

## Call for nomination for the Group Certification Pilot Projects in Europe

### Background

In developing countries, many organic smallholders are certified collectively, based on Internal Control Systems (ICS). The European Union recognizes the organic status (under its regulation 2092/91) of products certified organic through group certification when these are produced in developing countries, but not when produced in developed countries or in Europe itself. Up to now, individual certification is required for all farmers in Europe. Yet group certification of organic farmers could potentially bring multiple benefits to some farmer groups in Europe. The organic movement, led by IFOAM, is initiating group certification pilot projects in Europe, with a view to establishing advantages and drawbacks of such systems in the Northern context, starting with Europe, and eventually to influence Northern regulations towards the approval of group certification schemes if found appropriate.

### Principles of Group Certification

Group certification consists in a system of combined internal and external control for the collective certification of a group of small producers. It implies that:

- an Internal Control System (ICS) managed by the farmers group ensures individual internal inspections and establishes one documentation system common to the whole group.
- an external certification body (CB) inspects the documentation and the good functioning of the ICS, and carries out sample re-inspections of farmers to evaluate the quality of the internal inspections.
- the certification body delivers a collective organic certificate that is owned by the group and not by farmers individually. The cost of group certification is shared among the group members.

### Group Certification Pilot Projects

In the group certification pilot projects, volunteer groups of certified organic farmers will organize to test an Internal Control System and carry out internal inspections. A nationally accredited certification body will voluntarily inspect the farmers group and deliver an evaluation of the performance of the ICS. Consultants will be nominated for each pilot project to assist the producer group in establishing the ICS and manage the whole pilot project.

As this is a pilot study, the certification body will not deliver a real group certificate, since this is not yet allowed by the EU regulation. Consequently, farmers will continue being individually certified to keep their organic certification. The call is open to European producer groups, cooperatives, and certification bodies. Europe is understood in its broader geographic definition. Ideally, candidate partners would include the joint application of a producer group and a certification body, both willing to commit time and resources to the success of the ICS pilot project. Producers can be farmers or processors. Ideal size of the producer group to participate in the pilot project is to have at least 20 member operators. IFOAM is planning to have 3 pilot projects running in different parts of Europe, in the years 2006 and 2007, each pilot

project involving a producer group, a CB and a consultant.

Each pilot project will typically be organized in two phases: the first phase consists in setting-up the Internal Control System and initiating the mechanisms for external inspection by the CB. The second phase consists in evaluating the ICS performance and compiling the results of the external evaluations of the project, in order to produce case studies reports.

At the beginning of the project, an intensive training on the establishment and maintenance of an ICS will be conducted for the producer group. At the end of this training, the project methodology will be established together with the producer group and the CB. Then, the producer group will establish internal documentation and procedures needed to run the ICS. The group will need to appoint an ICS manager, an internal inspector, and other “staff” as required for the proper management of the ICS. The different functions can also be performed by a single person appointed by the group. This person is likely to need around 10 days in a year for internal inspection, and additional days for report writing, ICS coordination and liaison with project partners. Time needs also to be planned for producers meetings and internal communication within the producer group, as it is important that the project is owned by the group as a whole and not only by the ICS manager. As the ICS is being established and run by the producer group, the consultant will regularly provide technical assistance to ensure continued improvement of the system.

The second phase is adding external inspection for “virtual certification” and project evaluation to the on-going group certification activities. External inspection will be carried out by the CB, which will implement the whole procedure necessary to inspect and certify a producer group, but without delivering the official certificate. In addition, there will be both a mid-term evaluation and a final evaluation of the project. These evaluations are “project evaluations” and are to be distinguished from the external inspections of the ICS carried out by the CB. Each of the evaluations will combine information collected from the different partners (producer group self-evaluation, external inspector and CB reports, and independent external evaluators’ reports). IFOAM will finance travel and accommodation costs and consultancy costs. A financial compensation will also be granted to the producer group and the CB participating, although most of their activities will require in-kind contribution on their side.

#### Starting date

Pilot projects are expected to start in May 2006.

#### Selection criteria for ICS pilot project in Europe

Criteria applying to each candidate (producer group and CB):

- Amount of in kind contribution (minimum in kind contribution is 15 days for producer groups and 7 days for CB)
- Amount of external funds mobilized and use of these funds
- Prior experience in dealing with internal inspections (including in certifying groups through ICS in the South for CBs) and/or with quality management systems
- Potential in terms of efficiency of group certification if adopted by the EU (e.g. most components of ICS are in place anyway, etc)
- Level of prior negotiation between the producer group and the CB, and geographic proximity between them

- Level of national support behind the proposal of the candidate, and capacity of the national organic movement to influence policies at the national or European level
- Level of current involvement in the ICS North project
- Ability to communicate efficiently with IFOAM head office and other partners (including fluency in English for at least 1 group representative)
- Length of existence of the organic producer group and capacity of the group to organize itself collectively
- Correspondence between the group characteristics and the ideal characteristics established in the Bonn workshop (e.g. number of farms in the group and proximity of the farms belonging to the group)
- Willingness to contribute to the process of dialogue on ICS in Europe after the completion of the pilot project
- Producers wishing to participate in the pilot projects must declare and provide copies of contracts by which the group or any of its members are integrated into enterprises not owned by the producer group or its members.

Overall (on the 3 pilot projects), IFOAM should make sure that:

- there is a geographic diversity across Europe
- there is a diversity in terms of production systems
- there is a balance between “simple groups” (e.g. groups meeting the existing IAC of homogeneity in production systems and marketing channels) and “diversified” groups (e.g. groups having diversified production systems and market channels but with long history of existence and ability to organize internal inspections)
- The choice of the pilot project groups fits nicely with the ability of external volunteer organizations (e.g. consumer associations, other CBs, etc.) to contribute by participating in the project evaluation

#### How to apply

Applicants should fill in and return the application form to [j.katto@ifoam.org](mailto:j.katto@ifoam.org) (cc [a.boor@ifoam.org](mailto:a.boor@ifoam.org)) before the 28<sup>th</sup> of April. For further information on the project, please visit the ICS section of the website. You can also contact Joelle Katto-Andrighetto at [j.katto@ifoam.org](mailto:j.katto@ifoam.org) for any further question.