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**GUIDANCE MANUAL FOR
USING THE ALIGNMENT ASSESSMENT TOOL
FOR
ASEAN STANDARD ON ORGANIC AGRICULTURE
(ASOA)**

GUIDANCE MANUAL FOR USING THE ALIGNMENT ASSESSMENT TOOL

Introduction

For the alignment activities, the Philippines used the tool developed by the International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence for Organic Agriculture Systems (ITF), which was further modified by the Task Force on ASEAN Standard for Organic Agriculture (TF-ASOA). The Alignment Assessment Tool was designed to provide an initial self-assessment of the National Standard against the ASEAN Standard. Further, it enables the users to identify points for clarification/modification or have action lines for provisions of the national standard that deviate from the regional standard.

I. **Scope & Purpose**

This document provides guidelines in filling-up the Alignment Assessment Tool in assessing the alignment of the ASEAN Member States (AMS) National Standard for Organic Agriculture with the ASEAN Standard for Organic Agriculture (ASOA). The purpose of this document is to provide common understanding among AMS in using the adopted Alignment Assessment tool.

II. **Objectives of the Alignment Assessment** (Alignment with the ASOA)

The objectives of the Alignment Assessment is to align the AMS' National Standard and other regulations for Organic Agriculture with the ASOA of the Expert Working Group on Organic Agriculture (EWG-OA). In order to achieve this end, the following objectives are to be met by the AMS:

1. Provide self-assessment on the alignment assessment tool;
2. Review the self-assessment conducted by other AMS (peer review);
3. Resolve issues that may occur during peer-review; and
4. Group Validation to determine the degree of alignment of AMS' National Standard for Organic Agriculture against the ASOA.

III. **Guidelines**

The first column is the ASOA – where provisions of the base standard are written. The second column is the AMS national standard and other regulations – where corresponding provisions of the national standards are filled-in relevant to the requirements in the Base standard (ASOA). Reviewers are required to determine the degree of alignment in whether it is fully aligned (E) or the national standard has a higher or more stringent requirements (A); or not aligned (N) including the declaration that the national standard has omitted or does not have a corresponding provision with that of the Base Standard. Besides the line by line

review of the provisions, the alignment of the national standard to the ASOA for each sub-section is to be determined based on the fulfilment of the objectives of the ASOA.

A column for justification or clarification is on the 4th column (example: that another law or standard covers the provision; or having more stringent provisions in the national standard due to religious requirements such as Halal, etc).

Step A: Self-Assessment

- A certain requirement is assessed by ticking the corresponding box under the **Self-Assessment column**.
- The following serves as legend for filling up the alignment assessment tool:
 - E - aligned; have equivalent requirement in the national standard
 - A - if the requirement/s of the national standards is/are higher than the ASOA requirements; or if there are additional requirements from the national standard
 - N - Not aligned
- Relevant reference/legislations/regulations of the AMS should also be cited as deemed appropriate in meeting the requirements of the ASOA. This can be recorded in the Justification column
- Alignment assessment may include following cases:

Case 1: ASOA requirement is broader

A specific ASOA requirement is met by several corresponding requirements in AMS' National Standard for Organic Agriculture. In such cases, it will be deemed aligned, and E will be ticked for several corresponding requirements of AMS' National Standard. Otherwise, if one of the corresponding requirements is not included, it is deemed as not aligned (N).

Example:

Sections and Requirements in the ASOA	Corresponding Requirements in National Standard & Other Regulations	Self-Assessment
II.1 There shall be a period of at least 12 months organic management for annuals and 18 months for perennials that meets all the requirements of these standards before the resulting product can be considered organic. The conversion period can be extended based on the identification and evaluation of	4.1.1.5 Length of crop conversion period Plant products can be certified organic when the full requirements of these Standards have been met: - for annual crops: at least twelve (12) months before the start of the production cycle; - for perennials: at least eighteen (18) months of management according to the full standards	E <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">X</div> *Only one tick for the two AMS requirements. If the 2 nd one is not included, it is

relevant issues and risks.	requirements before the first harvest	deemed (N) not aligned.
	4.1.1.10 Lands that have been heavily treated with synthetic chemicals shall undergo conversion for a minimum of three (3) years before the start of the production cycle. The competent authority decides whether this rule applies on a specific site and the required test to confirm. In such cases, the farmer should be able to provide results of contaminant analysis, which include among others, pesticides, heavy metals, nitrate accumulation.	

Case 2: AMS' National Standard for Organic Agriculture requirement is broader

A specific requirement of AMS' national standard meets several ASOA requirements. In such cases, AMS' requirement is filled-into several corresponding rows/cells and assessed accordingly. Other references such as legislations and regulations should be cited as deemed appropriate under the justification/comment column.

