

International Organic Accreditation Service

Highlights

- **The International Organic Accreditation Service grows by 33%, maintaining a year on year growth over the last five years of 13%.**
- **A Canada programme is launched in anticipation of the coming into force of the Canadian Organic Regime. The Canadian authorities conduct an on-site audit of the head office in Jamestown.**
- **In anticipation of the entry into force of the new European Regulation 834/2007, the IOAS further develops its information handling systems to deal with the requirements for equivalence assessment of certification bodies.**
- **The US National Institute of Standards and Technology conducts a reassessment of the IOAS against ISO Guide 17011 and grants continued recognition.**
- **The IFOAM Assembly votes to maintain the central role of the IFOAM Basic Standards in the IFOAM Accreditation programme.**
- **Two new Board members, 1 new AC member and two new staff members join the IOAS.**

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Operational environment

Working with regulators

The increasing interest and involvement of government authorities in regulating the organic sector means that the IOAS works with an increasing number of organic norms, both private and public. The major developments in 2008 were the planned introduction of a regulation in Canada in which the IOAS will be named as one of several authorised conformity verification bodies and the publication of detailed rules and import guidelines for organic products entering the European Union. Throughout 2008, the IOAS contributed to the development of the two conformity assessment systems on both sides of the Atlantic.

Despite neither system being implemented until 2009, the IOAS has been accepting applications and preparing itself for handling this work throughout the year. The certification requirements for Canada and the updated requirements for Europe and the standards for Europe have all been added into the IOAS database to allow for assessment and surveillance of certification bodies for multiple programmes. The database now stands as probably the most comprehensive and updated organic standard resource in the world. It can be used for other purposes on a contract basis.

Legislation changes also took place in South Korea, a growing Asian market for organic products. A new regulation was prepared to come into force in 2009 in Taiwan. In the latter the IOAS has applied to the authorities to recognise IFOAM Accreditation as one basis for imports.

Collaboration

IFOAM

The IFOAM General Assembly, which took place in Vignola, Italy in June 2008, was a focus of discussion for the IFOAM Norms and the accreditation programme. One of the clear decisions that emerged was that the IFOAM membership wants to retain the IFOAM Basic Standards as a key guideline for the organic movement instead of the simplified equivalence-seeking document proposed by the previous World Board of IFOAM. The IBS thus remains a cornerstone for IFOAM Accreditation.

At the end of 2008, 37 certification bodies held IFOAM accreditation whilst 23 held ISO Guide 65 accreditation.

National Accreditation Bodies

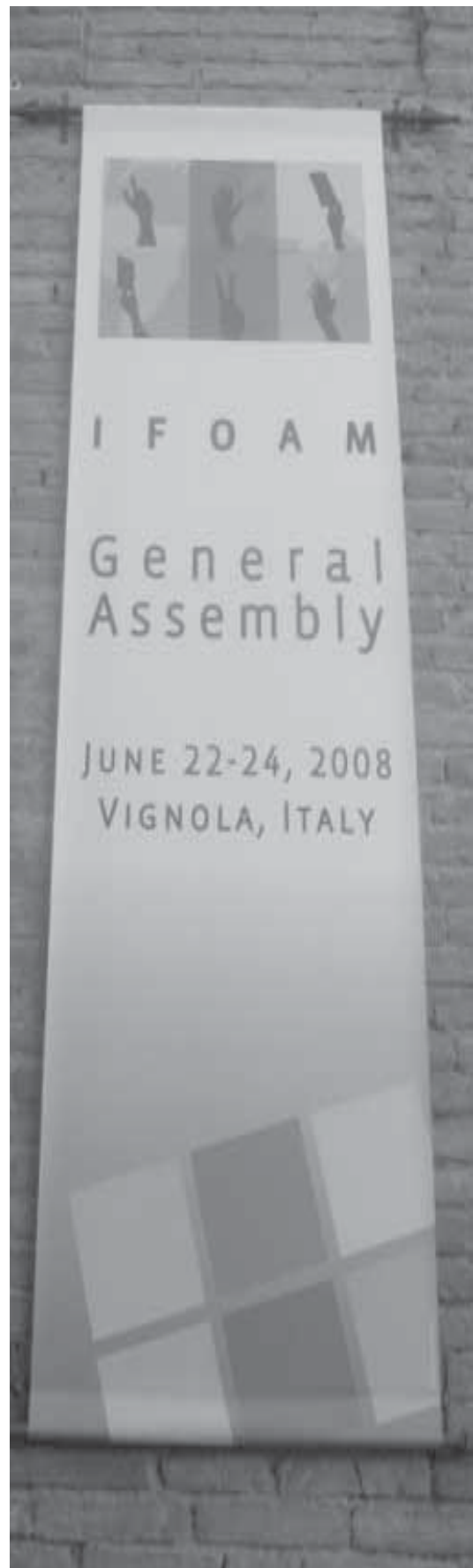
The IOAS continued its collaboration with national accreditation bodies both in performing joint audits and in training. One training audit was performed in Argentina for the Conseil des appellations réservées et des termes valorisants (CARTV) of Quebec against the new Canadian norms (see photo). A simultaneous audit was performed of a common client with DAP (Deutsches Akkreditierungssystem Prüfwesen GmbH), also in Argentina, and the IOAS provided an evaluator for an



