

International Organic Accreditation Service

The people



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The organisation

The International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS) is a non-profit organisation based in North Dakota, USA with offices in Australia, Spain and the United Kingdom. We work solely in the field of assessment of organic certification bodies and offer voluntary accreditation against IFOAM Norms and ISO/IEC Guide 65. The IOAS is recognised by the US Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards & Technology as offering these two programmes in compliance with ISO/IEC17011. We provide assessment and reporting services to government authorities in this field and training on assessment of organic certification bodies against various relevant international Norms and regulations. The IOAS is committed to providing systems for world-wide equivalency, with rigour, empathy and integrity at reasonable cost.

The IOAS was established by IFOAM in 1998 to implement the IFOAM Accreditation Programme at arms length from the advocacy role of IFOAM itself. IFOAM Accreditation remains our core work but the ISO65 Programme, new programmes for regulatory purposes, training and other services represent an increasing proportion of our work programme. The day-to-day work (including all assessment visits) is performed by 6 staff in 4 countries: Amaia Aldana, Ken Commins, David Crucefix, Jan Deane, Stephanie Goldfinch and Angela Jackson. Overall responsibility is exercised by a 7-8 member Board elected to represent a balance of interests and geography with current members coming from Costa Rica, Germany, Netherlands, Thailand, United Kingdom and the USA. A similarly balanced, 7-8 person Accreditation Committee is responsible for accreditation decisions and currently has representation from Canada, Chile, Germany, Italy, Peru, Quebec, Switzerland and Thailand.

Highlights of 2007

- IOAS achieves its goal of more than 40 accreditation clients as it enters its 10th year of existence in 2008.
- IOAS clients are now based in all five continents and in 23 countries around the world and in turn themselves work in over 70 countries.
- Organic agriculture continues to grow and our clients report faster growth in 2007 than in recent years.
- IOAS starts use of its multiple assessment service. By the end of 2007 document review and on-site visits are being done simultaneously against up to 3 accreditation scopes.
- The legislative developments which started in 2006 in Canada and the European Union continue throughout 2007 but still have some way to go to completion and full clarity on implementation.
- Collaborating with the increasing number of organisations and authorities with interests in conformity assessment of organic agriculture takes up a considerable amount of IOAS efforts.
- The IOAS starts more seriously planning how it can develop and maintain its service but with a reduced environmental footprint; more effective surveillance, greater collaboration on audits, enhanced use of communication tools are all figuring in these discussions.
- The IOAS develops and implements a new training course on 'Management of Organic Certification'
- The IOAS collaborates with retailers to undertake a pilot study on ways to enhance the protection of organic integrity in the supply chain.
- The IOAS hires a new staff member to assist with the expanding services being offered and additional clients.

Accreditation

The IOAS continues to operate two accreditation programmes; IFOAM Norms and ISO/IEC Guide 65. In 2007 two organic certification bodies (Ecoland of Germany (IFOAM) and Organska Kontrola of Bosnia & Herzegovina (IFOAM & ISO/IEC 65) became newly accredited with IOAS and five further organisations (UgoCert of Uganda, TECPAR of Brazil, Libancert of Lebanon, Ecoinspect of Rumania and Ecocert-Afrisco of South Africa) applied during the year and are under assessment. At the end of 2007 37 bodies are accredited with IOAS and 6 further are under review. In addition 3 already IFOAM accredited certification bodies (ICEA of Italy, CCOF of California and OCIA of USA) extended their accreditations to include ISO/IEC Guide 65 bringing the total number under that programme to 16.

In recent years most client growth has come from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, a sure sign of the growing interest in organic agriculture around the world. A number of these new clients are young organisations playing key roles in the development of the organic sector in their country.

During 2007, the IOAS has also been preparing for the launch of two new programmes; one linked to the new Canadian Organic Regime that fully comes into effect in December 2008 and the second linked to the changing import rules within the European Union (see Operating Environment).

New accredited clients

Ecoland

Ecoland were granted IFOAM Accreditation in February 2007. They were founded as a farmers association in 1997 with the main aim of establishing structures for processing and marketing.