Example:

Sections and Requirements in the ASOA	Corresponding Requirements in National Standard & Other Regulations	Self-Assessment	Justification/Comment
II.2 Organic management does not rely upon switching back and forth between organic and conventional management. Exceptions to this may only be made in cases where compelling reasons to cease organic management on the certified organic land are present and in these cases conversion requirements apply.	If the farm or a section of the farm being applied for conversion does not get converted at once or if a field is decertified, the responsible farmers have to ensure: - proper demarcation and identification of organically managed lands must be put in place. Land managed organically must be inspected for compliance to organic certification.	N <input type="checkbox"/> X	
II.3 Organic management completely and clearly separates the non-organic and organic parts and products of holdings with split	- that the organically farmed parts are identifiable and may be inspected for certification;	E <input type="checkbox"/> X	

<p>or parallel production, e.g. through physical barriers; management practices such as the production of different varieties or the timing of harvest; storage of inputs and products.</p>	<p>- that all farm records and accounting are identifiable for both farming systems; - simultaneous planting of organic and non-organic plants of the same variety within the organically managed areas is not allowed; - those converted areas are not switched back and forth from organic and non-organic management</p>		
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Case 3: ASOA requirement is addressed under different AMS' standard/regulation

A specific requirement of ASOA is not addressed by AMS' national standard for organic agriculture but provided under different AMS' standard/regulation. In such cases, AMS' requirement is filled-in to several corresponding rows/cells and assessed accordingly. Other references such as legislations and regulations should be cited as deemed appropriate under the justification/comment column.

Example:

Sections and Requirements in the ASOA	Corresponding Requirements in National Standard & Other Regulations	Self-Assessment	Justification/Comment
<p>II.5 Land clearing and preparation by burning vegetation is prohibited except where it is part of an established and well managed traditional management practice e.g. slash and burn shifting cultivation where it is to be restricted to a minimum.</p>	<p>Land clearing through burning is prohibited, as per Republic Act 8749 or the Clean Air Act of 1999.</p>	<p>E <input type="checkbox"/> X</p>	

Note:

For submissions, the submitting country must:

- Fill-in the name, contact details and country of the Focal Person and the date of self-assessment (YY/MM/DD) in the space provided in the Alignment Assessment Matrix.
- The AMS submits the self-assessment matrix including the English translation of AMS standard and other requirements to the Philippine Secretariat (Email: accreditation.bafs@gmail.com).

Figure 1. Designated space to be filled-out by the Assessor and Reviewers on the Alignment Assessment Tool.

Step B: Peer-Review

- There shall be two (2) reviewers to conduct peer-review: 1 Lead Reviewer and 1 Second Reviewer
- The Lead Reviewer shall be from a country that have an existing standard and certification in place and has experienced in using the alignment assessment tool.
- The designated Reviewers will simultaneously do the review of Self-Assessment Results.
- The Reviewers and the Country of the AMS national standard may need to meet either physically, via teleconference, or other means of electronic communication.
- The Reviewers must not review each other's standard.
- The choices for the assessment of alignment in the tool are:
 - E - aligned; have aligned requirement in the national standard
 - A - if the requirement/s of the national standards and other regulations is/are higher than the ASOA requirements; or if there are additional requirements from the national standard and other regulations
 - N - Not aligned
- For the Reviewers, mark only against the ASOA requirement. If the Reviewer's assessment is not the same with that of the Self-assessment, provide comments on the corresponding rows of AMS requirements as relevant under the "Justification/Comment" column.

Note:

For submissions of peer review, the Reviewer must:

- Fill-in the name, contact details of the Reviewer and the date (YY/MM/DD) in the space provided in the Alignment Matrix.
- The Reviewer submits the results of the peer review to the Philippine Secretariat
- The Philippine Secretariat transmits the results of the peer review to the country of the referred standard furnished the Reviewers.

Figure 1. Designated space to be filled-out by the Assessor and Reviewers on the Alignment Assessment Tool.

Step C: Resolution of Issues and Validation (Group)

- If necessary and applicable, issues identified and clarifications requested by the Reviewers will be discussed with the reviewed Country during the Workshop for the ASOA Alignment.
- The reviewed Country should prepare response to the issues/clarifications posed by the Reviewers and submit the Discussion/Position Paper to the Philippine Secretariat (Email: accreditation.bafs@gmail.com) for use as working document during the Workshop.

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- The reviewed assessment will be discussed in plenary by the Expert Working Group on Organic Agriculture for validations of the results of the review and to resolve unresolved issues, if any. All reviewed assessment will undergo group validation.