The IOAS collaborated with CARTV for an audit of LETIS, Argentina

New work

Increasingly the IOAS is being approached by owners of other private labelling schemes to perform accreditation or evaluation services. Where these schemes are of interest to our clients, the IOAS is considering such extension of our services even into the non-organic sector. The most significant progress was made with the organic textile group (GOTS www.global-standard.org) which is proposing to use the IOAS as the preferred accreditation body using the new International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies (IROCB) as developed under the FAO/UNCTAD/IFOAM harmonisation work - http://www.unctad.org/trade_env/ITF-organic/welcome1.asp The IOAS also had some preliminary discussions with COSMOS and with Rainforest Alliance about providing services for their planned new verification



Accreditation and assessment

Canada

During 2008 the IOAS effectively launched two new assessment schemes; Canada and the new European Recognition Programme. Both represent, at the same time, a departure from our normal mode of operation and a significant step forward in terms of working with governments.

The on-site audit (including witness audit) of the IOAS by the Canadian authorities in March 2008 made clear that there was no obstacle to the IOAS being approved to work as a conformity verification body under the Canadian system.

European Union

In a different manner, but equally significant, was the inclusion of a simple phrase in the import guidelines published by the European Commission in December 2008 which accepted that an 'international supervisory or accreditation body that is specialised in organic agriculture' will be recognised as an assessment body. This opened the door for the IOAS to do equivalency or compliance reports for CBs seeking recognition from the Commission.

Both systems require the IOAS to perform full assessment and on-site surveillance but the decisions on accreditation or recognition will be made by the relevant authorities. By the end of 2008, the IOAS had 24 certification bodies in process towards Canada accreditation and 25 in process towards recognition by the European Commission.

The other notable difference in the assessment work under (EC) 834/07 is that it is primarily performed on the basis of equivalence. This may be relevant for both production standards and/or the certification requirements. In order to do this, the IOAS has again turned to its database to establish ground rules and instil consistency for the basis for equivalence.

New Clients

During 2008 the IOAS started working with 3 new clients. Ecocert-Afrisco of South Africa applied for accreditation against IFOAM Norms, ISO Guide 65 and Europe. The Industry Foundation of Chonnam National University (CONU) of South Korea was the third certification body from that country to apply for accreditation against IFOAM Norms. Oregon Tilth of the USA was the third new client applying for accreditation against ISO Guide 65, Europe and Canada. IOAS evaluators performed 13 full reassessment visits and 6 first assessments during the year.

Accreditation was awarded during the year to 7 organisations, 5 of these being new clients and the other two existing clients extending their accreditation to other norms. Two of the new clients are based in Africa which means that the IOAS now have clients in all 5 continents (see table). The five new clients are Ecoinspect of Rumania (ISO Guide 65), Libancert of Lebanon (ISO Guide 65), TECPAR of Brazil (IFOAM), UgoCert of Uganda (IFOAM and ISO Guide 65) and TanCert of Tanzania (IFOAM and ISO Guide 65).

