

**International Federation
of
Organic Agriculture Accreditation
Programme (IFOAM)**

A1 The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)

A1.1 IFOAM was founded in 1972. It is a membership-based organisation the worldwide movement of organic agriculture.

In the year 2007, it represents more than 700 member organisations in over 100 countries around the world and provides a platform for global exchange and cooperation.

A4 Standards and Criteria

A.4.1 International Norms

The IFOAM Accreditation Programme has been developed on the basis of 30 years of experience with inspection and certification in the organic community and takes into consideration the various special circumstances related to certification of organic agriculture, processing, and related areas. In the criteria, reference is made to relevant national and international standards for inspection, certification and accreditation like ISO/ IEC 17011 ,ISO guide 65 and ISO/ IEC 19011.

Internationally accepted norms for quality management as laid down in the ISO 9000 series of standards have also been taken into account.

A4.2 The IFOAM Basic Standards for Organic Agriculture and Processing

The standards used by the applicant certification bodies are reviewed for compliance with the IFOAM Basic Standards for Organic Agriculture and Processing.

These basic standards are in continuous development as organic farming evolves and under the overall management of the IFOAM Norms Management Committee.

A4.6 The IFOAM Accreditation Criteria for Certification Bodies

The criteria against which the operations of certification bodies are assessed are approved by the IFOAM World Board of Directors (WBOD), which is mandated to do so by the General Assembly.

The responsibility for the process of revision is delegated by the WBOD to the IFOAM Criteria Committee made up of a diversity of stakeholders.

The process is consultative and includes two calls for comments from a wide range of stakeholders and authorities, including the applicant and accredited certification bodies.

Any amendments are communicated to the certification bodies, and a set period is allowed for changes to become effective.

B1 Scope of Accreditation

B1.1 IFOAM accreditation is open to applications from certification bodies engaged in the inspection and certification of organic production and/or processing operations. Membership of IFOAM is not a prerequisite.

B1.2 Certification bodies must agree to conform with all applicable standards, structures, and operating procedures as set down in the IFOAM Norms They must provide all required information and must be operational prior to the evaluation visit. For a newly established certification organisation, 'operational' means that at least 10 operators have undergone the inspection and certification process by the time of the evaluation visit (PR0501).

B1.5 The categories of certification included in the accreditation scope are:

- y Crop Production**
- y Livestock including beekeeping**
- y Wild Products**
- y Processing and Handling including fibre processing**
- y Retailing**
- y Input Manufacturing**
- y Aquaculture**
- y Certification Transference**
- y Smallholder Groups**

B1.6 Certification bodies that contract out part of their services may apply for accreditation providing the certification body takes full responsibility for subcontracted work and provided the certification decision itself is not subcontracted.

This is relevant to certification bodies that subcontract their inspection service and those that operate a regional structure.

Where there is uncertainty on which body should apply for accreditation, it is the decision making body that should apply.

B1.7 Accreditation is awarded to a certification body for competence to operate a defined certification programme.

Organisations which operate more than one organic certification programme may apply for accreditation with scope limited to specific programmes.

Section C: The Accreditation Process

The procedures for attaining and maintaining IFOAM Accreditation involves five phases;

- y Application and screening of documentation**
- y Evaluation and assessment of certification body performance**
- y Accreditation**
- y Surveillance**
- y Re-evaluation**

C1 Application and Screening Procedures

C1.1 Following inquiry the IOAS forwards to the certification body an application pack which contains full details of the procedures of application. Potential applicants must assure they have copies of the IFOAM Norms.

C1.2 The applicant returns the completed application form and the required documentation together with the application and assessment fee.

As the required documentation is extensive and translation may be necessary, applicant bodies are allowed four months from initial submission of the application form to provide all the required documents.

C1.3 The documentation is reviewed for completeness. Where documentation is manifestly incomplete the IOAS informs the applicant of the necessary additional documentation before further processing the application.

When a complete application is received, the application is publicly announced and a call for comments on compliance with the relevant norms is made through electronic media.

C1.4 The IOAS screens the documentation against the IFOAM Norms and prepares a screening report. This screening report is peer reviewed by another member of IOAS staff.

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**C1.4 The IOAS screens the documentation against the IFOAM Norms and prepares a screening report.
This screening report is peer reviewed by another member of IOAS staff.**

C1.5 A non-compliance report is prepared by the IOAS, which indicates any non-conformities and deficiencies with the standards and criteria and requests for further information where necessary.

