

16 April, 2007

Invitation to Comment on first draft of the new IFOAM Benchmark for Standards

To IFOAM Members and other Stakeholders,

You are invited to comment on the first draft of the new IFOAM Benchmark for Standards, which you can access electronically by clicking on this link: [1st Revision Draft of the IFOAM Benchmark for Standards](#). Comments are due by 14 June, 2007. Send comments to M.Fecht@ifoam.org.

This new Benchmark is the result of a process that was started in 2005 to comprehensively revise the IFOAM Basic Standards and other parts of IFOAM's Organic Guarantee System (OGS). The System is being re-designed to make it more accessible for organic producers, processors, traders, standards-setting bodies, certification bodies, accreditation bodies, governments and other stakeholders.

The plan for creating more accessibility of the private international Organic Guarantee System includes establishing a baseline for organic standards – one that differentiates organic systems from conventional ones, rather than differentiating some organic systems from others. Therefore the role of the Benchmark is to set the essential requirements for the development of organic standards as well as provide flexibility to recognize differences throughout the world such as in agro-ecosystems, basic infrastructure and the stage of organic sector development.

Existing and new organic standards (including government standards) that meet the Benchmark can then be part of the "IFOAM Family of Standards," and considered as equivalent. With the many private and government organic standards that now populate the world, there is a need for a mechanism to assess and foster equivalence among them. IFOAM is positioning to provide such a mechanism.

More information on the Family of Standards and on the "big picture" of the OGS Revision, are contained in this link: [The Revised Organic Guarantee System](#).

The process for creating the IFOAM Benchmark for Standards started with the IFOAM Basic Standards. First, a set of "revision guidelines" was prepared by IFOAM's Norms Management Committee, and reviewed by our World Board. Then the Standards Committee revised the IFOAM Basic Standards according to the guidelines. The development process lasted for more than one year and involved several drafts and substantial consultation among the responsible IFOAM structures. As a result, the IFOAM Basic Standards were substantially transformed and the resulting document was given a new name.

The IFOAM Benchmark for Standards links IFOAM's Principles of Organic Agriculture to organic practices. It establishes the outcomes that organic standards must achieve when applying the principles. The Introduction in the draft document

explains this and other aspects of the logic and structure of the document. Please be sure to read it and bear it in mind when evaluating and commenting on the Benchmark. And please comment on the document in the context of the new role.

More information on the IFOAM Benchmark for Standards, including a Question-and-Answer space which is linked here: [IBS-Question and Answer](#), are posted on the IFOAM Website. An interactive website space for questions and discussion will be finished by the end of April; and you will be notified by email and provided the link when it is ready.

We will accept, consider, and prepare a response to all relevant general and specific comments about the draft. When making specific suggestions for language changes or additions, please submit them in “tracked changes,” which is a tool in the document’s format, Microsoft Word; or else provide clear and specific language changes that you are requesting. Submit your general and specific comments in a separate document, which can be either the IBS draft itself or a new document. Do not use email text for your comments. Be sure to identify yourself and your affiliation. All comments will be posted on the IFOAM website.

After evaluating the comments, the Standards Committee will prepare a second draft on which you will again be invited to comment. The process leads towards a decision on the final draft by IFOAM members, which is currently scheduled for May, 2008.

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