Ways of working

During the last two years the IOAS have been discussing ways in which we can reduce our environmental footprint and reduce the cost and make more efficient our services to clients whilst at the same time maintain the integrity of our work. Manoeuvring ourselves to be able to perform multiple assessments has been key to achieving this. In addition, given the international scope of our personnel we have looked at reducing the number of face-to-face meetings and making electronic meetings more effective. In 2008 the Accreditation Committee has experimented with new electronic meeting formats in preparation for reducing the face-to-face meetings from 3 to 2 in 2009. The Board also plans to replace one physical meeting with an electronic meeting in 2009.

Surveillance

Visits

During 2008 IOAS evaluators performed 13 on site surveillance visits to certifier premises and reviewed 10 reports for those organisations qualifying for a bye year. Under IOAS procedures introduced in 2007, the IOAS now permits alternate year surveillance visits subject to evidence that the certifier quality system is functioning well and no significant changes are underway.

Increasingly surveillance visits are covering more than one programme. 36 of the 43 organisations under IOAS surveillance are involved in more than one IOAS programme.

Foreign visits

The IOAS conducts visits to certifier premises that conduct key activities and also do sample visits to operators in countries other than the certifier's home territory. During 2008 five such visits were conducted covering Guatemala (2 operations), Vietnam, Ukraine and the People's Republic of China. With the increasing number of programmes and by extension the increasing number of operators in IOAS accredited programmes, the rate of foreign visits is likely to increase in 2009 and beyond. In line with the IOAS commitment to provide a quality accreditation service of high integrity at the lowest possible cost to organic certification bodies, we always aim to combine such visits with other travel.

Quality improvement

NIST recognition

During 2008 the IOAS was again subject to a full reassessment of our IFOAM and ISO Guide 65 programmes against ISO Guide 17011 by the US National Institute for Standards and Technology. The assessment included an office visit and an interview with one of the IOAS evaluators. In November NIST confirmed that the IOAS recognition of compliance would continue for another two years. The NIST assessment team commented 'The team would like to commend IOAS for the culture of compliance and continuous improvement that exists within the organization.'

Internal training

Given the continuing changes in the regulatory environment and the fact that the work that IOAS performs is highly technical, internal training, not just of staff but our Accreditation Committee is always a high priority. In 2008 the Programme Manager, Jan Deane, prepared and implemented a detailed training for staff and the Committee on the accreditation and certification requirements for the new Canada Organic Regime. This training was also made available to a collaborating accreditation organisation.

Feedback

The IOAS continues to enjoy excellent feedback from its clients. Given that, we take even the slightest criticism or suggestion very seriously. Each certifier is specifically invited to comment on the IOAS service at the end of an assessment and these comment forms are always reviewed by the Board. In the same way, at the end of each Board meeting the IOAS consider whether any proposed changes to policies or procedures should be sent out for comment. In this way we hope that the service that IOAS provides is continuously shaped and headed in the direction that meets the need of our clients and their clients in turn.

Personnel

As an organisation involved in observing other organisations and their competence we know that an organisation is no more than the sum of its people



Integrated production, Colombia

Staff

2008 was an exceptionally active year for IOAS personnel most notable of which Amaia Aldana gave birth to a healthy boy, Ander, in July. In planning for this event the IOAS had hired Gergana Nentcheva of Bulgaria in March, both to cover for Amaia's maternity leave but also in anticipation of the increasing work we were expecting for Canada and the European Union.

Later in the year we were sorry to lose Stephanie Goldfinch as Client Manager who had worked with us since 2002 but who went onto further challenges continuing to work in organic conformity assessment but at the certification level in her native Australia. As a replacement the IOAS hired Afreen Rahman of India in September.

Joyce Ford of the USA who has been working on the development of the IOAS database during the past two years and contributed to work on the anti-fraud programme was also hired and trained for work on a part-time basis.

At the end of 2008 the IOAS full-time staff complement consisted of Ken Commins, Executive Director (USA), David Crucefix, Assistant Executive Director (Spain), Jan Deane, Programme Manager (UK), four Client Managers, Amaia Aldana (Spain), Angela Jackson (USA), Gergana Nentcheva (Bulgaria) and Afreen Rahman (India) and Susan Hepper, Office Administrator (USA).

