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Introduction:

This document is intended to give interested persons or companies an overview of the OCCP's requirements for Group Certification. These requirements are generally based on IFOAM's documents on Smallholder Group Certification.

Who is eligible for group certification?

Farmers group (cooperatives, associations or similar organizations) or processors/ traders organizing and contracting their suppliers (small farmers) can apply for group certification.

The following conditions must be fulfilled in order to qualify:

- Cost of individual certification is disproportionately high in relation to the sales value of the product sold
- Only small farmers can be members of the group. Larger farms can be part of the group provided they are inspected annually by the certifying body
- There is homogeneity of members in terms of geographical location, production system, size of holding and common marketing system
- There is a central body responsible for ensuring the group's compliance with the standards


Minimum Requirements:

1. Internal Control System

- A formal internal control system should be in place and documented in a manual
- The group controls all its members for compliance with organic standards
- The group is aware of all the risks and critical control points relating to its operations
- The group has documented effective procedures for internal farm inspection and internal approval
- The group has qualified personnel and a clear structure
- The group ensures training of farmers and its ICS staff
- The group handles and supervises the organic product flow

2. Risk Management

- The group has to prepare a detailed risk assessment at the beginning of the certification
- Important risks that may jeopardize the organic quality are identified and taken into consideration by all involved in the ICS
- All appropriate countermeasures are taken so that potential risks never actually become a problem

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3. Internal Organic Standards

- The internal organic standards takes into account and covers all the applicable aspects of the organic standard requirements (i.e. crop production, livestock/animal husbandry, etc.)
- It should be written in clear and simple language that can be understood by all members of the group

4. Organization and ICS personnel

- One person has the overall responsibility for the ICS
- Personnel are given responsibility and are qualified to do the work for each procedure of the control system
- Conflicts of interest are avoided

5. Training

- Group members must receive practical training in organic standards as well as clear instruction on certification requirements that they have to comply with
- ICS personnel need regular training to remain up to date with the requirements and harmonize their inspection and evaluation skills.

6. Internal Inspection

- Each registered farmer/member of the group is inspected by the ICS at least once a year
- Results are documented in the inspection report

7. Approval Procedures

- There has to be a system to approve or sanction farmers
- Approval and sanction decisions must be documented
- If minor or major non-conformities are identified, the ICS has to take appropriate measures to correct them and/or sanction members if needed

External Control:

The number of producers controlled by the external (OCCP) inspector is determined by the square root of the number of all growers, multiplied by a risk factor.


The risk factor can vary between 1 to 4 depending on the level of effectiveness of the ICS, risks identified and/or rate of nonconformities identified during internal inspection

Records:

The group must maintain updated documents of the following, containing key information to allow evaluation of compliance with standards:

ICS-level

1. Description of Activities

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- overview of all handling steps from harvest to final sale; people responsible; names/addresses of all processor/warehouses or partners in organic handling; information on project sites
- 2. Structure and Responsibilities
 - positions, tasks
- 3. ICS Manual
- 4. Farmer's List
 - name and code of farmer; total area under the organic crop; date of registration and date of last use of prohibited inputs; date of internal inspection and name of internal inspector; result of approval process; previous and estimated production yield
- 5. Overview Map
 - location and code of group members; roads and landmarks; potential sources of contamination (i.e. adjacent conventional farms)
- 6. Summary of Production
- 7. Annual Internal Inspection Reports
 - evaluation of farm production including harvest and postharvest; evaluation of contamination risks; yield estimates

Farmer-level

1. Farmers contract
 - Commitment to follow standards; give inspector access to fields, stores and documents; sanctions in case of non-compliance
2. Farm Entrance/Application
 - field history; last date of use of prohibited inputs; description of all areas under the management of the farmer (organic and non-organic); crops planted and area covered;
3. Farm maps
 - clearly give the location, dimensions, boundaries, crops planted and the size of the land in terms of hectares
4. All other documents required by the specific type of operation (crop production, animal husbandry, aquaculture, special products, etc)

These documents must be maintained for at least three years after the crops has been sold, and be available for inspection at all times.

Knowledge:

All members of the group has to study and keep a copy (hard copy or electronic file) of the respective standards

All members need to have adequate knowledge on organic rules and technologies

Note:

Please be aware that this is only a selection of the essential requirements of the standards and everyone is advised to get a copy of the standards and study all the requirements of the standards. A copy of the OCCP standards may be obtained from the OCCP website www.occp.phils.org while the Philippine National Standards may be obtained from the DA-BAFPS website