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IFOAM Accreditation Programmes

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Operator dual/multiple certification - Exchange of information between certifiers

IFOAM Norms (2005) criterion 7.9.2 states:

‘In cases of dual or multiple certification with the same certification scope, the certification body shall supply the other certification body (or bodies) with copies of transaction certificates or information regarding sales and inform them in event of de-certification. The certification body shall request the same information from the other certification body (or bodies).’

In other words where an operator chooses to be certified by two or more certification bodies for organic production, the certification bodies are obliged to share information on sales by that operator and also to inform each other if the operator is decertified by either one of them.

The purpose of this requirement is primarily to prevent multiple certification being used by the operator to multiple-sell his product, once under one logo and again under another and to ensure both certifiers are kept up to date with possible problems uncovered by either side.

Since this requirement was added in 2005, some accredited certifiers have suggested that this requirement is either too burdensome or that even if they fulfil the requirement of sending information to the other certifier, the exchange is not reciprocated.

The IOAS Accreditation Committee have now considered this clause on two separate occasions and each time come to the same conclusion; that the requirement does contribute to good certification practice and is a useful tool in deterring and uncovering fraud.

Therefore this notice confirms the IOAS commitment to ensure certifiers accredited against IFOAM Norms fulfil this requirement. However the IOAS Accreditation Committee would like to clarify the following:

- **Knowing who is dual certified** - IFOAM clause 7.9.1 requires that the certifier obtains information as to whether the operator holds other certification. This is normally achieved at initial application but less commonly followed up during surveillance. As a first step in satisfying 7.9.2, good practice suggests that the certifier can easily access information on which of its operators are also currently certified by another entity.
- **What information** - certifiers may have focused on the need to exchange transaction certificates with the other certifier and considered such a task (with some operators shipping weekly) to be excessive

work. In fact 7.9.2 wording states 'or information regarding sales' which provides more flexibility such as sales summaries every month or quarter for example. The nature and frequency of such information is for the certifier to determine.

- **Non-reciprocation** - the IOAS Accreditation Committee considered the problem of other certifiers being unwilling to provide their own information in return but decided that even if others are not willing to work in a proper and beneficial manner that should not be the reason for IFOAM CBs to do the same. By showing an example of best practice, others will, in time, be forced to do the same. The recently agreed Code of Conduct by the European Organic Certifier Council included just such a commitment.

In summary, the IOAS requires full implementation of IFOAM criteria 7.9.2.

End