

Minutes of the meeting on Group Certification Pilot Projects in Europe, Biofach, Nuremberg, 16th of February 2006

Introduction

Group certification is currently accepted only when implemented in the developing countries as defined by the OECD list. IFOAM is currently initiating a project of promotion of group certification in the North. The first step of this project was a workshop organized in Bonn (November 2005) on Group certification in Europe, of which the main outcome was to agree on starting pilot projects in Europe. Following the Bonn workshop, IFOAM Head Office circulated the proceedings of the workshop, along with an information flyer on Group certification pilot projects. A broad range of stakeholders have therefore received the first information on IFOAM's project on group certification in the North, and have been given a chance to comment on the process and contribute to the project in different ways. As recommended by the participants at the Bonn workshop, IFOAM organized a follow-up meeting on the same subject during BioFach 2006 in Nuremberg. The focus of this meeting was the initiation of pilot projects in Europe, with the purpose of bringing potential pilot project candidates and other interested stakeholders to meet and discuss the implementation of the pilot projects. Joelle Katto-Andrighetto, from the IFOAM Head Office, did a short presentation on the background of the "Group Certification in the North" project and explained the main principles of the European pilot projects. After participants presented themselves, the group discussed the implementation of pilot projects in Europe and made some recommendations to IFOAM for the design and implementation of the projects. Finally, representatives of producer groups interested in becoming potential candidates described their groups and their interest in the pilot project.

Participants

The following 25 participants were present at the meeting:

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Short presentation on group certification pilot projects, principles and objectives:

- IFOAM has been working on ICS for more than 10 years, through its Accreditation Criteria, its training materials on ICS for group certification, and its position on smallholders.
- Main outcomes of the workshop in Bonn were presented and are available in the corresponding proceedings, posted on the IFOAM website on the ICS in the North webpage.
- IFOAM has 30.000 euros funds for these pilot projects in 2006. Additional funds are likely to be available for later years. With this, IFOAM plans to support at least 3 pilot projects across Europe, but the ultimate maximum number of pilot projects also depends on the in-kind contribution and additional funds mobilized by pilot project partners. Ideally, pilot project partners should include a producer group and a certification body both willing to commit time and resources to the project. Expected starting date for the pilot projects is May, but this is flexible and probably too late. Indeed, it is noted that farmers make their decisions in winter and are mostly available in winter for meetings, training etc., and that IFOAM should try to respect this.

Participants' remarks and recommendations:

- Design clear expected results from the pilot projects and share these with potential pilot project candidates
- When planning, take into consideration that setting up ICS usually takes 1 or 2 years, so the length of a pilot project should ideally extend to more than 2 years.
- Hivos is involved in the development of a larger concept of risk based participatory quality management in several countries and is ready to exchange information with pilot project groups.
- Intensive training is likely to be needed at the beginning for some groups.
- Goal of the pilot projects should be to understand the risk that we add by doing group certification and the advantages of such a system: therefore, it could be good to make a trial in a risky situation as

well. Indeed, group certification, by adding another layer or filter in the certification process, makes it more and more difficult to guarantee the organic mode of production. On the other hand, we should start with some easy situations because it is something completely new. GroLink and Krav are starting to think about a more diversified model of ICS, and IFOAM should be in touch with them on that. A crucial point will be monitoring of volume flow to local marketing.

- Use the existing IFOAM Accreditation Criteria for group certification as a starting point, but keep in mind that they might need adjustments for the North.
- IFOAM should clarify who decides what as regards pilot project selection and implementation. This is crucial for the credibility of the project and of the evaluations. Participants in the 2 workshops (Bonn and BioFach) to be invited to comment on the criteria for selecting pilot projects.
- The choice of the consultant is a critical one. Participants emphasized that ideally each producer group should be able to decide or strongly influence the choice of the consultancy managing its project.
- Any vertical integration of producers, into enterprises they do not own, should be transparent or the project methodology should exclude such groups from participating. (Vertical economic integration is what happens when producers are bound by contract to buyers, packers, processors or the final marketing body that thus can participate in organising the producer group or the ICS, which can create a conflict of values or of interest for the group as a whole).
- Group certification pilot projects should try to develop the possibility for direct local marketing. It shouldn't be just a model for centralised buying, packing, processing and distribution.
- It should be assessed whether the bureaucracy is reduced by Group certification or not, because this is a crucial aspect (for instance in Italy, it is the major problem for smallholders).
- The idea of an ICS Task Force should be submitted to the IFOAM world board. Its work should be linked to the work of the existing PGS task

Force. It was remarked that the ideal ICS is based on a functioning PGS (Participatory Guarantee System).

- Include aspect of product flow in the training of pilot project groups, because this is not emphasized enough in the IFOAM Training Manual on ICS, and is crucial in the case of diversified production or multiple marketing channels.

Potential candidates

Among participants of the meeting were representatives of groups that are considering proposing themselves for the pilot projects. These representatives briefly explained the situation of their producer groups and the reasons why group certification would fit nicely in their situation. Examples of potential pilot project candidates included:

Country	Producer group	Contact person	Conditions favorable to group certification
Italy	Biogargano	Massimo Marcolivio	The group is composed of producers in proximity of a National Park in the south of Italy. Very small landholdings. Already common marketing. The group has already experienced the problems of giving up producers' independence, but group coordination is part of the original mission of the cooperative. 20 producers. Linked to ICEA for certification
Italy	Producer group in proximity to the national Park of Cinque terre in Italy	Alessandro Triantafylidis	The group is composed exclusively of part-time farmers. None of them is a professional farmer. None of them can face the cost of individual organic certification, but they are already close to organic production and the park would be very interested in bringing them to organic standards for environmental purposes. They already have the paper work and technical assistance in common. They have diversified production, are not organized in a cooperative but they sell to one single place that processes everything. This case raises the question of whether it would be appropriate to initiate pilot projects among farmers in conversion period, as a way to test if group certification could bring more producers into the system, and not only replace

			individual certification.
Slovenia	Apple growers	Primoz Kriselj	Are homogenous (only one production), have very small landholdings (0.5 ha), are already organized as an interest group within the broader Slovenian association of organic farmers.
Bulgaria	Beekeepers	Svetla Nikolova	Very homogenous.
Turkey	Rapunzel producer group	Tunc Kolatan	Homogenous production (1 or two products), already organized collectively, technical assistance in place through Rapunzel consultants. Linked with IMO for certification.
France	Nature et Progrès local groups + producer groups in Brittany	Anton Pinschhof	Nature et Progrès groups are based on geographic proximity. Already have internal inspections and only lack external inspection of their system and external certification of the group. Nature et Progrès has already decided to be candidate for participation and published a position paper during its last general assembly at national level. 4 Breton producer cooperatives are considering whether or not to participate (meat; milk; vegetables; potatoes)

Next steps: IFOAM to

- circulate the draft minutes of this meeting and integrate participants' comments.
- circulate the final minutes more broadly and continue its effort to share information, open-up the process and get additional contributions.
- circulate the draft criteria for selecting pilot projects to the participants in the Bonn workshop and the BioFach meeting, and collect and integrate comments.
- also circulate the draft application form for pilot project candidates to the same persons and collect and integrate comments.
- work on finalizing the pilot project methodology, including for the choice of the consultant(s), and share it with the relevant stakeholders and collect and integrate comments.



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS

Representatives of the interested producer groups will channel information to their members and initiate internal discussion on the potential participation of the group in the pilot projects. Groups that will have agreed to apply will fill in the final application form received from IFOAM and liaise with the IFOAM Head Office.