



# Organic Certification and Accreditation Process

Sourav Roy<sup>1\*</sup> and Chandan Karak<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1&2</sup>Department of Vegetable Science, Faculty of Horticulture, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Mohanpur, Nadia

Corresponding Author: [sourav1995roy@gmail.com](mailto:sourav1995roy@gmail.com)

## Introduction

Organic certification is a certification process for producers of organic food and other organic agricultural products. In general, any business directly involved in food production can be certified, including seed suppliers, farmers, food processors, retailers and restaurants. A lesser known counterpart is certification for organic textiles or (Organic clothing) that includes certification of textile products made from organically grown fibres.

Requirements vary from country to country (List of countries with organic agriculture regulation) and generally involve a set of production standards for growing, storage, processing, packaging and shipping that include:

- Avoidance of synthetic chemical inputs (e.g., fertilizer, pesticides, antibiotics, food additives), irradiation and the use of sewage sludge.
- Avoidance of genetically modified seed.
- Use of farmland that has been free from prohibited chemical inputs for a number of years (often, three or more).
- For livestock, adhering to specific requirements for feed, housing and breeding.
- Keeping detailed written production and sales records (audit trail).
- maintaining strict physical separation of organic products from non-certified products.
- Undergoing periodic on-site inspections.

In some countries, certification is overseen by the government and commercial use of the term organic is legally restricted. Certified organic producers are also subject to the same agricultural, food safety and other government regulations that apply to non-certified producer.

Organic Accreditation authorizes private, foreign state organizations to certify farms or processing facilities. Certifying agents are accredited by the USDA and are responsible for making sure USDA organic products meet all organic standards.

Certified organic foods are not necessarily pesticide-free, as certain pesticides are allowed.

## Purpose

Organic certification addresses a growing worldwide demand for organic food. It is intended to assure quality and prevent fraud and to promote commerce. While such certification was not necessary in the early days of the organic movement, when small farmers would sell their produce directly at farmer's markets, as organics have grown in popularity, more and more consumers are purchasing organic food through traditional channels, such as super markets. As such, consumers must rely on third-party regulatory certification.

For organic producers, certification identifies suppliers of products approved for use in certified operations. For consumers, "certified organic" serves as a product assurance, similar to "low fat", "100% whole wheat" or "no artificial preservatives".

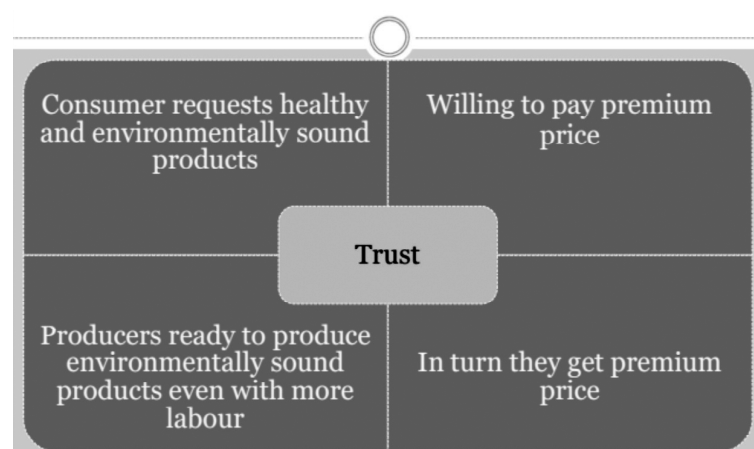


Certification is essentially aimed at regulating and facilitating the sale of organic products to consumers. Individual certification bodies have their own service marks, which can act as branding to consumers—a certifier may promote the high consumer recognition value of its logo as a marketing advantage to producers.

