



GUARANTEEING THE VALIDITY OF THE ORGANIC SYSTEM

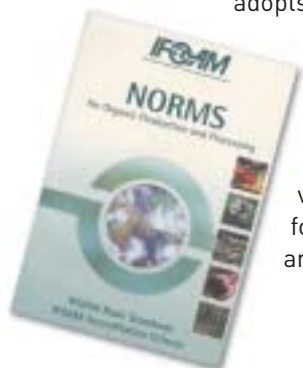
With organic products, the label tells a big story. Informed consumers know that the label will tell them everything from the name and type of organization that certified the product's "organic" validity to the type of standards that the product met throughout its growth and processing. These standards make organic agriculture the food industry's most well defined food supply system.



Certification bodies ascertain that products meet the standards set by either private or public institutions. In countries that have organic legislation, certification bodies are approved and supervised by the government. Some also are accredited by the International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS), an independent non-governmental organization that authorizes certifiers who follow the voluntary standards of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

Administered jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO), the Codex Alimentarius Commission develops and adopts international food standards,

guidelines and related texts that serve as the basis for many national standards. It governs such crucial issues as food labelling, residues of pesticides and veterinary drugs, food hygiene, food import and export inspection and certification systems.



In 1999, Codex adopted guidelines on the *Production, processing, labelling and marketing of organically produced foods* that provide a description of the "organic" system and the "organic" labelling claim in order to ensure fair trade and to facilitate the development of the organic sector.

The private sector equivalent of the Codex Alimentarius guidelines is the *International basic standards for organic production and processing*, created by IFOAM. Both the Codex and IFOAM guidelines cover the production of plants, livestock and bees; the handling, storage, processing, packaging and transportation of products; and a list of substances permitted in the production and processing of organic foods. IFOAM also has provisions for fibres, aquaculture and non-wood forest products.



Food quality control, Kenya

The Codex and IFOAM guidelines for organic agriculture are minimal, intended to guide governments and private certification bodies in setting standards. In other words, they are “standards for standards” meant to:



- protect consumers against deception and fraud;*
- protect organic products from misrepresentation by non-organic products;*
- ensure inspection and compliance throughout the process of production, processing, storage, transport and marketing;*
- harmonize provisions for the production, certification and labelling of organic produce;*
- facilitate the establishment of equivalence agreements between importing and exporting countries; and*
- enhance organic agricultural systems locally and globally.*

Governments can use these guidelines to develop their own national organic agriculture programmes, tailored to their specific needs. Most national standards, such as those of



Argentina, European Union countries, India, Japan, Tunisia and the United States of America, set forth regulations which are legally binding. In the major organic markets (i.e. Japan,

European Union countries and the United States of America), certifiers are approved and supervised by the national governments.



Labelling of organic pears

The private sector, and certification bodies in particular, have so far been the main agents in guaranteeing the validity of the organic system, ascertaining that farms are inspected according to agreed upon organic standards before products are certified “organic” for labelling. **It is a system that aims at ensuring credibility and building consumer trust.**

