

INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE ON HARMONIZATION AND EQUIVALENCE
IN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE (ITF)



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



International Federation
of Organic Agriculture
Movements



United Nations
Conference on
Trade and
Development

Guide for Assessing Equivalence of Organic Standards and Technical Regulations

Definition & Considerations

ACCEPTANCE THAT DIFFERENT STANDARDS OR TECHNICAL
REGULATIONS ON THE SAME SUBJECT FULFILL COMMON OBJECTIVES.

- ✓ Use or reference to international standards
- ✓ Determination of equiv based on common objectives
- ✓ Clear process incl criteria for differences & verification
- ✓ Provision for exclusions
- ✓ Provision for transparency

WTO TBT agreement

Codex Guidelines for the Development of Equivalence Agreements Regarding Food
Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CAC/GL 34)

IFOAM system and organic sector experience

Parties

Principal parties: Parties seeking an equivalence agreement with each other

Base standard party: Party representing the base standard

Base standard: The standard or regulation that constitutes the basis of the
equivalence assessment

Evaluated standard party: Party representing the standard to be evaluated

Evaluated standard: The standard or regulation for which a determination of
equivalence with the Base standard is sought

Public stakeholders

Elements

3.1 Choice of Base standard (scenario dependent)
*International standard; importing standard /regulation;
participating standards in turn*

3.2 Role & appointment of expert assessment panel
Impartial assessment increase credibility and acceptance
- Joint appointment (preferably independent)
- Expert opinion (not decision)

3.3 Reference objectives
Agreement on a common set of reference objectives
- specified or deciphered from base standard / international norm
- preferably at the level of sub-headings, e.g. soil fertility

Elements

3.4 Scope of equivalence

- Geographical; product range and production process
- Related requirements in other documents

3.5 Method of assessment

Expert opinion to form the basis for decision [principal parties]

- invite public input to inform opinion
- consensus based / note differing opinion

3.6 Equivalence assessment based on set criteria

*Primary focus: Does evaluated standard meet agreed common
reference objectives*

Equivalence assessment considerations

**a. Equivalence to international standards as basis of
equivalence to the base standard as a whole**

**b. Equivalence of individual and/or subsets of related
requirements**

Comparison of individual requirements can be based on concise
or paraphrased versions of relevant text

Related requirements (individual differences & omissions) as a
set should be accepted as equivalent based on similar level of
fulfillment of relevant agreed objectives

Outcomes not prescriptive details

c. Criteria for variations of requirements

Acceptance of variations based on criteria

Criteria for variations

Need and Necessity to be established based one of the following:

- Climatic, geographical and/or structural conditions prevent application;
- Compliant methods are not achievable or feasible
- Application prevent further development of OA
- Application seriously contradict religious or cultural beliefs
- Application prohibit compliance with legal requirements or legitimate sector regulations;
- Application does not meet established consensus or 'state of the art' understanding of the organic sector

Considerations for acceptance

- documented standard setting process including open stakeholder consultation.
- equivalence to international standards and/or acceptance by other private standard setters or government authorities.
- variation maintain practices that clearly distinguish organic from non-organic production and processing practices.
- variation does not contradict specified objectives of the Base standard.
- variation does not prejudice fair competition, consumer trust in organic and international harmonization necessary for international trade.

Side by side - line by line comparison

SUBJECT: FERTILITY MANAGEMENT					
Category	Sub-category	EU Ref	EU Text	US Ref	US Text
Fertility	Tillage practices and erosion control	No reference		205.203.a	(a) The producer must select and implement tillage and cultivation practices that maintain or improve the physical, chemical, and biological condition of soil and minimize soil erosion.
EU compliant to US: Not equivalent US compliant to EU: Equivalent		Comment: EU does not address tillage practices or soil erosion. Comment: US exceeds EU requirement.			
Livestock manure	Source of manure	Annex I.A.2.1 Annex I.B.7.4	(b) incorporation of livestock manure from organic livestock production in accordance with the provisions and within the restrictions of part B, point 7.1, of this Annex; (c) incorporation of other organic material, composted or not, from holdings producing according to the rules of this Regulation. 7.4. Organic-production holdings may establish cooperation with other holdings and enterprises, which comply with the provisions of this Regulation, with the intention of spreading surplus manure from organic production. The maximum limit of 170 kg of Nitrogen from manure per year/hectare of agricultural area used, will be calculated on the basis of all of the organic-production units involved in such a cooperation.	No reference	
EU compliant to US: Equivalent US compliant to EU: Not equivalent		Comment: EU exceeds US requirement. Comment: US does not require manure to be from organic production units.			

