ASPECTS REGARDING THE STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS FOR THE ORGANIC PRODUCTION

ASPECTE PRIVIND STANDARDELE ŞI REGULAMENTELE PENTRU PRODUCȚIA ORGANICĂ

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Abstract. *The IFOAM standards are the framework for worldwide certification organisms and standard developing organisations. These organisations use them to develop their own certification standards, but they cannot certify themselves. The IFOAM basic standards (IBS) are developed by the IFOAM Standards Committee (SC), which cooperates with the IFOAM member organisations and other interested parties. The Codex Alimentarius Committee implements the Common Programme for Food Standards of FAO/WHO, whose aim is to protect consumers' health and ensure a fair food trade.*

Rezumat. *Standardele de bază IFOAM reprezintă un cadru pentru organismele de certificare şi organizaţiile de elaborare a standardelor din toată lumea; pe baza lor, acestea îşi elaborează propriile standarde de certificare şi nu se pot autocertifica. Standardele de bază ale IFOAM sunt elaborate de Comitetul pentru Standarde, în strânsă cooperare şi consultare cu organizaţiile membre ale IFOAM şi alte părţi interesate. Comisia Codex Alimentarius implementează Programul Comun de Standarde Alimentare al FAO/WHO, al cărui scop este acela de a proteja sănătatea consumatorilor şi de a asigura un comerţ alimentar corect.*

Key words*: demands, objectives, general principles, standards, certification*
Cuvinte cheie*: cerinţe, obiective, principii generale, standarde, certificare*

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, 24 million hectares were managed organically. In 2005, their number was increased to 26 million, and in 2006 to 31 million. In the same years, the global sales of organic food and beverages grew constantly with 7-9%. Organic development can be considered in several ways. One can either feel sorry for the loss of the small but well-defined organic sector or accept its challenges and built new advantages. Either way, one must understand that the change of the organic and the natural food market into the main trends was predictable.

The mega food manufacturers have studied the organic movement for years, but it remained just a small market niche for a long time. Initially, organic agriculture was performed on a small scale. In time, however, its popularity and benefits have grown and the business has flourished. Some say that today's organic movement has become "the victim of its own success". On the other hand, the interest of the larger corporations in the organic industry can be considered positive. More money and more power are not only the means to keep the market up, but also to expand it.

Studies show that large scale organic agriculture will not only boost the world food supply, but will also eradicate famine, especially in poor, far and arid regions where people can barely find what to eat.

While the donating agencies and the governments are searching for solutions to save the poorer and poorer population in the developing countries, organic agriculture is acknowledged as a rural development instrument, thanks to its direct and indirect contribution to the accomplishment of the developing goals of the millennium. Organic agriculture contributes directly to reducing poverty and enhancing food security and indirectly to

improving health and environment conditions in the local communities and a better living standard. For the global success of organic agriculture, it is important that the developed countries should establish agreements with the larger corporations, avoid internal divisions that weaken and undermine industry and frustrate the consumers and support the market penetration of the producers in the developing countries.

One should not forget that, thanks to its general approach, organic agriculture provides successful and efficient alternatives to conventional agriculture. In time, IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) has had to cope with difficulties that it managed to overcome because everybody worked for the same purposes. If all people and organisations interested in organic agriculture – governments, agricultural units, managers, farmers and consumers – combine efforts, they will find solutions to the most complicated problems.

In May 2007, the international conference on organic agriculture and food security was held in FAO's headquarters in Italy, Rome. For IFOAM, organic agriculture is a suitable production system for food security. The farmers are at the centre of the strategy, playing an important role in the decision-making process within the local communities. In the first place, every community must know its resources well. In the second place, it has to have the right to control them. Income and food security are gained by economic, social and ecologic diversity.

The farmers' associations developed their first organic production standards in the middle of the previous century. IFOAM published the first international standards in 1980. The first legislative initiatives were developed in European countries (Austria and France, for instance) in the 1980's. In 1991, the European Union passed the Organic Regulation (EEC) 2092/91 and developed standards with major implications in the international commerce, including not only production standards, but also labelling and inspection standards. Several countries from Europe, Latin America and Asia introduced organic legislation in the 1990's. In 1999, Codex Alimentarius sanctioned the first guidelines for organic plant production. Organic animal production was included in 2001. Most major economies have implemented organic production legislation. The USA National Organic Program was fully implemented in 2002 and the Chinese legal framework was finalised in 2005. 2006 was another dynamic year in developing the legal framework for the organic production. Both Canada and Paraguay passed their legislation and other states revised their bills or current laws.

The EEC 2092/91 revision on organic agriculture has drawn international attention. The process started at the end of 2005. The European Council for Agriculture and Fisheries sanctioned the new organic regulation in December 2006. The final decision was expected by the spring of 2007. As part of this process, the European Council revised the import regulations and introduced an approval system not only for the third countries, but also for the inspection organisms operating in them.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the past decade, organic agriculture promotion and development was debated and strongly underlined both at the global and the European level. Organic agriculture is part of a larger spectrum of methodologies that support the environment and are based upon the minimum reduction of external inputs, avoidance of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Organic production systems are founded on specific and accurate production standards that intend to create optimal agro systems easy to support socially, ecologically and economically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

IFOAM Basic Standards. IFOAM Basic Standards (IBS) decide how organic products are cultivated, produced, processed and manipulated. They reflect the current state of organic

production and processing methods. IBS Standards are the worldwide framework for the certification organisms and the standard development organisations; based on these standards, they develop their own certification standards, though they cannot certify themselves. In close cooperation with the IFOAM member organisations and other interested institutes, the IFOAM Standards Committee develop the IBS. These are presented as General Principles, Recommendations, Basic Standards and Derogations. Currently, IFOAM is revising the IFOAM Organic Guarantee System, one of its activities being the complete revision of the IBS.