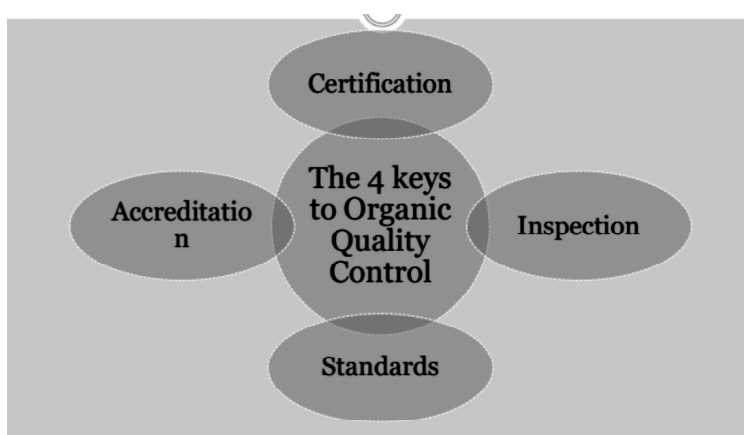
### Why Certification ?

- Third party assurance from producer to the consumer separated by distance
- For uniform label
- Assurance to the consumers that its concern for healthy food has been addressed.
- Effective marketing tool for Image, credibility, visibility/Transparency

### Balance of Interests



### The Organic Quality Control



**Methods-Third Party:** To certify a farm, the farmer is typically required to engage in a number of new activities, in addition to normal farming operations:

- **Study:** The organic standards, which cover in specific detail what is and is not allowed for every aspect of farming, including storage, transport and sale.
- **Compliance:** Farm facilities and production methods must comply with the standards, which may involve modifying facilities, sourcing and changing suppliers, etc.
- **Documentation:** Extensive paper work is required, detailing farm history and current set-up, and usually including results of soil and water tests.
- **Planning:** A written annual production plan must be submitted, detailing everything from seed to sale: seed sources, field and crop locations, fertilization and pest control activities, harvest methods, storage locations, etc.
- **Inspection:** Annual on-farm inspections are required, with a physical tour, examination of records, and an oral interview.
- **Fee:** An annual inspection/certification fee (currently starting at \$400–\$2,000/year, in the US and Canada, depending on the agency and the size of the operation). There are financial assistance programs for qualifying certified operations.
- **Record-keeping:** Written, day-to-day farming and marketing records, covering all activities, must be available for inspection at any time.

In addition, short-notice or surprise inspections can be made and specific tests (e.g., soil, water, plant tissue) may be requested.

For first-time farm certification, the soil must meet basic requirements of being free from use of prohibited substances (synthetic chemicals, etc., for a number of years. A conventional farm must adhere to organic



standards for this period, often two to three years. This is known as being in transition. Transitional crops are not considered fully organic.

## **The Concepts of Standards, Certification and Labelling**

### **Standardization**

One of the main objectives of standardization is usually that everybody adheres to the same standards, i.e., the same procedures or product specifications. This may ease logistical procedures, facilitate trade, prevent consumer deception and improve quality. It is easy to see how standardization facilitates trade and other logistical procedures, if only by looking at the complications that different weight measurement systems can cause. However, increase in quality is not an automatic result of standardization. This will only be achieved when the advocated standard is a "high" standard, i.e., the requirements are an improvement in relation to common practice.

### **Standards**

Standards are defined by ISO as documented agreements containing technical specifications or other precise criteria to be used consistently as rules, guidelines or definitions, to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose.

From this definition it becomes clear that standards are not only used for standardization, but also as "guidelines", i.e., for capacity building.

Product standards are specifications and criteria for the characteristics of products. Process standards are criteria for the way the products are made. Social and environmental standards in agriculture are essentially process standards. These process criteria might or might not influence the characteristics of the end products.

Process standards can be further divided into management system standards and performance standards. Management systems standards set criteria for management procedures, for example for documentation or for monitoring and evaluation procedures. They do not set criteria for the performance of the management system in terms of what actually happens in the field or the packing station. Performance standards, in contrast, set verifiable requirements for factors such as the non-use of certain pesticides or the availability of sanitary services.

