

Code of Conduct for Certification Bodies

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Preamble

Certification is an important tool of consumer protection, but also of quality assurance in the market place at large. The certification bodies (CB) are therefore faced with highest expectations with regard to their performance and services.

In the field of organic product certification numerous bodies have engaged in certification activities all over the world. Many of them have obtained accreditation according to international norms for certification bodies, however, the professional performance may often still be improved and the procedures optimized.

In order to harmonize their procedures and to improve their professional client services, but also to strengthen the trustworthiness and reputation of organic certification as well as the quality assurance of organic products at large, the undersigned certification bodies herewith pledge to adhere to this Code of Conduct (CoC) and to implement its terms and provisions without condition.

Principle 1, Fairness

The signatories of this CoC pledge to adhere to a fair and professional business performance. This includes the following specific exertions:

- The signatory will respect and support the independent responsibility and the right of self-determination of its clients and not bind them with improper contractual or other obligations;
- Tariffs shall be designed in a transparent and easy to understand manner to provide open and reliable information to the clients. Services shall be delivered in line with these tariffs and no dumping will be practised;
- The signatory will refrain from enticing away clients from other signatory CBs by visits and special low costs and services. This does, however, not prevent submission of objective information and standard offers.

Principle 2, Harmonization

The signatories of this CoC pledge to work towards a harmonized interpretation of the organic regulations and implementation of professional performance. This includes the following specific exertions:

- The signatory will support and actively engage in interaction with each other concerning interpretation of the organic regulations in the EU as well as in third countries;
- In case such common opinion has been reached, the signatory pledges to consequently implement these minimum requirements in his own field of activities and to inform the partners if such implementation is not possible under certain conditions and the procedures should be changed;
- The signatory will work with other certifiers and share best practice on methods to reduce fraud such as fraud resistant or electronic certificates.

Principle 3 Management of clients

3.1 Changes of Clients

The signatories of this CoC pledge to adhere to a professional and harmonized procedure for taking over clients that have previously been certified by another CB. This includes the following specific exertions:

- The signatory will request a Data Release authorisation from the new applicant to get a summary of all previous reports, sanctions. certification decisions and other relevant information from the previous CB;
- The signatory will inform the previous CB on the client's desire to change and request a summary of all previous reports, sanctions. certification decisions and other relevant information from the previous CB;
- In case the client is not submitting any data release authorisation, the signatory will not engage in a certification service for this client and inform – if applicable – its competent authority.
- Time frame of informing each other as a CB, maximum 5 working days from the arrival of the request.

3.2 Multiple certifications

- Signatories will include contractual obligations to inform in case of multiple certifications and shall – if multiple certifications apply – establish relevant regular data exchange, including major infringements in respect to organic regulations/standards, with other CB involved.

Principle 4, Qualification

The signatories of this CoC pledge to constantly improve the quality of their business performance. This includes the following specific exertions:

- The signatory will take maximum care to the qualification of their inspection and certification personnel. This especially also in foreign countries;

- The signatory will take maximum care that also in foreign countries the performance of their inspection personnel is continuously monitored and the outcome critically evaluated before certification of a client is granted;
- The signatory will take particular care during certification of grower groups to ensure that all operators in the group are aware of the requirements of the certification and that control systems meet best available practice.

Principle 5, Information

The signatories of this CoC pledge to adhere to a timely and professional performance in information exchange practises. This includes the following specific exertions:

- The signatory will exchange information with other CB duly justified with the protection of organic integrity. This includes, but is not limited to exchange of information in case of suspected fraud, residue detection or cross checking between CBs;
- The signatory will participate in the Rapid Alert System Organic (RASO) – as agreed by the EOCC, taken into account the notification between the member-states – to inform each other in a timely and professional manner on problems and potential problems with organic products in the market place. Only the involved CB's are informed.

Principle 6, Quality Assurance

The signatories of this CoC pledge to support further developments and harmonization in the field of quality assurance of organic products. This includes the following specific exertions:

- The signatory will participate in developing joint policies with regard to residue analyses and their professional interpretation;
- In case of activities in foreign countries, the signatory will participate in developing joint policies with regard to the interpretation and application of organic regulations or other relevant standards in third countries;
- The signatory will publish information on clients including the scope of their certification. This information will be readily available and frequently updated to enable customers and CB's to check that clients are certified;
- The signatory will develop and share with other signatories risk assessment procedures. They will use the results of these risk assessments to improve identification of potential fraud. Their risk assessment will also help to target spot inspections, and identify areas where cross checks should be made with other certifiers;

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RASO (Rapid Alert System Organic)

Very urgent
Alert notification:
Subject:
Sender:

A GENERAL INFORMATION

A1	Notifying country	
A2	Inspection/certification body	
A3	Date of notification	
A4	Contact person	
A5	Address (telephone, fax, e-mail)	

B PRODUCT

B1	Category of products	
B2	Productname / trade name	
B3	Identification of the lot	

C ORIGIN

C1	Manufacturer, exporter (name, address)	
C2	Inspection body	
C3	Country of origin	
C4	Address buyers and their inspection/certification bodies	
C5	Exported to third countries	

D SUBJECT

D1	Deviation	
D2	Samples	
D3	Results of the tests	
D4	Date of sampling	
D5	Place of tests	
D6	Accreditation	
D7	Methods of analysis	

E MEASURES

E1	Corrective actions	
E2	Date of entry into force	

F OTHER INFORMATION

F1	Competent authority informed	
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Remarks and questions: