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ASEAN GUIDE FOR ORGANIC CERTIFICATION (AGOC)

**ASEAN SECTORAL WORKING GROUP ON CROPS
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ASEAN Guide for Organic Certification (AGOC)

Foreword

The preparation of ASEAN Guide for Organic Certification (AGOC) is in line with *Strategic Thrust 2 of Vision and SP FAF 2016-2025 Enhance Trade Facilitation, Economic Integration and Market Access* in particular Action Programme 2.2 aimed at harmonizing accreditation, inspection, and certification requirements so that uniform requirements will prevail ASEAN-wide, thus, enabling the recognition of equivalence.

This ASEAN Guide serves as guidelines and references for certification of organic agriculture produce and products by the Certification Bodies (CB) among the ASEAN Member States (AMS) to help in the facilitation of intra and extra regional trade of organic products. This guideline was developed based on the understanding that national regulatory and food safety requirements in each AMS should take precedent. The notes and examples in this Guide aim to provide additional information intended to assist in understanding and use of the document. This Guide may also serve as one of the references for the development of Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) for inspection and certification system on organic production, processing, and handling.

1. Scope

This Guide specifies the criteria for organic agriculture certification in the ASEAN Region to be performed by Certification Bodies (CB) for individual and group certifications.

2. Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions provided in (a) ISO/IEC 17000:2004 – *Conformity assessment – Vocabulary and general principles*, (b) ISO/IEC 17011:2011 – *Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies*, (c) ISO/IEC 17065:2012 – *Conformity assessment- Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services*, and (d) ISO/IEC 17067:2013 – *Conformity assessment – Fundamentals of product certification and guidelines for product certification schemes* and the following apply:

- 2.1 Competent authority – official government agency having jurisdiction.
- 2.2 Internal Control System (ICS) – part of a documented quality assurance system that allows the external certification body to delegate the annual inspection of individual group members to an identified body/unit within the certified operation.
- 2.3 Operator – an individual, organization, or business enterprises responsible for ensuring that the operation meets, and continues to meet the requirements on which the certification is based.
- 2.4 Surveillance – a systematic iteration of conformity assessment activities as a basis for maintaining the validity of the statement of conformity.

3. Functions and activities for an organic certification scheme

The organic certification scheme includes at least the activities listed in Table 1 of ISO/IEC 17067:2013 as follows:

- 3.1 Selection, including planning and preparation of activities, specifications of requirements, e.g. normative documents, sampling, as applicable;
- 3.2 Determination of characteristics, as applicable through: (a) Testing, (b) Inspection, (c) Design appraisal, (d) Assessment of services/processes, and (e) Other determination activities, e.g. verification;
- 3.3 Review - Examining the evidence of conformity obtained during the determination stage to establish whether the specified requirements have been met;
- 3.4 Decision on certification - Granting, maintaining, extending, reducing, suspending, withdrawing certification; and
- 3.5 Attestation, licensing - Issuing a certificate of conformity or other statement of conformity (attestation).

4. General Requirements for Certification Body

- 4.1 A Government certification body (CB) should be competent to take all necessary steps to ensure the consistent operation, integrity, impartiality, and independence of its certification systems following the principles of ISO/IEC 17065.
- 4.2 Non-governmental CB should be officially recognized by its national competent authority following the principles of ISO/IEC 17065, or accredited in accordance with ISO/IEC 17065 by AMS national accreditation body.

5. Standard and Normative Documents

The ASEAN Member States (AMS) should identify applicable standards and normative documents against which the produce and products are evaluated.

6. General Requirements for Applicant for Certification

- 6.1 Refer to the requirements given in Clause 4.1.1 (Legal Requirements) and 4.1.2 (Certification agreement) of ISO/IEC 17065.
- 6.2 The organic certification system should be based on written agreements, with clear responsibilities of all parties involved in the chain of operations for production of an organic produce and/or product.
- 6.3 The operators should sign contracts/agreements requiring them to:
 - 6.3.1 Follow the applicable organic agriculture standard/s and relevant regulatory requirements as identified by the AMS, and other documents such as certification scheme or certification process;
 - 6.3.2 Give access to the CB or designated authority and provide any necessary information for inspection purposes, e.g. access to:
 - all relevant units and facilities of the organic operation including the non-organic production and handling units owned or managed by the operator;
 - accounts and sales related records of the organic operation for the purposes of traceability of origin, nature and quantities of all raw materials bought, and the use of such materials. In addition, written and/or documentary accounts of the nature, quantities and consignees of all agricultural products sold should be accessed; and
 - its record-keeping system adapted to the scope of certification that enables the CB to retrieve information necessary for verification of the production, storage, processing, purchase, and sale; and other relevant documentation to provide adequate audit/inspection trails and traceability of organic produce and/or

products.

6.3.3 Inform the CB of all complaints received by the certified clients relating to the certified products.

6.3.4 Notify the CB of any change that may affect the ability of the operator to conform with applicable certification requirements-

Examples of changes may refer to changes in group member, plantation areas, or type of products, etc.

6.4 Provide the CB with information regarding any previous organic certification and/or other certification scheme currently undertaken or in progress.

6.5 Provide the CB with the updated information on the scope of certification, which the operator maintains or intends to maintain for ensuring organic integrity.

7. Resource Requirements

7.1 Refer to requirements given in Clause 6 (Resource Requirements) of ISO/IEC 17065.

7.2 The CB should ensure that its personnel have sufficient knowledge on the applicable organic agriculture standard/s and relevant regulatory requirements identified by the AMS.

7.3 The following criteria should be applied for CB personnel in organic certification, which should include but not limited to, as appropriate, the initial review personnel, inspection and evaluation personnel, technical reviewers, and decision-makers. These personnel should have:

7.3.1 Sufficient background and knowledge in agriculture and/or food technology. The requirements may vary based on the functions undertaken by the personnel and the product category. Knowledge may be gained typically through educational qualification and/or experience, adequate to provide knowledge of organic products and processes. Personnel should be qualified on the basis of use of appropriate evaluation methods.

NOTE: A number of evaluation methods like review of records; feedback; interviews; observations/witness; and examination can be used to evaluate knowledge and skills

7.3.2 Received appropriate training with respect to organic agriculture, food, processing, trade, specific production areas (e.g. mushroom production) and the applicable organic agriculture standard/s and relevant regulatory requirements as identified by the AMS.

7.3.3 Gained experience through participation in sufficient number of inspection/s or its equivalent man-days as defined by the CB for personnel involved in inspection and evaluation activities.

- 7.4 The CB should actively identify training at entry level as well as based on needs identified through systematic performance reviews and provide, as necessary, training to its staff on the requirements of the applicable organic agriculture standard/s and relevant regulatory requirements identified by the AMS, the certification scheme, and relevant methodologies. Adequacy of such training plans, training and evaluation records, and related materials should be maintained.
- 7.5 The performance assessment should be done regularly for each evaluator/inspector. The performance assessment should include observation of a sufficient number of on-site inspection/s or its equivalent man-days as defined by the CB, typically within a three-year period, unless there is sufficient supporting evidence that the inspector is continuing to perform competently.

8. Process Requirements

- 8.1 Refer to the requirements given in Clause 7 (Process Requirements) of ISO/IEC 17065.

8.2 General

8.2.1 Any organic certification scheme offered—by the CB should have defined requirements for CB's functioning as well as certification process requirements.

8.2.2 The organic certification scheme should take into consideration explicitly the following aspects as applicable: retroactive recognition of conversion period, separation and inspection of non-organic production units, parallel /split production, group certification, and wild collection.

8.2.3 The CB should have available and implement policies and procedures for risk-based inspections, management of deviations, non-conformities and corrective actions, exchange of information between CBs and competent authorities.

8.3 Application.

When accepting an application, the CB receiving the application should ensure availability of all the background information with respect to the operator, and whether another CB had denied certification to the applying operator. The CB should also have a documented system for corroborating the information received from the CB who had previously certified the applying operator.

8.4 Inspection

8.4.1 The CB should ensure that a full physical inspection is undertaken prior to certification of the organic operation. An inspection report should be drawn up after each visit.

8.4.2 The inspection protocol of the CB should at the very minimum undertake the following:

- a) Assessment of the production, processing, and handling system by means of visits to facilities, fields, and storage units (which may also include visits to non-organic production units);
- b) Review of records and accounts in order to verify flow of goods (production/sales reconciliation on farms, input/output reconciliation, and the trace back audits in processing and handling facilities);
- c) Identification of areas of risk to organic integrity; and
- d) Verification that changes to the standards and to the requirements of the certification body have been effectively implemented, and that corrective actions have been taken.

8.5 **Sampling**

8.5.1 Sample analyses and testing should serve as supporting tools to verify information; the organic certification scheme of the CB should set out standard procedures for taking samples, where necessary, based on perceived risks.

8.5.2 The CB should have documented policies and procedures aligned with the regulations of the AMS relevant to establishing organic integrity. These should generally include the following:

- a) System for identifying cases in which samples should be taken for analysis if use of a substance, prohibited by the standards, is suspected.
- b) A procedure on taking samples and sending them to the laboratory.
- c) The number of samples to be taken and the frequency of sampling.

8.6 **Testing**

Samples taken by the CB should be analysed in ISO/IEC 17025 accredited testing laboratories. In the absence of laboratories accredited to ISO/IEC 17025, samples should be analyzed by testing laboratories recognized by the AMS.

8.7 **Certification Decision**

The CB grants organic certification to the applicant upon satisfaction of the criteria for certification.

8.8 Certification Documentation

The CB should issue official organic certification document/s to each operator containing the following information:

- 8.8.1 For individual certification, the name, address, number of certified farms/plots, and total certified area of the operator whose organic produce and/or products are the subject of organic certification. In case of multiple crops, a crop list could be provided as an attachment. The operator should notify the CB for any change in the organic management system (e.g. change in the size of the area);
- 8.8.2 In case of group certification, name of the group, address, total area, and the name of all group members as well as their addresses, locations, and status (organic or in-conversion) of organic certification of each member should be included as an attachment;
- 8.8.3 Unit certified, e.g. processing unit, packaging unit, and/or storage unit;
- 8.8.4 Name and address of the CB that issued the organic certification documents;
- 8.8.5 The scope of the certification granted, including:
 - a) Organic produce and/or products certified, which should be identified by type or range of products. In case of group certification, these information can be described in an attachment;
 - b) Unit certified, e.g. processing unit, and/or packaging unit;
 - c) Applicable organic agriculture standard/s and/or applicable certification scheme that is/are the basis for the organic certification; and
 - d) Effective and expiry dates, or period of validity.
- 8.8.6 Any other information required by the AMS.

8.9 Surveillance

The CB should implement a system and documented procedures in conducting operator risk-based surveillance activities including:

- 8.9.1 A full physical audit/inspection is undertaken, at least once a year, of the organic production, post-harvest, processing, handling, packaging, and storage unit/s.
- 8.9.2 Additional, occasional, and unannounced visits/inspections should also be undertaken according to need or at random, with frequencies in accordance with the regulations of the AMS.
- 8.9.3 In the case of reported frauds, mislabeling and other complaints, the CB should conduct necessary investigation including, but not limited

to, inspection and document review, depending on the nature of reported case.

NOTE: See related Clauses 17 and 18 of this Guide

9. Group Certification

9.1 Scope

The CB should limit the scope of group certification to groups that fulfill the following requirements:

9.1.1 The group have registered operations with a functional internal control system;

NOTE: This requirement does not limit the arrangement to farmers. Other operations organized collectively may also be included provided the other requirements in 9.1 are met.

9.1.2 Large farming units, simple processing units, and traders may be included as part of a group but should be inspected directly by the CB;

9.1.3 Simple on-farm processing and storage units may be included as part of a sample inspection arrangement;

9.1.4 No group of processing units and traders can apply for group certification;

9.1.5 Group members should have geographic proximity;

9.1.6 The group should be large enough and have sufficient resources to support a functional internal control system (ICS) that assures compliance of individual members with production standards in an objective and transparent manner; and

NOTE: The requirement refers to the three factors that the size of the group should ensure sufficient resources, transparency, and impartiality. The CB must determine whether the group is large enough to satisfy these factors.

9.1.7 The group should have coordinated marketing.

9.2 Requirements.

Group certification should require that at least:

9.2.1 The entity should be the group as a whole. This means that group members cannot use the organic certification independently (i.e. marketing as separate individual member outside of the group's internal control);

9.2.2 An effective and documented internal control system (ICS) should be in place, and there are competent personnel managing and implementing the system. The system should include a documented management structure of the ICS;

- 9.2.3 A general description of the operation with the definition of the type of group (such as cooperative, association, exporter with producers under contract);
- 9.2.4 Internal inspection protocol should be described and implemented. Audits/inspections of all group members for practices in accordance with Clause 8 of this Guide should be carried out by the ICS at least annually;
- 9.2.5 Internal inspectors should be designated by the group to carry out internal audits/inspections. The internal inspectors should receive suitable training. The ICS should set out rules to manage potential conflicts of interest of the internal inspectors;
- 9.2.6 A clear description and identification of the production units and group members should be recorded, updated, and made available at all times;
- 9.2.7 A mechanism to include new members and to implement sanctions on non-conforming group members should be in place;
- 9.2.8 The relationship of the management body to each of the group member, the relationship between group members, and conflict of interest should be evaluated by the CB prior to the issuance of the certificate;
- 9.2.9 Risk assessments should be conducted; and
- NOTE: Risk assessments should be done by both the CB and the group.*
- 9.2.10 The core documentation is complete, which includes:
- a) Appropriate maps/sketches;
 - b) A complete list of the group members and status of the members to the ICS;
 - c) Farm/field and/or processing records;
 - d) Yield estimates; and
 - e) Signed member agreements stating obligation from all group members to comply with applicable organic agriculture standard/s and relevant regulatory requirements identified by the AMS.

9.3 **Contracts**

Group certification should require that the management body of the group sign a written contract with the CB specifying the responsibilities of the group. The contract should require that the group management obtain signed

obligations from all group members to comply with the applicable organic agriculture standards and relevant regulatory requirements identified by the AMS and to allow internal and external inspections.

9.4 **Access to Standards**

All group members should have access to the applicable or relevant sections of organic agriculture standards and relevant regulatory requirements presented in a way adapted to their language and knowledge.

9.5 **External Inspection**

The CB should conduct external inspections as follows:

9.5.1 Inspection of the group should be carried out by the CB at least annually;

9.5.2 The inspection visit should include both an inspection for conformity with the applicable organic agriculture standard/s and regulatory requirements as identified by the AMS and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the ICS;

9.5.3 Inspection of a sample of group members should be undertaken by the CB;

9.5.4 Determining the risk classification of the group and sample number of group members subject to external inspection should take into account the following aspects:

a) The number of operations in the group; and

b) The outcomes of the risk assessment of the management structure (low, medium or high risk) which include, but are not limited to:

1) The value of the produce/products and the difference between the price of the organic and non-organic produce/product;

2) Degree of similarity of the production systems and the crops within the group;

3) Risks for co-mingling/mixing and/or contamination; and

4) Experience of the group, (i.e. number of years in operation, number of new members registered annually, nature of problems within the organization, potential conflicts of interest, and staff turnover).

c) Determination of the number of group members subject to annual external inspection for group certification should be calculated by taking the square root of n , where n is the total

number of group members or in accordance with the AMS relevant regulations.

- d) The sample should be selected based on a combination of risk-based and random selection. The risk factors may include the number of years an individual group member has been into organic production, post-harvest, processing, handling, packaging and storage, their size, location and/or identified risk.
- e) The production, post-harvest, processing, handling, packaging, and storage units visited by the external inspection body must be predominantly different from one year to the other. Larger production units, processors, and exporters should be inspected annually by the CB.

9.6 Evaluation and Assessment of ICS

The following should be applied in evaluating the ICS:

- 9.6.1 Internal inspections/audits of all group members should be carried out at least annually; new group members are included only after internal inspections/audits, according to procedures agreed with the CB;
- 9.6.2 Sample external inspections/audits should be carried out with the relevant documents from the internal inspection/audits, and the methods and results of the internal inspection/audits should be compared with the results of the external inspection to determine whether the inspections/audits of the ICS have adequately addressed the compliance of group members;
- 9.6.3 Instances of non-conformity have been dealt appropriately by the ICS and according to a documented system of sanctions;
- 9.6.4 Adequate records of inspections have been maintained by the ICS;
- 9.6.5 The group members understand the applicable organic agriculture standard/s and relevant regulatory requirements as identified by the AMS; and
- 9.6.6 The external inspector is encouraged to witness a number of internal control inspections.

9.7 Records

The CB should maintain basic data on all group members, in addition to certification records of the group as a whole. A standardized form containing the basic data should be completed and updated by the group management which includes: identification code, name, location (at least on an area map), year of entrance into the certification system, date of last internal and

external inspection, number of hectares, certified crops, sales, yield estimates, and status of the group members.