Setting international standards has proven to be very difficult due to the variety of circumstances that exist around the world. This is especially true for agricultural practices, which have to respond to differences in climate, soils and ecosystems and are an integral part of cultural diversity. In response to this diversity, international environmental and social standards are often normative standards, i.e., generic standards or guidelines to be used as a framework by local standard-setting or certification bodies to formulate more specific standards. It has to be noted that environmental and social standards in agriculture usually do not have the purpose of standardization purpose, but are developed to improve environmental and social sustainability in the variety of existing farming and agro-trade systems.

### **Certification**

Certification is a procedure by which a third party gives written assurance that a product, process or service is in conformity with certain standards. Certification can be seen as a form of communication along the supply chain. The certificate demonstrates to the buyer that the supplier complies with certain standards, which might be more convincing than if the supplier itself provided the assurance.

The organization performing the certification is called a certification body or





certifier. The certification body might do the actual inspection, or contract the inspection out to an inspector or inspection body. The certification decision, i.e., the granting of the written assurance or "certificate", is based on the inspection report, possibly complemented by other information sources.

Certification is always done by a third party. The verification is done and the assurance is provided by a party without direct interest in the economic relationship between the supplier and buyer. An internal control is a first-party verification. When a buyer verifies if the supplier adheres to a standard, it is second-party verification.

It is important to note that third-party verification does not automatically guarantee impartiality or absence of conflicts of interest. First, the standard-setting can be done by any party. The producer (first party) can set the standard, in which case the producer's interests are likely to be reflected in the standard. Also the buyer (second party) can set the standard, in which case business interests will be reflected in the standard. Second, if the standard-setting and certification body are one and the same body, this can also cause conflicts of interest. The standard-setting body would like to see high implementation rates of its standard, or have a bias against certain types of producers for ideological reasons, which can influence certification decisions. Third, a conflict of interest might arise depending on who pays for the certification costs. Commercial certification bodies face competition from other bodies and they might lose clients if they are too strict.

### Accreditation

The system of rules, procedures and management for carrying out certification, including the standards against which it is being certified, is called the certification programme. One certification body may execute several different certification programmes. To ensure

that the certification bodies have the capacity to carry out certification programmes, they are evaluated and accredited by an authoritative body. Certification bodies may have to be accredited by a governmental or parastatal institute, which evaluates compliance with guidelines set by ISO, the European Union or some other entity for the operation of certification and inspection bodies. In addition, standard-setting bodies might accredit certification bodies for the scope of their particular standard. When the standard-setting body has developed normative standards, they will evaluate whether the specific standard used by the certification body is in line with the generic standard and whether they are satisfied with the method of verification.

Certification and accreditation comes at a cost. The implementation of standards usually requires investments, but sometimes results in a reduction in production costs in the longer term. The possible effects of standard implementation and certification costs on production costs, revenues and farm economics.

### Labels

A certification label is a symbol indicating that compliance with standards has been verified. Use of the label is usually controlled by the standard-setting body. Where certification bodies certify against their own specific standards, the label can be owned by the certification body.

While the certificate is a form of communication between seller and buyer, the label is a form of communication with the end consumer. For this communication to be effective, the label must be meaningful. For the Consumer's Union in the United States of America, a meaningful label is not only backed up by a good certification system without conflicts of interest, but the system must also be transparent, information on the content and the organization behind the label must be

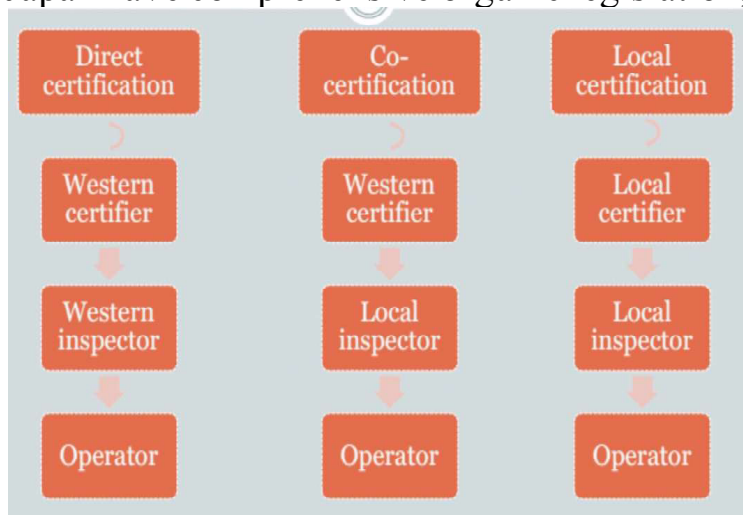


accessible and there should be opportunities for public comment. The Consumer's Union also advocates that the meaning of the label must be consistent across the range of products that carry that label.