Ecoland is a membership organisation whose members elect a governing Board which is responsible for the design and implementation of the certification system. In addition to the Board, Ecoland have an Advisory Board providing for participation of a range of stakeholders. A certification committee is responsible for decision making and a standards committee sit to develop and maintain up to date the Ecoland organic standards which are based on the European Regulation EC 2092/91. An ad hoc appeals committee sits as necessary to hear any appeals.



Organska Kontrola

Organska Kontrola is the first certification body in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH), established in 2004 by the 'OK Association' for development and support of organic agriculture in BIH. OK activities comprise the development of organic standards, the organisation of inspection and certification according to OK standards with the aim of providing a more economical service to organic producers and promote organic production in general.

The Company Council is the highest authority in Organska Kontrola. The Council appoint a Director, who is responsible for co-ordination, the inspection operations and the certification. The authority for certification decision is held by the Organska Kontrola Council but is delegated to the Certification Committee which acts under its supervision. An ad-hoc Appeal Committee handles appeals. The in-house staff are responsible for processing and reviewing applications and inspection reports.

rules which are still in draft form at the end of 2007 but give us confidence that the IOAS will play an important role. Uncertainties in that in all cases the rules still remain ill-defined.

Nevertheless the greatest asset of the IOAS is the people, their expertise, their commitment, their motivation to travel far and sit in meetings and of course work long hours. We continue to invest in new staff and we expect to hire further staff in 2008. We can be proud that we have developed a stable team in the staff, competent management, a committed Board of Directors and a highly qualified Accreditation Committee. For sure we have a strong organisation that will take the IOAS into the future.

Personnel

Krista Wanser who was working part time for IOAS during 2006 was unable to take up a full time position as planned and has stopped working for IOAS during 2007.

In 2007 the IOAS welcomed its sixth professional staff member, Angela Jackson of South Dakota, USA. Angela is former Director of the Organic Grass Fed Beef Coalition. As well as being trained and working as an organic inspector she has a background in information technology.

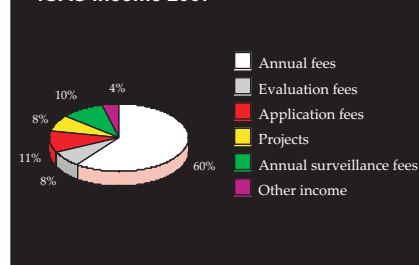
At the IOAS AGM of March 2007, Jochen Neuendorf of Germany, Anne Macey of Canada and Vitoon Panyakul of Thailand were re-appointed to the Accreditation Committee for a further three year term. Vitoon Panyakul and Bo van Elzakker of the Netherlands were recommended for a further term on the Board and this was ratified by the IFOAM Board as is the requirement under our license agreement with IFOAM.

Finance

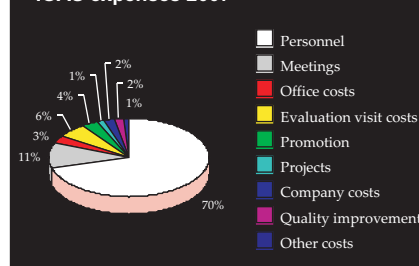
The IOAS had budgeted for a net loss in 2007 due to taking on new staff and time investment in systems development; both in preparation for expansion of services for regulators in 2008/2009. In fact the year resulted in a greater loss than anticipated of US\$20,000, as in previous years partly due to the weak dollar. The IOAS remains confident that income will increase in 2008 and the reserve will be replenished.

The total income of the IOAS rose slightly on 2006 (2.5%) to US\$564,000, 92% of that from accreditation services and 8% from training and other projects. Personnel represented 70% of expenditure, more than in previous years in line and expected with our gearing up. The next biggest expenditure related to meetings (11%), accreditation travel costs (6%), promotion (4%) and quality improvement and training (2%).

IOAS income 2007



IOAS expenses 2007



Quality Improvement

After several years of exchanging internal audits with other organisations, the IOAS used its own staff to do the audit in 2007. The audit raised a number of issues and resulted in the Board deciding that we should alternate the two approaches as they bring different perspectives to the process, both beneficial. This audit looked at specific aspects or performance that normal audits against ISO/IEC17011 would not do. The management review was discussed and signed off by the Board in October 2007 setting new goals for 2008.

