

**POLICY on the approval of Standards for inclusion in the IFOAM Family of organic standards****NO: 42***REVISED DATE: February 2020***I. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to govern the approval of organic standards and regulations by IFOAM-Organics International for inclusion in the IFOAM Family of Standards. The IFOAM Family of Standards serves the following purposes:

- Draw the line between organic and non-organic standards, while acknowledging that organic standards may vary depending on local conditions, stakeholders' interests and values, or product specific needs.
- Improve transparency and public understanding about the differences between different organic standards.
- Facilitate equivalence agreements of all kinds between organic standards and regulations, including unilateral, bilateral and multilateral equivalence agreements based on the results of the equivalence assessment with one international organic reference norm.

IFOAM-Organics International acknowledges that standards from different regions, developed by different stakeholder groups, or for different product categories may vary to some extent. Standards reflect local conditions such as climate, cultural background, stakeholder values, the stage of development of organic production or product specific needs, and the historical development of the standard itself. These specific conditions provide justification for standards variations, as long as the standards are based on the same understanding and commonly agreed principles of organic agriculture.

The IFOAM Standards Requirements – also called Common Objectives and Requirements of Organic Standards (COROS) are the international reference maintained by IFOAM-Organics International to serve as a basis for the establishment of the IFOAM Family of Standards. The IFOAM Standards Requirements are developed in line with recognized good practices for norms setting; they mark the baseline that differentiates organic standards from other standards. The IFOAM Standards Requirements are not themselves a certification standard and are not meant to contain the detail found in standards used for certification. They are the reference tool for the equivalence assessment of all organic standards under the IFOAM Family of Standards.

Based on this understanding IFOAM-Organics International provides the following policy applicable for approval of organic standards by IFOAM-Organics International for inclusion in its Family of standards.

**II Scope**

This policy covers the recognition of

- private certification standards,
- governmental standards and technical regulations,

of any geographical or product specific scope within the scope of the IFOAM Standards Requirements.

### III General Requirements for approval in the Family of standards

1. The IFOAM Standards Requirements serves as the reference document for IFOAM-Organics International to approve organic standards for inclusion in the Family.
2. All standards approved as part of the Family of standards must have passed an equivalence assessment against the IFOAM Standards Requirements. However, the following exceptions apply:
  - At the launch of the Family of standards, a 5-year derogation to this requirement will be granted to government organic regulations that have a history of implementation of at least 5 years, and to government regulations that have been officially recognized as equivalent to them.
  - All private standards that have been assessed as compliant with the IFOAM Standard, under the IFOAM Accreditation Program, will automatically be granted approval into the Family with the comment “Compliant with the IFOAM Basic Standard” or “compliant with the IFOAM Standard”, for as long as they remain in the IFOAM Accreditation Program.
3. The ownership and scope of applicant standards must be clearly defined. The scope should include geographical area of application, and the range of products and processes covered. Standards in the Family may have a different scope and structure than the IFOAM Standards Requirements and may not necessarily cover all areas the IFOAM Standards Requirements includes (e.g. wild harvested products, animal husbandry).
4. All applicants for the Family of standards must submit documentation of the standards setting process indicating whether or not the process included an open stakeholder consultation consistent with the scope of the standard.
5. Application and approval in the Family of standards is subject to an assessment fee and to annual fees according to the fee scheme developed by IFOAM-Organics International. IFOAM-OI may also choose to evaluate and include standards at its own initiative and cost.
6. IFOAM-Organics International makes public the list of approved standards with their scope and ownership.
7. Transparency towards all interested parties shall be maintained throughout the application, equivalence assessment and approval processes.
8. Approved standards are periodically re-evaluated for continued approval.
9. In order to protect IFOAM’s integrity, IFOAM reserves the right to withdraw the approval of a standard and remove it from the Family at any time.

### IV. Rights associated with approval in the IFOAM Family of standards

10. Approval in the IFOAM Family of standards grants to standard owners the right of using the IFOAM Family-of-standards logo on, or otherwise in reference to, their standard (but not on products). Owners

of approved standard will also receive a time-limited (renewable) certificate stating the inclusion of their standard in the Family of standards.

11. Using a standard approved in the IFOAM Family of standards is a precondition for IFOAM Accreditation.

## V Application for Recognition

- Any party may apply to IFOAM-Organics International for approval of a certification standard.
- IFOAM-Organics International may initiate the process for approval of a particular standard/regulation.
- In case of evaluation of private certification standards, the applicant (if different from the standards owner) will ensure permission of the standards owner.