### Certification of Exported Products

#### Certification Around the World

In some countries, organic standards are formulated and overseen by the government. The United States, the European Union and Japan have comprehensive organic legislation,

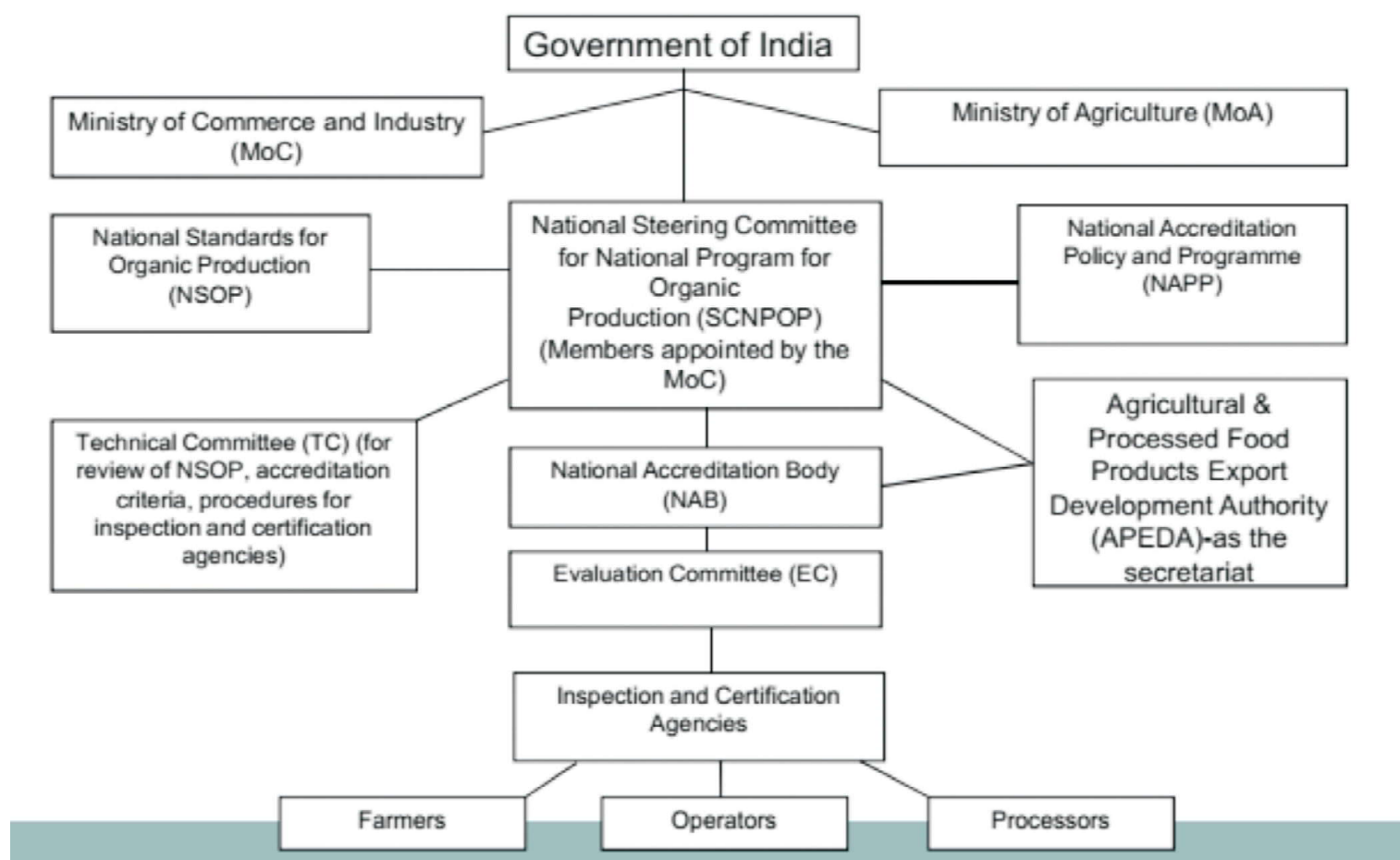


and the term "organic" may be used only by certified producers. In countries without organic laws, government guidelines may or may not exist, while certification is handled by non-profit organizations and private companies.

EU countries acquired comprehensive organic legislation with the implementation of the EU-Eco-regulation 1992. Certification is handled on the national level.

- In the United Kingdom, organic certification is handled by a number of organizations, of which the largest are the Soil Association and Organic Farmers and Growers. All the certifying bodies are subject to the regulations of the UK Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS), which itself is bound by EU legislation.
- In Sweden, organic certification is handled by the private corporation KRAV. In the US, the National Organic Program (NOP), was enacted as federal legislation in Oct. 2002. It restricts the

#### Programme for Organic Production (NPOP)





use of the term "organic" to certified organic producers (excepting growers selling under \$5,000 a year, who must still comply and submit to a records audit if requested, but do not have to formally apply). Certification is handled by state, non-profit and private agencies that have been approved by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In Canada, the government has published a national organic standard, but it is a guideline only, legislation is in process. Certification is provided by private sector organizations. In Quebec, provincial legislation provides government oversight of organic certification within the province, through the Quebec Accreditation Board (Conseil D'Accréditation Du Québec).

In Japan, the Japanese Agricultural Standard (JAS) was fully implemented as law in April, 2001. This was revised in November of 2005 and all JAS certifiers were required to be re-accredited by the Ministry of Agriculture.

In Australia, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) is the controlling body for organic certification because there are no domestic standards for organic produce within Australia. Currently the government only becomes involved with organic certification at export, meaning AQIS is the default certification agency.