This is sent to the applicant programme requiring it, within a set time limit, to take the necessary actions to come into conformity with the requirements

C1.6 Applicants may wish to seek review of specific conditions without officially appealing the overall decision.

Such requests must include substantive reasons why the condition imposed is considered inappropriate or unjustified.

C1.7 Once the submitted information and standards or policy /procedure amendments have been accepted by the IOAS, to the effect that there are no outstanding non-conformities and the deficiencies have been reduced to a defined number, an evaluation visit is arranged.

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C2 Evaluation visit and Assessment Procedures

C2.1 The evaluation visit is assigned to an approved evaluator. Evaluators must not have, or have had during the past five years, any interest in the organisation to be evaluated.

A certification body shall not be evaluated by the same person for more than two consecutive evaluations

C2.2 The certification body may challenge the appropriateness of an assigned evaluator.

C2.3 The evaluator is briefed and provided with the screening report and any necessary documentation.

C2.4 The evaluation visit is made up of the following stages:

- y Meeting with officers of the applicant body at the central office**
- y A detailed inspection of the certification office files**
- y Physical review audits of operators**
- y At least one witness audit**
- y Exit interview held in the central office**

C2.5 The evaluator requires access to all previous inspection documentation and may request an inspector or officer of the certification body to accompany him/her on the review audits.

C2.6 The evaluator(s) will check, among other things, that:

- y all documentation is complete and up to date and that there are no forms, inspection reports, or certification decisions missing;**
- y the inspection reports are comprehensive and enable sound certification decisions to be taken on the basis of the information provided;**
- y the certification decisions are consistent with the degree of compliance recorded in the inspection reports;**
- y where conditions or requirements for corrective action have been imposed on the operators by the certification body, that their implementation has been adequately monitored and documented;**

C2.6 The evaluator(s) will check, among other things, that:

y the body is operating in accordance with the IFOAM Norms;

y in the case of re-evaluations, conditions of accreditation have been fulfilled;

y in the case of operator audits, that the practices of the operators conform to the standards of the certification body and that the inspection files accurately record the production system.

y Where certification bodies operate in countries outside of their home territory, the evaluation will normally include office and/or operator visits in a sample of the countries concerned.

C2.7 The evaluator will record the findings of the visit in the evaluation report. The evaluation report follows a set format and includes the findings of the office file checks and the operator visits.

C2.8 When the report is complete and if no major problems are uncovered, the IOAS will send a copy to the evaluated applicant body. The report may be referred to the Accreditation Management Committee and subsequently to the Accreditation Committee where serious deficiencies are uncovered.

The evaluated body is invited to identify any inaccuracies in the report and to provide explanatory comments.

2.9 Following the visit, the IOAS identifies any additional non-conformities and deficiencies resulting from the visit.

The applicant body is informed of these and is allowed a time period for taking the necessary corrective actions.

C2.10 The IOAS Accreditation Committee (AC) reviews the file at critical points in the process.

C2.10 The AC may determine that the applicant body's functional performance has been revealed by the evaluation visit to be inadequate and terminate the evaluation process.

Alternatively, the AC may withhold accreditation pending the outcome of an additional visit to verify the effective implementation of corrective actions related to the functional performance of the certification body.

C2.11 Failure to meet the deadlines for the required corrective actions specified in C1.5 or in C2.9 may result in the IOAS terminating the evaluation process.

C3 Accreditation Procedures

C3.1 The IOAS will only grant accreditation if

- y All identified non-conformities have been adequately addressed by the applicant body.**
- y Identified deficiencies have been reduced to a specified number.**
- y The certification body has agreed to take the necessary corrective actions regarding the remaining deficiencies within a set time period not to exceed 2 years.**
- y The IOAS is satisfied that the functional operation of the certification body is effective.**

C3.2 Deficiencies remaining to be rectified following accreditation are included in the accreditation contract as conditions of accreditation together with the deadlines for associated corrective actions.

C3.3 When the IOAS accreditation committee is satisfied that the applicant body meets the requirements, it will be awarded accreditation status.

The applicant is informed in writing of the decision. If at any stage the IOAS denies accreditation, the certification body is informed of the necessary improvements for re-application.

C3.4 Once the applicant body has agreed to the conditions imposed and the timetable for compliance, it is sent an Accreditation Contract which must be signed and returned with the annual fee. The contract permits the body to use its accreditation status subject to the terms stated in the contract.

