

Title: Overview of organic standards globally

Subtitle: Trends in standard development

Author: Joelle Katto-Andrighetto

Author background: An Agricultural Engineer with multi-disciplinary background and a specialization in rural development and project management, J. Katto-Andrighetto has worked for IFOAM since August 2005. She is currently IFOAM Value Chain Manager.

Summary:

We are in a period of rapid development of organic standards globally. Most of the development is in terms of the number of standards, including regulations. Especially for countries with a quasi non-existent organic sector, the trend is towards fast regulatory development, which poses a number of problems. In the private standards, there is a continued trend for differentiation, however balanced by a harmonization trend as a result of the IFOAM Family of Standards.

Background:

Organic standard development has already a long history (with the first organic standard having been published in 1967). Historically, the development of standards has been mostly taking place in developed countries. In the last decade, some major producer countries have developed their regulations, quite effectively and resulting in increased market access for their producers through recognition of equivalence by the EU. More recently, increased awareness of the potential of organic agriculture as an export sector, but also of its potential to contribute to a green economy domestically, has lead more and more governments to embark on the development of a national organic regulation. As a result, the number of organic regulations under development around the world is bigger than ever before. Unfortunately, international cooperation on this aspect is still low, and governments are also often lacking an effective sounding board in their own countries, especially when the organic sector is quasi inexistent and/or not organized. Since 2010, IFOAM has set-up the IFOAM Family of Standards and is conducting a number of technical assessments of standards and regulations. All of these developments have led to new trends in the area of organic standards development, which this paper will present.

Main Chapter:

The presentation will present the trends observed at the international level on the aspect of standard development, both on the private level and on the governmental level. The IFOAM presenter will base herself on the experience gained through various activities, such as:

- Advice to national organic movements and governments on the development of their national organic standard.
- Technical assessment of standards for approval in the IFOAM Family of Standards.
- Advocacy towards government developing or amending their organic regulation.

The trends that have been observed are the following:

- A slowed down speed of development in terms of content (although some content development is happening currently, e.g. in aquaculture and cosmetics), even though private standards continue to seek differentiation.
- A tendency by governments to engage too quickly into a mandatory regulation and to copy the EU regulation or the Codex guidelines instead of developing their own locally adapted and stakeholder-based standard.
- A tendency by private stakeholders (including NGOs) to wanting to develop standards from scratch, and to use all international available reference standards (IFOAM, Codex, EU reg, NOP, JAS, etc) instead of starting from an existing standard developed for similar conditions (e.g neighboring country).
- A tendency for standard developer to adopt too broad scopes, instead of focusing on the scopes that are relevant to their production capacity.
- Generally, a tendency to "rush" through the standard development process and to consider it a desk job instead of stakeholder process.
- A tendency for harmonization around the COROS from standards that have been assessed for inclusion into the IFOAM Family of Standards (except for major regulations).

Core messages and conclusions:

The presenter will present the IFOAM recommendations for standard developer and standard owners. These are mainly:

1. Use an existing standard if you can, do not contribute to the multiplication of standards unless it is absolutely justified that you need to develop yet another standard.
2. If you want to develop a new standard, start from an existing standard, appropriate to your conditions. This can be the standard of a neighboring country, or the IFOAM Standard. On average, local adaptation of standards require only about 20% change to the content, while the core 80% can remain the same.
3. Do not copy and paste the EU regulation or the Codex Guidelines.
4. As a government, do not engage in regulating the organic sector unless there is a strong and organized organic movement in your country and they are asking you to do so.
5. Take your time to develop your standard: focus on quality rather than speed and quantity. However, quality is not a synonym of detail or prescriptiveness, when it comes to standards!
6. As a national organic movement, try to retain the lead on standard development instead of handing it over to your government.
7. Apply for the IFOAM Family of Standards and harmonize your standard against the COROS.
8. Follow IFOAM's work on the development of the IFOAM Standard and learn from it.