9.8 Responsibility

The group should be responsible for conformity of all group members. The ICS should include the application of sanctions to individual group members who do not conform with the applicable organic standards and relevant regulatory requirements as identified by the AMS. The group should inform the CB of the irregularities and non-conformities found, as well as the corrective actions implemented.

9.9 Sanctions

In the event of non-conformity by the group and/or its group members, sanctions should be issued commensurate with the severity of the non-conformity. Failure of the ICS to detect and act on non-conformances should invoke sanctions on the group as a whole. In cases where it finds the ICS to be lacking in reliability and effectiveness, the CB should apply sanctions to the group as a whole, including, in case of serious deficiencies, the withdrawal of the organic certification of the group.

10. Publicly available information

- 10.1 Refer to requirements given in Clause 4.6 (Publicly Available Information) and 7.8 (Directory of certified products) of ISO/IEC 17065.
- 10.2 The CB operating the organic certification scheme should have processes for informing all concerned, including the prospective and present certified, operators about the applicable organic agriculture standard/s and relevant regulatory requirements as identified by the AMS.
- 10.3 The CB should clearly identify the standards and requirements used for the different product categories. These should be available to the operator and publicly accessible.
- 10.4 The detailed information regarding applicable organic agriculture standard/s and relevant regulatory requirements as identified by the AMS against which the products will be certified and the certification processes, as well as schedule of fees should be made available through publications and electronic media.

11. Confidentiality

Refer to requirements given in Clause 4.5 (Confidentiality) of ISO/IEC 17065.

12. Use of Licenses, Certificates and Marks of Conformity

- 12.1 Refer to requirements given in Clause 4.1.3 (Use of license, certificates and marks of conformity) and Clause 4.4 (Non-discriminatory conditions) of

ISO/IEC 17065.

NOTE 1: Guidance on the use of certificates and marks permitted by the CB can be obtained from ISO/IEC Guide 23

NOTE 2: ISO/IEC 17030 provides requirements for the use of third-party marks

- 12.2 The conditions for use of certification scheme mark and validity of organic certificate should be in accordance with the rules and regulations of the AMS e.g. the CB that certified the last process (processing, packing, labeling) should be identified.
- 12.3 The validity of certificates for organic certification scheme should be in accordance to the AMS relevant regulations on organic agriculture.
- 12.4 The CB should:
 - 12.4.1 Exercise control over the use and display of certificates and logos that it can authorize operators to use;
 - 12.4.2 Be able to request an operator to discontinue the use of certificates and logos that it authorizes an operator to use based on the provisions of the agreement;
 - 12.4.3 Apply suitable actions to deal with incorrect/falsified references to the certification system or misleading use of certificates or logos that it authorizes operators to use.

13. Extension, reduction, suspension, reinstatement, withdrawal or transfer of certification

Refer to requirements given in Clause 7.10 (Changes affecting certification) and Clause 7.11 (Termination, reduction, suspension or withdrawal of certification) of ISO/IEC 17065.

14. Records

The CB should maintain records to demonstrate that the certification procedures on organic production, handling, storage, processing, and packaging have been effectively implemented. Such records should include but not limited to:

- 14.1 Full description of the production, handling, storage, processing, and packaging units;
- 14.2 It should also maintain information about individual members of a group as well as the certified organic unit's sub-contractors, if any.

15. Complaints and Appeals

- 15.1 Refer to requirements given in Clause 7.13 of ISO/IEC 17065 (Complaints and Appeals).
- 15.2 The competent authority should also establish policies and procedures for

the resolution of complaints received from the general public such as consumers including operators about the operation of the CB or certification activities as well as complaints against operators.

16. Non-conforming Produce/Products

The CB should define procedure(s) that should be implemented when a produce or product no longer fulfils certification requirements, such as product recall and/or providing information to the market. The CB should ensure that appropriate corrective actions have been carried out satisfactorily.

NOTE: See also ISO Guide 27 (Guidelines for corrective action to be taken by a CB in the event of misuse of its certification mark of conformity)

17. Fraudulent Claim of Certification

Sanctions and penalties for fraudulent claims of certification including misuse of certification marks and mislabeling should be enforced in accordance with the rules and regulations of the AMS.

18. Management Systems

Refer to the requirements given in Clause 8 (Management system requirements) of ISO/IEC 17065.

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