C3.5

At the time of signing an accreditation contract, the applicant body is also required to sign an Arbitration Agreement which commits both sides to solve issues which cannot be resolved through the IOAS Appeals process, through an independent arbitration procedure.

C3.6 Once the contract has been signed, the IOAS issues a Certificate of Accreditation. Among other details, the certificate identifies the scope of accreditation including the activities and programmes of the certification body that are, and are not, covered by the accreditation.

C3.7 On becoming accredited and the signing of an additional Seal Agreement, the accredited certification body is also permitted to use the IFOAM Seal in its own promotional materials and to sub-license the use of a combined certifier/IFOAM Seal to its operators for use on their product packaging and promotional materials.

C4 Surveillance

C4.1 The IOAS is responsible for monitoring the compliance of accredited certification bodies on an ongoing basis. Certification bodies are required to submit an annual update report and to undergo short surveillance visits to a specified schedule.

After initial accreditation the certification body will normally receive surveillance visits in year 1 and year 3 of their first 4 year contract. In subsequent contract periods, the certification body will normally receive one surveillance visit in year 2 of the contract period.

This surveillance model depends on continued good performance of the certification body, the details of which are available in document PR0508. Additional visits may also be required when the certification body reports significant changes in its operation.

C4.2 Detailed instructions for both the report and the visit are sent to accredited certifiers in advance.

C4.3 The purpose of the update report is to enable the IOAS to monitor the general changes undergone by the certification body over the previous year.

Under the accreditation contract, substantial changes which may effect the accreditation status of the certification body are required to be reported at the time they are being made.

C4.4 Surveillance visits are conducted following review of the update report. At the surveillance visits the IOAS will:

y examine any additional material related to the update report;

y review the evidence related to compliance with contract conditions. The evaluator will give the accredited certification body an assessment of whether the condition has been adequately fulfilled and, if not, explain the deficiency and what is expected;

y review both general files and operator files. Particular attention will be paid to whether the accredited certification body has effectively implemented conditions that have previously been considered fulfilled;

C4.4 Surveillance visits are conducted following review of the update report. At the surveillance visits the IOAS will:

y As deemed necessary the surveillance visit may include a witness audit of a scheduled inspection.

y conduct an exit interview during which the evaluator will inform the accredited certification body of any findings;

y complete a report of the visit and its conclusions and send a copy to the accredited certification body.

C4.5 The Accreditation Committee shall review the results of the surveillance visit. The certification body is informed of the outcome and of any additional conditions of accreditation.

C4.6 If the certification body has failed to meet the deadlines for contractual conditions or where the visit reveals that the certification body has failed to effectively implement the corrective actions related to conditions that have previously been considered fulfilled, the IOAS may impose sanctions.

C4.7 Failure to meet any of the terms of the accreditation contract may result in the suspension or withdrawal of the accreditation contract or in the imposition of other sanctions in accordance with the IOAS policies and procedures.

The action taken will be in accordance with the severity of the Infringement.

C5 Re-Evaluations

C5.1 The IOAS requires regular review evaluations every fourth year.

Procedures for the review evaluation are similar to those of the initial evaluation and include resubmission of all required documentation and a full evaluation visit.

C6 Timeframe for the accreditation process

C6.1 The time period from receipt of an application by the IOAS to signing an accreditation contract will vary depending on the initial level of non-compliance of the certification body and the intensity of work done to rectify nonconformities. The time period can be expected to be 9 to 15 months.

C7 Fees

C7.1 The IOAS is a not for profit company and the IFOAM Accreditation Programme is run on a non profit basis. Charges are set to cover the operating and continued development costs of the programme. A current fee schedule is available from IOAS offices and the web site www.ioas.org/fees.htm

Section D:

Rights and Responsibilities

D1 Accreditation Contract Period

D1.1 The Accreditation cycle is 4 years following which re-evaluation must take place.

Accreditation is a continuous status, subject to the certification body's compliance with the relevant Norms, as well as the terms of the contract including any specific conditions set by the IOAS.

IOAS retains the right to withdraw the accreditation contract without notice in the event that the accredited body does not fulfill its obligations.

D2 Use of Accreditation Status

D2.1 The accreditation contract includes the following provisions regarding the use of the accreditation status:

y Accredited programmes may refer to their accredited status in writing, either on letterheads or in written documents and reports and other information related to the programme.