Like many organisations, the IOAS continues to adapt to changing circumstances, reacts to new scenarios and finds better ways of doing things. Through preventive actions, internal and external audits, amendments in our own policies and procedures take place. The following are the main changes that took place in 2007 which have external impact.

Complaints outside of scope

After consulting with clients and as a preventive action, the IOAS amended its complaints procedures and its accreditation contracts to secure the right to investigate, under rare circumstances of possible fraud or incompetence, the activity of a client certification organisation that did not come specifically under the scope of the accreditation.

Adoption of IAF Guidance for ISO/IEC 65

In March 2007 and again after consultation with clients, the IOAS adopted the Guidance of the International Accreditation Forum for implementation of accreditation against ISO/IEC Guide 65. As part of this adoption, the IOAS are requiring that certificates of certification organisations under ISO65 scope bear the logo or name of the IOAS and that this should be implemented by January 2009.

Presidents report

The IOAS continues to grow steadily in terms of clients. We reached the 40 certification bodies goal in 2007 with about 50% of them also holding ISO65 accreditation. Part of the growth is therefore in the diversity of services the certification bodies require as a result of an ever-complicated world of standards and conformity assessment systems. With the anticipated new services for Canada and the European Union the work of the IOAS will continue to diversify. We are also seeing some initiatives in the area of fraud prevention services and training. This not only provides diversification of income, allowing reinvestment in systems, but engages the IOAS with a wider client base and fits very well into the overall goal of the IOAS to contribute to the integrity of organic products, and to harmonisation of the mechanisms of control.

We do not want however to forget our roots, that of the global guarantee system that is IFOAM Accreditation as the arguments for a harmonised system remain persuasive. The process that has taken place during the last three years to reposition the IFOAM Organic Guarantee System as more inclusive should be completed in 2008. The level of buy-in from certification bodies and government authorities however remains unclear.

On the financial side for the first time in some years the IOAS made a substantial loss in 2007 which, although to a certain extent planned, we are trying to recuperate this year so that we come back to our full reserve. We are surrounded by opportunities and uncertainties. Opportunities in the guise of new work anticipated as an approved accreditation agent under the Canadian Organic Regime when it comes into force and assessment work related to the new European import

Multiple assessment database

In May 2007 and after some years of planning and development the IOAS multiple assessment database was christened with the entry and evaluation of the re-application documentation from the Israeli certification organisation Agrior. The Agrior application was typical of many IOAS clients today (50 % of IOAS clients hold or have applied for more than one accreditation with us and this trend is likely to continue as new country norms like Canada come into play) being a joint accreditation against both IFOAM Norms and ISO/IEC Guide 65. Since then all new applications and re-applications have been reviewed using this new tool.

The core of the database tool is an analysis and placement of various norms (both organic standards and requirements for certification) such that clauses that deal with the same topic are set alongside each other. Those clauses are further assessed for their similarity and marked as such, so considerably aiding and making more efficient the multiple assessment process.

Currently the standards component contains organic standards of IFOAM and EU Regulation 2092/91. Certification requirements have been entered for IFOAM, ISO/IEC 65, EU Regulation 2092/91, Quebec and Canada. Other norms will be added as demanded.

As with all databases, there has been continuous development and there is still much more potential to be explored as a wider service to the organic sector

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Organic dairy system, Switzerland

Surveillance

During 2007, 13 organisations were in the process of assessment or reassessment, 16 organisations received on-site surveillance visits and 13 were subject to reporting and desk review.

Reassessment takes place every four years and the process involves full document review as for an initial application. An on-site visit takes place of at least 5 audit days which involves office checks and operator visits.

Surveillance audits are shorter, normally 2-3 days but nevertheless involve file checks in offices and operator field visits.

The relatively new approach of reporting and desk audit is subject to the certification body performing well previously. This is one of the first of a range of measures IOAS is taking to reduce its environmental footprint - a considerable but necessary challenge for an international body like the IOAS.

The Accreditation Committee of the IOAS met three times physically during 2007 to fulfil its role as ultimate decision maker in the IOAS accreditation procedure. Here too, the Committee has been trialling new methods of electronic meetings with the aim of reducing physical meetings to two per year with the aim of reducing air miles.

Organic Integrity programme

Although there was considerable confidence in the growth of the organic sector during 2007, there has also been increasing discussion about the dangers of conventional produce entering the marketplace under an organic label and the damage that could do to the industry as a whole.