Although there is no system for monitoring the labeling of organic produce sold within Australia, this primarily effects the retail public. Commercial buyers for whom this is an issue have simply taken the export system as a de facto standard and are willing to pay premium prices for produce from growers certified under the National schemes. As of 2006, there are seven AQIS-approved certifying organisations authorised to issue Organic Produce Certificates and in 2004 there were 2,345 certified operators. The

largest importer of Australia's organic produce (by weight) is Japan (33.59%), followed by the UK (17.51%), France (10.51%) and New Zealand (10.21%). The largest certifier of organic products is Australian Certified Organic, which is a subsidiary of Biological Farmers Australia, the largest organic farmer's 'collective in the country. In China, the China Green Food Development Center awards two Standards: A and AA, while the former standard does permit some use of synthetic agricultural chemicals, the latter is more stringent.

In India, Agricultural Processed Foods Export Development Authority (APEDA) under Ministry of Commerce is the controlling body for organic certification for export. Till date there are no domestic standards for organic produce within India. Currently 11 certification agencies have been authorized to undertake certification process under National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP). Although there is no system for monitoring the labelling of organic produce sold within India, this primarily effects the retail public. Commercial buyers for whom this is an issue have simply taken the export system as a de facto standard and are willing to pay premium prices for produce from growers certified under the NPOP. Internationally, equivalency negotiations are underway and some agreements are already in place, to harmonize certification between countries, facilitating international trade. There are also international certification bodies, including members of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), the Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) and Ecocert. Where formal agreements do not exist between countries, organic product for export is often certified by agencies from the importing countries, who may establish permanent foreign offices for this purpose. In 2006, India's organic certification process under NPOP has been granted equivalence





with European Union. It has also been recognized for conformity assessment by USDA's NOP.