The IOAS has formulated detailed instructions for such use.

D2 Use of Accreditation Status

D2.1 The accreditation contract includes the following provisions regarding the use of the accreditation status:

y Claims relating to accreditation status on products, labels, or product promotional material may only be made if an annex to the Accreditation Contract, the “Seal Licensing Agreement” has been concluded between the IOAS and the accredited body.

y Reference to IFOAM accreditation may only be made in conjunction with the categories for which accreditation applies, as stated in the contract.

y The right to the use of accreditation designation is not transferable.

D3 Notification of Changes and Extension of Certification Scope

D3.1 Accredited certification bodies are required to inform the IOAS of any changes which may impact their accreditation and of any changes which effect the scope of their accreditation as stated on the accreditation certificate.

D3.2 Where the certification body is introducing a category of certification not included in its accreditation scope (see B1.7), a request for extension of scope must be filed with the IOAS.

Appropriate standards of production and evidence of competence in this field must be submitted to IOAS for screening and evaluation. Any corrective actions must be taken before the commencement of the first certification decision.

D4 Appeals, Complaints and Sanctions

D4.1 Appeals

Accreditation decisions of the IOAS may be appealed. Appeals must be directed to the IOAS and lodged within 30 days of notification of the disputed decision.

D4.2 Initial appeals are considered by the Accreditation Committee but may be further appealed to the Appeals Committee of the IOAS. The Appeals Committee is a 3 person committee established by the President of the IOAS on an ad hoc basis.

The decision of the Appeals Committee will be sent to the appellant and is considered final.

D4 Appeals, Complaints and Sanctions

D4.1 Appeals

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D4.3 If agreement is not forthcoming and the appeals process is exhausted, a case may be referred to an Arbitration Process to which the certification body must agree on signing an accreditation contract.

D4.4 Complaints

The IOAS has formulated a detailed complaints policy which is available to interested parties on request and is available on the web site www.ioas.org

D4.5 Complaints against IOAS

Complaints concerning the functioning of the IFOAM Accreditation Programme and its personnel should be addressed in writing to the IOAS office.

Complainants will be informed of the decision.

D4.6 Complaints regarding accredited programmes
Complaints regarding the functioning of an accredited certification body should normally, in the first instance, be directed to the certification body in question.

If the complainant feels the complaint has not been handled satisfactorily by the accredited body, it should then lodge a complaint with the IOAS. Confidentiality regarding the source of such a complaint is maintained whenever possible.

D4.7 The IOAS will investigate the complaint. Where the IOAS considers the complaint to be sufficiently substantiated, it will inform the body concerned and invite a response.

The matter will then be referred to the IOAS Board to formulate a complaint resolution. The complainant is informed of the complaint resolution.

If the complaint is upheld, the IOAS may impose appropriate sanctions.

D4.8 Sanctions

In event of non-compliance with the accreditation contract, failure to fulfill conditions or gross breaches of the requirements of the accreditation criteria and basic standards, the IOAS may apply one or more of the following sanctions:

- y issue a warning letter or letter of reprimand;**
- y impose additional conditions and insist on corrective action according to a timetable;**
- y impose penalty fees;**
- y require the certification body to undergo a re-evaluation within a certain period;**
- y suspend accreditation;**
- y withdraw accreditation.**

D4.9 Withdrawal of Accreditation

The IOAS may withdraw the accreditation status of a certification body if performance and conduct of the body are not in accordance with the requirements for IFOAM Accredited certification bodies.

D4.10 Circumstances where accreditation status may be withdrawn include, but are not limited to:

y non compliance with the IFOAM Accreditation Criteria for Certification Programmes or the IFOAM Basic Standards;

y failure to fulfill conditions of accreditation related to non-conformities within the agreed timetable;

y misuse of accreditation status;

y refusal to allow, or hindering, full access to information at the request of the evaluator or IOAS staff;

y failure to pay fees and charges on time;

y failure to comply with any sanctions imposed.

D4.11 If non-compliance is severe, the IOAS reserves the right to revoke the contract without first requiring corrective action.

When a contract is revoked, the IOAS will publish the name of the certification body in the IFOAM Newsletter 'IFOAM in Action' and may release a public statement.

**END OF
AWARENESS TRAINING
ON
ORGANIC FOOD ACCREDITATION**