Accreditation Committee

During 2008 two AC members stepped down; Denis-Paul Bouffard and Roberto Ugas. Both have worked with much enthusiasm over many years with the IOAS and we thank them most sincerely for their contribution. Roberto is now Vice President of IFOAM and Denis Paul is Executive Director of the Conseil des appellations réservées et des termes valorisants (CARTV) in Quebec. Anne Macey took over from Vitoon Panyakul as Chairperson.

Board

Felicia Echeverria of Costa Rica stepped down from the IOAS Board as she had been appointed Executive Director of the certification body Ecologica. Rikke Lundsgaard of Denmark replaced her. Under agreement with IFOAM, the IFOAM Board member Jacqueline Alleje of the Phillippines was also appointed to the IOAS Board



Grower group inspection



Wild harvest inspection, Guatemala

New faces at IOAS

Afreen Rahman of India was previously working with the New Zealand Food Safety Authority working on Export Standards in the field of organic agriculture where he was involved with equivalence negotiations with various countries. Before this he had various positions in government and private companies in New Zealand, Saudi Arabia and India. Afreen has a Masters in Agricultural Science. He joined the IOAS as Client Manager in September.



Gergana Nentcheva of Bulgaria commenced work with the IOAS on April 7 as Client Manager. Gergana was previously General Manager of Balkan Biocert Ltd in Bulgaria and before that with a trading company working with food ingredients. She has worked as Project Evaluator with the European Commission in the area of Food Safety. Gergana has an MSc in Food Fermentation and has qualified as an Internal Auditor.



Dorota Metera of Poland was appointed to the IOAS Accreditation Committee. Dorota is both President of the Board and Certification Director of Bioekspert, a Polish Certification Body. Dorota has an MSc in Horticulture and has been a member of the Council of Agriculture, and advisory body to the Ministry of Agriculture in Poland since 1994 and it's Secretary since 2006. She has worked as a certifier under (EEC) 2092/91, the USDA NOP and under Demeter. Dorota represents the sector of Conformity Assessment on the Accreditation Committee.



Rikke Lundsgaard of Denmark is currently Agricultural Policy Advisor for the Danish Society for Nature Conservation but has served on numerous government and EU committees relating to organic farming and environmental protection. Since 1996 she is a member of the Organic Council for Food and Farming which advises the Danish Minister for Agriculture on the development of organic farming. Between 1990 and 1997 she was Chair of the IFOAM Standards Committee. Rikke has an MSc in Agronomy and was appointed to the IOAS Board in November.



Jacqueline Haessig Alleje of the Philippines is co-owner of Rizal Dairy Farms. She is the president of Organic Farming - Production, Training and Consultancy, Inc. (OFI), which is engaged in organic vegetable production, technology development and transfer. She was founding member of the Organic Producers Trade Association and the Organic Certification Center of the Philippines and is actively involved in government policy formulation for the promotion and development of organic agriculture in the Philippines. Jacqueline was appointed to the IOAS Board in November.



Sanction, appeals and complaints

Within its accreditation contract that IOAS signs with all clients is indicated the power for us to sanction an organisation for performance that does not meet the requirements of the relevant norms. The ultimate sanction is withdrawal of accreditation but there are lesser actions such as warning letters, fines and threats of suspension available. During 2008 the IOAS issued two fines, one each to two certification bodies for non-implementation of corrective actions that had previously been considered implemented.

The IOAS received no appeals on accreditation decisions or complaints against certification organisations or the IOAS itself during 2008. We did however handle 7 cases in which certifiers and operators misused the IFOAM Seal. IOAS is contractually obliged by IFOAM to police misuse. Most of these cases arise from misunderstandings by operators and certifiers over the use of the IFOAM Seal and sometimes confusion with IFOAM membership. Essentially the IFOAM Seal can only be used by an operator or certifier if the certifier is IFOAM Accredited and the operator is certified under the relevant programme. The Seal can only be used in combination with the certifiers Seal, never alone.

Promotion

As a small organisation with a limited budget the IOAS continues to focus its promotional efforts on the major BioFach fair in Nuremberg, Germany. Despite the increase in BioFach fairs around the world, the German event in February each year retains its dominance and is the place where the international organic movement meets. However in 2008 our Executive Director did attend the 'All Things Organic' show in Chicago and given its success we are now committed to attending this event on an annual basis.