The IOAS has started working with a group of retailers in the USA to look at simple ways to protect organic integrity in an ever-lengthening supply chain. The concept is based on deterrence as much as uncovering those that may want to fool the system. At the same time it does not intend to add additional burdens to what is already a comprehensive control system. Use of existing structures and organisations within the organic conformity assessment is fully anticipated.

The programme is still in its testing stages but is expected to be based on a web-based obligatory registration system led by the retailers. Once within the system, any component of the supply chain (certified or not) may be subject to inspection using specific audit tools based on risk.

Such tools are likely to include surprise inspections and, when necessary, in-depth input:output audits and traceability checks as well as residue testing which, as a percentage of the chain, will happen only infrequently. The key is that individuals in the chain will never know when they might be targeted, hence the deterrence effect.



Participants at IOAS training in the USA

Training

As well as implementing our now established course for authorities and accreditation body personnel on 'Assessment of organic certification bodies' in Switzerland in September 2007, the IOAS designed and implemented a new course for certification body personnel called 'Management of Organic Certification'. The first course was provided to a wholly North American group of 20 participants and took place near to the IOAS head office in North Dakota, also in September.

The new course dealt with themes of structure and decision-making, quality system design and quality improvement, risks to organic integrity, detecting negligence and fraud, special situations in organic agriculture, certificates and their use and abuse and the regulatory environment and changes ongoing. As always with IOAS courses, there were many case studies to discuss and exercises and 'problem-solving' sessions. The course is aimed at senior managers and quality managers of established certification bodies and will be offered again in 2008 in Europe and/or Asia. All such courses are open to all certification organisations. The IOAS refrains from providing company specific courses.

The IOAS were also specially commissioned to run a two day course in Turkey for government personnel on assessment of organic certification bodies and the demands of other countries for recognition.

Operational environment

The dominant developments of 2007 that have impacted upon the IOAS working environment have again been those of the regulators and the proposed changes to the IFOAM Basic Standards.

The European Commission published its new organic regulation 834/2007 in June. The regulation does not enter into force until January 2009 but the IOAS has been closely monitoring the developments and also involved in consultations, particularly with regard to import arrangements. Despite the demands of the more general 'revised new approach' to accreditation within Europe (only one national accreditation body will provide accreditation services within each member state), the IOAS expects to play a much more important role in providing expert reports for certification organisations outside the EU wishing to be placed on compliance and equivalence lists.

In contrast to the European Union the Canadian Organic Regime has developed a more open model of accreditation in which any accreditation body may apply for approval to offer services anywhere in the world. The Canadian authorities have spent 2007 developing their own operating system in which the IOAS has again had some input. At the end of 2007, the IOAS were awaiting the office audit by the Canadian Organic Office and expects to launch its Canadian programme during the first part of 2008.

Other significant events during 2007 were the discussions by the USDA NOP to not permit smallholder group certification. This remains under scrutiny and has raised a discussion as to whether such 'multi site' certification should not be available to all.

Within the IFOAM Organic Guarantee System, the revision of the Basic Standards into Benchmark Standards has resulted in a reduction of detail with the aim of harmonisation and improving accessibility to the system. At the same time this has caused concerns that the proposed standards lack rigour.

Sanctions and complaints

The IOAS can report a very good year for compliance amongst certification bodies. Only one sanction was issued in 2007, that of intent to suspend within 1 month for non-fulfilment of a condition within the deadline. The intent was removed after the certification organisation rectified the problem. According to IOAS procedures the decision to suspend is taken by the Accreditation Committee but must be ratified by the Executive Board. The ratification verifies that due process has been observed.

Only two complaints were received by the IOAS against clients but in fact both were dropped due to insufficient information in one case and not being within the scope of the accreditation in the other. There were no complaints against the IOAS itself.

Abuse cases however increased in 2007 with six cases arising during the year and with some of them still under investigation or awaiting final resolution. Generally the cases relate to use of the IFOAM Accredited seal which, under our license agreement with IFOAM, the IOAS is required to police. Five of the six were misuses by producers/manufacturers, sometimes of IOAS clients and sometimes of third parties.

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Delivery of organic grapes in Mendoza, Argentina