## VI Evaluation and decision

The IFOAM OGS manager, or any staff member mandated by him/her will evaluate applications and conduct the equivalence assessment necessary for inclusion in the IFOAM Family of standards. The equivalence assessment will be performed using the template provided in the IFOAM Standards Requirements – Common Objectives and Requirements of Organic Standards (COROS).

The OGS manager, will make the recommendation to the World Board on the decision of approval based on:

- fulfilment of the requirements for inclusion in the Family of standards
- the results of the evaluation assessment of the full standard against the IFOAM Standards Requirements (based on the COROS template).
- an analysis of these results against the Criteria for Acceptance of Variations in Standards (Annex I of this policy).

The World Board will validate or invalidate the decision, either through its in-person meetings or through an email decision process. Thereafter, the decision is communicated to the standard owner or applicant and published.

## VII Re-evaluation and maintenance of approved standards

The standards owner or the body originally applying for approval in the Family of standards annually reports all changes to the approved standard by a date defined by IFOAM-Organics International and **immediately** notifies IFOAM-OI of any **major changes** to the approved standard.

The OGS manager:

- confirms continued approval, or in case of changes to the approved standard, initiates a re-evaluation,
- ensures that changes to the IFOAM Standards Requirements are followed by a re-assessment of all approved standards against these changes within two years.

Continued approval in the IFOAM Family of Standards for private standards is conditional on the payment of annual fees as applicable.

### **IX Appeals and Complaints**

Appeals and complaints with regard to this Policy, its related Procedures and decisions are handled according to IFOAM-Organics International Policy 27 (Policy on Management of complaints).

*This policy replaces Policy 42 IFOAM Approval of Certification Standards Based on the IBS as approved by the World Board in June 2008.*

*Approved by the World Board on the 13th of December 2010.*

*Amended by the Executive Board on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2012*

*Amended by the Executive Board on the 9th of September 2013.*

*Amended by the Executive Director in November 2016*

*Amended by the Executive Director and endorsed by the Executive Board in February 2020*

## Annex I: Criteria for acceptance of variations in standards

The IFOAM Family of standards is based on equivalence assessments of applicant standards against the IFOAM Standards Requirements - Common Objectives and Requirements for Organic Standards (COROS). Applicant standards may have sections or requirements that are significantly different from sections or requirements of the IFOAM Standards Requirements. These are considered variations. Variations may be positive variations (presence of additional requirements in the applicant standard) or negative variations (failure of the applicant standard to address a certain requirement in the IFOAM Standards requirements, or requirements that are below expectations described in the IFOAM Standards Requirement). Positive variations are always acceptable in the context of the assessment for the IFOAM Family of Standards. The following criteria serve as guidance for the objective evaluation of negative variations.

### **1. Need and necessity for variations**

The need and necessity of the variation to the IFOAM Standards Requirements may be justified by at least one of the following conditions:

- a. Climatic, geographical and/or structural conditions where the evaluated standard applies prevent effective application of the requirement in the IFOAM Standards Requirements;
- b. Where the evaluated standard applies, operators would not be able to comply with requirements that would meet the expectation of the IFOAM Standards Requirements.
- c. The application of the requirement in the IFOAM Standards Requirement would prevent the further development of organic agriculture where the evaluated standard applies.
- d. The application of the requirement in the IFOAM Standards Requirement would seriously contradict generally accepted religious or cultural beliefs where the evaluated standard applies.
- e. The application of the requirement in the IFOAM Standards Requirement would prohibit compliance with legal requirements or legitimate sector regulations where the evaluated standard applies.
- f. The application of the requirement in the IFOAM Standards Requirement does not meet the commonly agreed consensus or “state of the art” understanding of the organic movement due to a different historical development of a organic practices where the evaluated standard applies.

### **2. Further considerations for overall acceptance of variations of a standard**

An applicant standard including negative (and positive) variations to the IFOAM Standards Requirements may be accepted as equivalent as a whole only if:

- a. Variations respect the Principles of Organic Agriculture.
- b. In its entirety it enforces practices that clearly distinguish organic from conventional production and processing practices.
- c. It does not contradict (but may omit) specified principles and objectives in the IFOAM Standards Requirements and covers to a reasonable extent the IFOAM Standards Requirements objectives that are relevant to its scope.
- d. The number and nature of unjustified negative variations is acceptable and may be compensated by positive variations.

Acceptance of the standard as a whole does not unduly prejudice consumer trust in organic or the reputation of the IFOAM Family of Standards.