In addition to trade fairs, we have continued to develop the IOAS web site and provide our free bimonthly E-News service which have been increasingly recognised as a source of reliable information on conformity assessment in the world of organic agriculture.



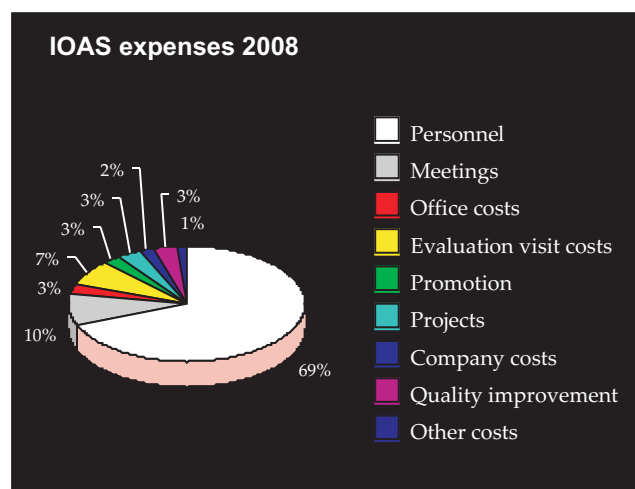
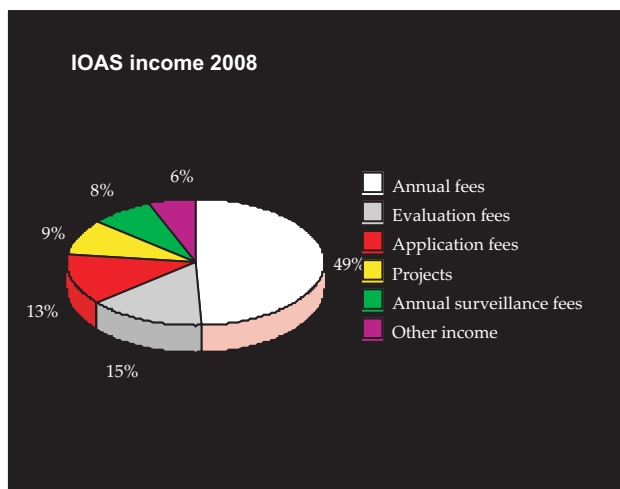
Participants of the 'Management' course in Frick, Switzerland

Training

The IOAS started offering training to government authorities, accreditation bodies and certification bodies in 2005 and have run annual courses on conformity assessment in organic agriculture ever since. In 2008 two courses were provided; one on 'Assessment of organic certification bodies' and one on 'Management of organic certification'. Both took place at the Research Centre for Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in Switzerland. Participants from government authorities, standard setters, accreditation bodies and certification bodies from Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Switzerland and Ukraine attended. Feedback from the course participants continues to be highly complimentary.

IOAS staff has continued to work on a programme in collaboration with the National Cooperative Grocers Association in the USA to better protect organic integrity in what is an ever-lengthening and ever more complex supply chain. During 2008 the IOAS have focused on performing field trials of techniques and on designing how such a programme would work as an add-on to company quality management systems. The next steps will look at getting buy-in from the major retailers as it is they who must provide the major impetus for a successful programme.

Largely due to the launch of the EU and Canada programmes, the IOAS turnover increased by 33% compared to 2007 and despite hiring an additional person in 2008 and consequent increased personnel costs, the operating surplus was just over US\$26,000. This went some way to replenishing the company reserve that was reduced considerably by the loss made in 2007, mainly due to the investment in information systems. Over the last 5 years the IOAS has seen an average increase in turnover of 13%.



Who we are

The International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS) is a non-profit organisation based in North Dakota, USA with additional satellite offices in South Dakota, India, Spain, Bulgaria 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 also 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 standard setting role of IFOAM itself. IFOAM Accreditation remains our core work but the ISO Guide 65 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 8 staff in 4 countries: Amaia Aldana, Ken Commins, David Crucefix, Jan Deane, Susan Hepper, Angela Jackson, Gergana Nentcheva and Afreen Rahman. Overall responsibility is exercised by a 7-8 member Board elected to represent a balance of interests and geography with current members coming from Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Philippines, 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, Poland, Switzerland and Thailand.