IFOAM basic standards reflect the current state organic production and production methods. They should not be treated as final, but as a progressing activity that contributes to organic agriculture development worldwide. IBS are not enough for certification. They are the framework of the worldwide certification organism/standard development organisations that develop their own certification standards. These standards will take into account the local conditions and will be more detailed than IBS. IBS have the following structure: General Principles, Recommendations, Basic Standards and Derogations. The General Principles are general aims of organic production and procession. The Recommendations are suggested standards, but not necessarily required. The standards are the minimum requirements that must be included in the certification standards.

Codex Alimentarius. The need of clear and harmonious regulations was felt not only within private organisms, IFOAM and government authorities, but also FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) and WHO and during the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). FAO and WHO consider that the international guidelines for organically produced foodstuff are important for consumer protection and as information that facilitates trade. They are also useful for governments that intend to develop regulations in the organic area, especially in the developing countries and countries undergoing a transition process. In 1991, The *Codex Alimentarius* Committee initiated a FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme to develop "Guidelines for the production, processing, labelling and marketing of organically produced foods". The Committee approved the plant production indications in June 1999 and the animal production ones in July 2001. The requirements specified in the Guidelines correspond to IBS and EU (EEC) 2092/91, but there are differences in the details and the areas that the standards cover.

The commercial Guidelines for organic foods are found on the current regulations of several countries, EU (EEC) 2092/91 in particular, as well as the particular standards applied by producers' organisations and IBS. The Guidelines define the nature of food production and prevent requirements regarding quality or production method that might mislead consumers.

In 2005, the revision of the lists of substances in the *Codex Alimentarius* appendices started. The process focused mainly in food processing and was based on the sanctioned criteria for the use of new substances. It was performed by the *Codex* Committee on Food Labelling, a group that meets in Canada in May every year. As the Guidelines are meant to provide help to governments, the member states and the international organisations are invited to make suggestions to the *Codex Alimentarius* Committee permanently. One the final form of the document has been agreed upon, the Guidelines will be revised every four years. The lists in the Appendices will be revised every two years, considering the recent progress in the field.

Private standards. In some European countries, the farmers' associations had developed their own private standards and labelling systems long before the international regulations were implemented by law. The promotion of trade marks and quality logos in the UK, Denmark, Austria, Sweden and Switzerland enhances consumer trust and is one of the causes leading to organic market success in these countries. The trademarks are listed in the IFOAM member catalogue, available on the IFOAM website. Unlike the national regulations, the private standards are developed from base to top. However, they must observe the national

regulations and the state authorities are making frequent decisions that favour the latter, not those developed by the farmers' associations.

CONCLUSIONS

If the private (farmers') organisations developed the production, inspection and certification standards in the 1980's, the first governments took over this task in the early 1990's. Although they took over the responsibility of defining rules as a sovereign right, they did not become involved in their implementation at all levels. The standards in the private sectors are based on IBS to which governments and *Codex Alimentarius* make constant reference.

Today, about 80 countries regulate or start regulating their organic agriculture through national standards and develop additional requirements for the acknowledgement of the inspection organisms. Some states also define the inspection procedures. There are several private standards and labelling schemes especially on the well-developed organic market. In 2006, there were about 395 certification organisms that performed certification operations based on private standards and/or established regulations.

Private standards have started to appear in less developed regions, with the help of different organisations, IFOAM and UNCTAD included. But this is not enough when rules have to be set. A minim equivalence guaranteed by the system must exist for the products to circulate.

There is no doubt that in the past decade, standard and certification and accreditation systems development has improved the safety and transparency of the organic. However, from a general perspective, the time has come to think of how these systems can be revised to be more comprehensive and eliminate the obstacles on the market. The differences between the organic systems derive from minor details and various cultural approaches, although they all serve the same purpose: to enhance their credibility.

In order to strengthen the organic whole, all involved parts (governments, private standard development and certification organisms and stakeholders) should focus on the essential difference between organic and conventional, instead of fighting over minor details. It's time we remembered that accreditation and certification are instruments for organic consolidation and development. Given the above-mentioned factors, certification (inspection and accreditation included) must be conceived in such manner that it should support the credibility of the organic system instead of endangering it by insisting upon details. This is what the organic movement is trying to obtain by developing harmonised international standards and private systems, at the same time acknowledging their existing limitations.

Whether the IFOAM, FAO and UNCTAD common initiative to establish the International Task Force on Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture will lead to a consensus between the private and governmental standards and between standards of different governments is still to be seen. Both the private sector and the government representatives take part in this initiative.

LITERATURE

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