. Depending on the targeted organic market official organic regulations must be complied with (e.g. EU-Regulation 2092/91, National organic Program NOP US, JAS Japan). Additionally other (private) organic standards may facilitate the market access, or may be requested by the buyer (e.g. Naturland, Soil Association, Bio Suisse, etc.). An overview on the requirements of different organic regulations and private standards is given in annex XX)

3.2 Internal Organic Standard

Policy: The internal organic standard is the reference standard for the internal control.

1. The internal organic standard must include the farm production requirements of the relevant external organic regulations as far as these requirements are important and relevant for the organic activities. It shall also include the necessary production rules to ensure a truly sustainable and organic farming.
2. It must be presented in an adequate form, according to the knowledge of the ICS staff
3. The requirements of the internal standard (and practical implications for farmers) must be communicated clearly to all farmers in local language.
4. The internal organic standard shall to address the following topics:
 - Definition of the production unit plus how to deal with part conversion (i.e. farmers still grow some conventional crops as well)
 - Conversion period
 - Farm production rules for the whole organic production unit (e.g. seeds, fertilisation & sustainable soil management, plant-protection, approved inputs, prevention of drift, livestock husbandry)
 - Harvest and post-harvest procedures

4 Organisation and ICS Personnel

Policy: For each procedure or task of the ICS, at least one person is responsible and that the staff is aware of their responsibilities and qualified for their job.

4.1 Organisational Chart

1. An organisational chart (or similar) of the operator's organisation needs to be available.

4.2 The ICS coordinator (ICS Manager)

*1. There has to be an assigned ICS Coordinator who is in charge to coordinate the internal control system, organise the internal inspections, coordinate between field staff and approval staff, co-ordinate the external inspection and act as the contact person for the inspection body.

4.3 Internal inspector

*1. There has to be a sufficient number of qualified internal inspectors.
*2. The internal inspector must be sufficiently qualified to perform a thorough and objective internal inspection
3. There has to be a CV, a contract (incl. His/her duties) and conflict of interest declaration available for each internal inspector.

4.4 Organic Approval Personnel

1. There has to be a qualified person ("organic approval manager") or certification committee who is assigned to take the internal approval decision.
2. Approval personnel must be qualified and neutral to take objective approval decisions.
3. There has to be a CV, a signed declaration of conflicts of interest, a written contract with list of responsibilities available for all approval personnel.

4.5 Field officer / Field advisor

4.6 Conflicts of interest

Policy: The ICS personnel must not have any conflicts of interest that might hinder the work.

*1. The Internal Inspector is not allowed to inspect his/ her own fields or the fields of his/ her immediate neighbours, friends or family.
2. All possible conflict of interests have to be declared in a written statement and it has to be ensured that farmers where a conflict of interests would arise, are inspected by another inspector.

5 Farm Control and Approval Procedures

5.1 Registration of new farmers

Policy: All farmers that shall be certified need to be formally registered as organic farmer.

- *1. For each farmer the total area under his/her management (incl. conventional fields), the organic crops with area (or number of plants/trees in mixed cropping) and his basic farming methods need to be recorded in a Farm Entrance Form. For each farm the date of last application of prohibited inputs is recorded.
2. A commitment declaration (contract) must be signed between each farmer and the ICS operator in a language understood by the farmer. The contract must contain commitments to fulfil the internal organic standard. The consequences of violation of the contract must be clear (sanction policy). It must also grant permission for internal and external inspectors to inspect farms and farmer records. The contract shall also available in the language of communication with the certifier.
3. An Overview Map (village or community map) must be provided showing where each organic farm is located. In case of farms with annual rotating organic export crops or in case of conventional other crops grown by the organic farmer, an up-to-date map showing at least the fields of each farmer must be available.
4. If the farm data changes considerably, a new form entrance form/basic farm data sheet must be completed, or the data in the farm file updated in update forms or similar.

5.2 Internal Inspections

Policy: Each registered organic farmer is inspected by the internal control once a year by qualified internal inspectors

- *1. There is one documented internal inspection per calendar year.
- *2. The inspection must be carried out in presence of the farmer (or his/her representative) and must include a visit of the whole farm, storage of inputs and harvested products, as well as brief check of post-harvest handling and animal husbandry. The internal inspector verifies if the internal organic standards have been respected and if the conditions of last year's internal inspection have been fulfilled.
- *3. The visit is documented in the Farm Inspection Checklist, which is signed by the internal inspector and acknowledged by the farmer (or his/her representative).
4. In case of severe non-compliances, the results have to be reported immediately to the organic manager and all measures taken according to the internal sanction procedures.

5.3 Yield Estimates

Policy. There has to be a yield estimate for the organic cash crop of each farmer

1. The internal control needs to provide for each farmer yield estimates of the crop to be certified. The estimates need to be available before harvest (or for defined harvest period)

5.4 Internal Approval Procedures

Policy: The ICS operator has defined procedures to approve or sanction farmers

1. All internal farm checklists are screened by the internal approval staff (Organic Approval Manager and/or the Organic Approval Committee, see chapter 6.2) with special focus on critical/difficult cases. The assessment of the internal inspector is checked, the (internal) certification status determined and conditions set (if necessary).

*2. The farmers lists as the summary of the internal control are finalised and approved.