### Inspection and Certification Process

- Appointment of Inspection and Certification bodies.
- Accreditation of Inspection and certification agency by NAB.
- Deployment of competent persons for audit.
- Undertaking inspection and certification.
- Annual Surveillance and Review of Inspection and Certification Agencies.
- Continuous improvement in system.
- Renewal of accreditation at 3 year interval.

### Activity for Certification by Accredited Agency

- Receipt of applications
- Providing standards and operational documents
- Agreement
- Demand for Fee
- Document audit
- Physical field inspection
- Risk assessment
- Compliance verification
- Reporting by inspector
- Review by reviewer
- Certification decision

### Inspection Methods

- Visits of facilities, fields, etc.
- Review of records and accounts.
- Calculation of input/output norms, production estimates etc.
- zssessment of production system.

- Interview with responsible persons.
- Risk assessment.
- Part Conversion and Parallel Production.
- Inspection for Use of Genetically Engineered Products.
- Use of off-farm inputs.



### AGRICULTURAL AND PROCESSED FOOD PRODUCTS EXPORT DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Department of Commerce,  
Ministry of Commerce & Industry,  
Govt. of India

### CERTIFICATE of

### Accreditation for Inspection and Certification of Organic Products

This is to certify that Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has conducted evaluation of certification programmes of the organisation listed below and have found them to be in accordance with the accreditation criteria laid down under the National Programme for Organic Production of the Government of India.

1. Name of the organisation: **TM, Tamil Nadu Organic Certification Department (TNOCD)**  
1424 A, Thangam Road  
Chennai-601211
2. Accreditation Number: **NPOP/NAB/0019**
3. Accreditation valid upto: **9/30/2012**

This certificate of accreditation is issued in accordance with Public Notice No 19 (RE-2001) 1997-2002 dated 11 June 2001 issued by the Director General of Foreign Trade, Govt. of India, New Delhi.

For and on behalf of APEDA,  
Place: **New Delhi**  
Date: **9/30/2009 (9/30/10/2009)**  
(CHAIRMAN)  
Jed Floor, NCUI Building, 3, Sirji Institutional Area,  
August Kranti Marg (Opp. Asiad Village), New Delhi 110 016 (India)  
Phone : (91-11) 6534175, 6514572, 6511219; Fax : 6534175; E-mail: org@apeda.com

### A Certificate of Accrediation for Inspection and Certification of Organic Products By A.P.D.E.A



**Organic Certification Logo of Different Countries**

### Organic Certification Agencies

There are two types of certification agencies -

- Indian certification agencies.
- International certification agencies.

#### Indian Certification Agencies

Government of India through Director General of Foreign Trade, New Delhi, allowed the export of organic products only if they are produced, processed and packed under a valid organic certificate issued by a certification agency accredited by one of the accredited agencies designated by the Government of India. The Government of India has already recognized the agencies viz.

#### Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export

|                               |                                                            |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Development Authority (APEDA) | <a href="http://www.apeda.com">www.apeda.com</a>           |
| Spice Board                   | <a href="http://w.indianspices.com">w.indianspices.com</a> |
| Coffee Board                  | <a href="http://ww.indiacoffee.org">ww.indiacoffee.org</a> |
| Tea Board                     | <a href="http://ww.teaboard.gov.in">ww.teaboard.gov.in</a> |

### International Certification Agencies

Imported organic produce from Latin America is subject to certification standards and guidelines just as stringent as produce produced in the United States. Under the US Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 (OFPA), the USDA is required to review the certifiers of imported organic produce, in order to ensure that they meet the requirements of the US National Organic Program (NOP).

Foreign certification agencies may apply directly to the USDA for recognition and are evaluated on the same criteria as domestic agencies. Alternately, foreign governments may apply to the USDA or the US government for recognition of equivalency in their organic oversight program. Once accreditation or recognition is granted, organic products produced under the supervision of the certifying agent or foreign government will be eligible for import to the US as certified organic. The following are the some of the International agencies involved in certification of organic products.

#### a. Argencert

Argentina's leading certification agency was created in 1992. In 1997, Argencert became the first Argentine agency accredited by IFOAM.