Livestock manure	Restrictions on quantity applied	Annex 1.B.7	7.1. The total amount of manure, as defined in Directive 91/676/EEC(2), applied on the holding may not exceed 170 kg of Nitrogen per year/hectare of agricultural area used, the amount specified in Annex III of the above mentioned Directive. Where necessary, the total stocking density shall be reduced to avoid exceeding the limit expressed above. 7.2. To determine the appropriate density of livestock referred to above, the livestock units equivalent to 170 kg of Nitrogen per year/hectare of agricultural area used for the various categories of animals shall be set out by the competent authorities of the Member States, taking, as a guideline, the figures laid down in Annex VII. 7.3. Member States shall communicate to the Commission and to the other Member States, any deviation from these figures and provide the reasons justifying such changes. This requirement relates only to the calculation of the maximum number of livestock for the purposes of ensuring that the limit of 170 kg of Nitrogen from manure per year/hectare is not exceeded. It is without prejudice to the stocking densities for animal health and welfare purposes laid down in Section 8 and in Annex VIII.	205.239.c	(c) The producer of an organic livestock operation must manage manure in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water by plant nutrients, heavy metals, or pathogenic organisms and optimizes recycling of nutrients.
EU compliant to US: Equivalent US compliant to EU: Not equivalent		Comment: EU exceeds US requirement. Comment: US does not set specific limits on quantity of manure applied.			

Individual & Sub-set equivalence in meeting objectives

1 Base Std ref.	2 Base Standard (BS) content	3 Evaluated Standard (ES) content	4 Evaluated Std ref.	5 Assessment						6 Assessment party's comment
				E	V	A	O	U		
Sub-Section: Fertility management										
Objectives: To practice a management system that seeks to nourish plants primarily through the soil ecosystem and achieve nutrient balance.										
	Requirement: None	Tillage and cultivation practices must maintain or improve soil condition and minimize erosion.				X				
	Incorporation of livestock manure and organic material, composted or not, from organic holdings						X			Organic livestock sector not well developed in country
	Amount of manure, applied on the holding may not exceed 170 kg of Nitrogen per year/hectare of agricultural area used.	Operation must manage manure not to contaminate crops, soil, or water by plant nutrients, heavy metals, or pathogenic organisms and optimizes recycling of nutrients		X						Quantity limit is addressed by non-contamination and optimisation of recycling requirement
	Further explanation, interpretation or additional legal text	matching Evaluated Standard content								
Do the Evaluated standard requirements and related legal text in this section as a whole provide equivalent fulfillment of the applicable specified objectives of the Base standard?				Totals of equivalent, variant, additional, omissions & undecided requirements						National for equivalence assessment of set of requirements

Elements

3.7 Resolution

Principal parties decision base on Expert Panel opinion

Outstanding issues may be resolved through:

- Revision of non-equivalent issue and/or addition of other provisions. (evaluated standard party)
- Granting of a waiver or amendment (base standard party)
- Exclusion or reduction of scope (mutual agreement)

3.8 Transparency

Public notification of key events, description of process and rationale of outcome.

Inclusion of public stakeholder input in assessment encouraged

Scope & Use

Government to government or private sector use.

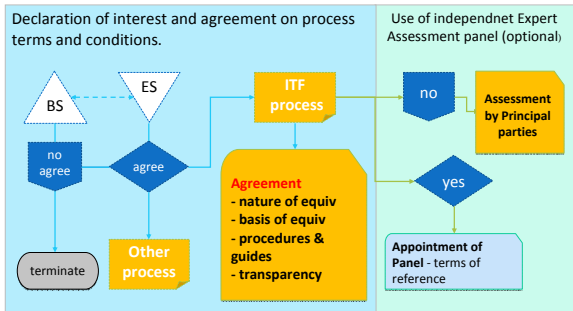
Apply only to Equivalence Assessment – not for preparing and maintaining agreement

May use only parts and/or adapted – points for consideration in setting the framework (process and criteria) before embarking on actual process

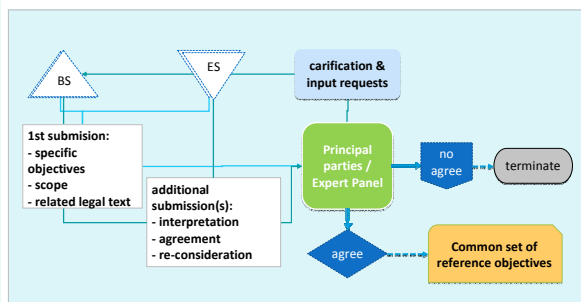
Structured approach – a method, not a norm

Request for permission to use not required

Procedure: Phase 1: Initiation



Procedure: Phase 2: Clarification of objectives, related legal texts and scope of equivalence



Procedure: Phase 3: Comprehensive comparison and equivalence assessment