5.5 Non-compliances and sanctions

Policy: In case of non-compliances appropriate corrective or mitigating measures are being taken by the ICS

1. It needs to be defined what happens in case of non compliances, and how the sanction measures are being implemented.

*2. Sanctions have to be documented (list of sanctioned farmers, documentation of identified non-conformities in files).

*3. Farmers that have used prohibited inputs in their organic crop must undergo again the full conversion period (if they remain in the organic project). In such cases it has to be checked whether the farmers have already delivered produce and whether this (now no longer certified) produce has been commingled with other organic produce. If this has been the case, the external certifier needs to be notified immediately and the commingled produce kept separate until further instructions.

5.6 Documentation of the ICS

Policy: The internal control needs to be documented.

1. The following documents must be available for each farmer

- * - Formal commitment of growers to fulfil the internal standard (written contract)
- Farm entrance form (Farm data sheet), incl. last use of prohibited inputs
- Update farm data: update cropping information (areas, crops), use of inputs, harvested quantities,

remark: may be included in internal farm checklist

- Maps (if required for single farmer)

* - Annual Farm Inspection Checklist

- Notes on trainings or advice given to the farmer by field officer

*2. As a summary of the internal control the following lists must be prepared:

- Farmers list with code and name of the farmer, total area, area under organic crop (or no. of plants), date of registration as organic farmer, date of last use of un-allowed products, date of internal inspection, name internal inspector, result internal inspection (separate lists for organic and for conversion farmers)
- (if relevant) list of sanctioned farmers with the reason and the duration of the sanction

6 Product Flow: Buying, Handling, Processing and Export

6.1 Buying Procedures

Policy: The buying procedures need to ensure the integrity of the organic product at the crucial interface farmer – buyer. In principle, the buying from the farmers (until product is consolidated/packed) is under responsibility of the ICS.

The buying procedures need to include the following minimum requirements:

- *1. The Organic status of the delivering farmer is checked
2. The supplied amount harvested is compared with the estimated yield. In case of doubt, the produce is kept apart until clarification by organic ICS Coordinator.
- *3. Deliveries are registered in the buying record and farmer is issued a receipt (indication delivered quantities)
4. All documents have to indicate the organic quality (“organic” or “conversion”).
- *5. Labelling of the bags as organic/conversion (see chapter handling)

6.2 Storage and Handling Procedures

Policy: During all handling of organic produce the organic quality of the product and compliance with respective documentary requirements of the applicable organic standard must be ensured.

Therefore buying procedures need to include the following minimum requirements:

- *1. General Handling Requirements at all stages of product flow:
 - Identification of the product in all steps according to the quality (organic, in transition) during all stages of product flow
 - strict separation according to quality (organic, in conversion, conventional).
 - no prohibited methods (fumigation of containers, irradiation/ionization, etc.)
2. Requirements during storage
 - Organic warehouse (part) must be labelled as “organic”
 - Facility pest management according to standard (see Annex XXX)

6.3 Organic Processing at <name processor>

Policy: During all handling of organic produce the organic quality of the product and compliance with respective documentary requirements must be ensured. Central Processing Units are always subject to full external inspection by the certification body.

*1. Ingredients and Processing aids must be defined

- all agricultural ingredients must be organic
- only allowed non-agricultural ingredients and processing aids

*2. Separation and identification

- Separation and identification according to quality (organic, in transition, conventional) during all stages of product flow
- all processing steps are duly documented

6.4 Organic Exports

6.5 Buying, Handling & Processing Personnel

6.5.1 Buying Personnel

- *1. There are buying officers in charge to ensure correct buying of organic produce from the farmers.
2. Buying officers have to sign a contract with ICS operator with a list of responsibilities

6.5.2 Warehouse Manager

6.5.3 Processing Manager

7 Training

The main objective of training is to inform and train organic growers and project staff in the relevant aspects of organic farming and, especially, make them aware of the contents and implications of the internal regulation for organic agriculture.

7.1 Training of ICS personnel

1. Each internal inspector needs to receive at least one training by a competent person per year.
2. The date of participation and content of the training of all ICS staff needs to be documented in the staff files.

7.2 Training of farmers

Policy: The most important aim of an organic project is to improve the farmer's knowledge and understanding on how to farm organically and that organic farming is much more than simply not using chemicals. Therefore continuous training of farmers is a very important part of an organic project and is in the responsibility of the ICS operator.

1. Each farmer needs to receive at least one initial advisory visit by the extension service or in an organised training.
2. The participation and content of the training needs to be documented.

8 External Inspection and Certification

Generally Once per year;
the external inspection will evaluate the effectiveness of the Internal Control System. The percentage of external control will be determined by the certifier on the base of risk assessment. The external inspector compares his observations with the documents of the internal inspection and evaluates if the Internal Control System, the internal inspections (and farm extension) fulfil the minimum requirements and are sufficient to guarantee that the organic activities of all farmers comply with the external regulations/standards.

Further Reading

- IFOAM Smallholder group Certification – Compilation of Results, March 2003
www.ifoam.org
- IMO/Naturland Manual for Quality Assurance- A Guideline for Internal Control Systems (ICS) in Smallholder Organisations, Jan 2002
- EU Guidance Document Guidance document for the evaluation of the equivalence of organic producer group certification schemes applied in developing countries, 6.11.2003
<http://www.oecd.org/pdf/M00038000/M00038051.pdf>