#### b. California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)

CCOF's purpose is to promote and support organic agriculture in California and elsewhere.

#### c. International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)

The federation's main function is coordinating the network of the organic movement around the world. IFOAM is a democratic, grassroots oriented federation.

#### d. The Ecological Farming Association

Formerly the Committee for Sustainable Agriculture is a nonprofit educational organization that promotes ecologically sound agriculture.





**e. Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF)**

Sponsors research related to organic farming practices, disseminates research results to organic farmers and to growers interested in adopting organic production systems, and educates the public and decision-makers about organic farming issues.

**f. Organic Trade Association**

It is a national association representing the organic industry in Canada and the United States, Members include growers, shippers, processors, certifiers, farmer associations, brokers, consultants, distributors and retailers.

**g. Community Alliance with Family Farmers**

CAFF political and educational campaigns are building a movement of rural and urban people who foster family- scale agriculture that cares for the land, sustains local economics, and promotes social justice.

**h. Institute for Marketecology (IMO)**

It is one of the first and most renowned international agencies for inspection, certification and quality assurance of ecofriendly products. Since more than 20 years, IMO has been active in the field of organic certification but it is also expert in the sectors of natural textiles, sustainable forestry, and social accountability monitoring. IMO is closely co-operating with the popular private label Naturland (IFOAM accredited) and conducts Naturland inspections world-wide. In the field of agriculture, IMO is certifying all types of agricultural products, from traditional produce such as coffee, tea, spices, cocoa, nuts, fruits, vegetables, cereals, pulses, cotton, dairy products, honey, fish & seafood. This also includes all types of food processing, product manufacturing and international trading activities.

**i. SKAL**

SKAL International, Netherlands is a certification and inspection organisation, which certifies organic products, processes and inputs. Further sustainable forest/wood and textile are certified. Skal International operates worldwide in Western and Eastern Europe, South America and Southern Asia. Through the network of the shareholder nearly all countries in the world can be covered.

**j. ECOCERT INTERNATIONAL**

ECOCERT is an inspection and certification body accredited to verify the conformity of organic products against the organic regulations of Europe, Japan and the United States. The ECOCERT certification mark is one of the leading international organic certification marks, enjoying a good reputation and trusted by both consumers and the organic industry. Besides the certification of organic production, they provide all necessary information about the requirements of the organic regulations in Europe, Japan, United States and applicable national standards to their clients. They also assist in obtaining EU import authorizations for certified commodities.

**k. DEMETER**

DEMETER is a world wide certification system, used to verify to the consumers in over 50 countries that food or product has been produced by biodynamic methods. The Bio Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association is the certifier in New Zealand. (The Association registered DEMETER as a certification trademark in 1984.) Inspectors visit the operators (farmers and processors) annually to collect information about their methods. A committee of assessors then decides whether to grant certification. Most committee members are experienced biodynamic farmers and r processors. The Demeter Standards are a published statement of the allowed and the required practices for certified biodynamic operators. All persons



working towards Demeter certification are recommended to obtain a copy from the Bio Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association.

The organic certification and regulations create entrepreneurial opportunities for producers and processors that want to capitalize on consumer growth in the organic sector.

#### **Becoming certified organic helps producers and handlers**

- Receive premium prices for their products.
- Access fast-growing local, regional and international markets.
- Support local economies.
- Access additional funding and technical assistance.
- Market products to consumers.

#### **Conclusion**

The organic certification and regulations create entrepreneurial opportunities for producers and processors that want to capitalize on consumer growth in the organic sector. Becoming certified organic helps producers and handlers to receive premium prices for their products, to access fast-growing local, regional and international markets to support local economies to access additional funding and technical assistance.

#### **References**

- <https://www.indiamart.com/proddetail/organic-certification-consultancy>
- <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/benefits>
- [http://agritech.tnau.ac.in/org\\_farm/orgfarm\\_certification.html](http://agritech.tnau.ac.in/org_farm/orgfarm_certification.html)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organic\\_certification](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organic_certification)

❖❖