

European Harmonization Group for the Standardization of Organic and Natural Cosmetic Standards

Ecocert, Comebio, Soil Association, BDIH, AIAB-ICEA, Ecogaarantie

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Abstract

It is now more than three years that the main European organizations have been playing a crucial role in the field of natural and organic cosmetics, both considering producers (BDIH in Germany and Cosmebio in France) and certifying bodies (Soil Association in the UK, Ecocert in France, Ecogaarantie in Belgium, and AIAB-ICEA in Italy). They meet regularly trying to harmonize the different standards to arrive to a common version to be adopted at the European and international level.

All members of the European Group share the common view that in order to improve eco-sustainable cosmetic production based on raw materials and ingredients obtained from renewable sources or organic agriculture, it is absolutely necessary to develop a tool that will help consumers, all around Europe, and also outside its borders, to recognize cosmetic products manufactured according to the abovementioned principles.

Among the different organizations many are the differences. Some certify only products containing a definite percentage of organic ingredients (Soil Association or Ecocert), while others also allow products containing only natural ingredients, without an absolute obligation to use organic raw materials (BDIH, AIAB-ICEA).

After a three-year debate inside the working group, it has been decided that the preliminary draft of the standard will contain two distinct European certification levels:

A first level dealing with "natural" cosmetics, without any obligation to use organic ingredients, except in case the product is claiming to possess an organic content. In this last case, there will be the obligation to use all ingredients included in the formulation that can be found in organic quality on the market, but without a minimum defined percentage of organic content.

A second level called "organic," with the obligation to use at least 95% of all agricultural and zoo technical ingredients in organic quality. Those organic ingredients should be obtained by simple, physically allowed extraction methods.

In both cases, synthetic molecules obtained through chemical synthesis must originate from natural ingredients, and only some transformation processes included in a positive list published together with the common standard will be allowed. Those molecules shall also have clear admitted values concerning their biodegradability and environmental toxicity requirements.

For the second certification level, in due time it will be also compulsory to use a definite percentage of synthetic molecules deriving from organic agricultural ingredients, and the only industrial chemistry allowed for those ingredients will be the one respecting all twelve principles of Green Chemistry. The percentage to be used will initially be quite low, considering the difficulties of finding chemically processed organic ingredients on the market.

For the first certification level, it will then be always possible to formulate cosmetic products based on natural ingredients, but not containing any organic raw material. Producers will be free to indicate or not in the label the organic percentage of the used ingredients, if any.

For the second level, the organic one, it will be always mandatory to indicate the true organic percentage on the total of the cosmetic product, a percentage that will not be lower than 15-20%. Added water is considered as a natural ingredient, and as such included in the overall calculation of the organic content.

The harmonization work is continuously dealing with the great many aspects that must be taken into account when dealing with natural and organic cosmetics, such as the calculation of organic percentages in extracts, the importance to give to Green Chemistry, or how to consider nanoparticles.

The intention of the European Harmonization Group is to present the common standard and make it public and open to suggestions at the occasion of the next IFOAM World Congress in Modena on the 20th of June 2008.