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Merger of two US certification bodies suspended

California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) and Oregon Tilth (OTCO), two of the oldest US certifiers, recently announced that their planned merger has been suspended. Plans for the two organisations to merge were announced in May (see TOS 134, June), with the effective date planned for 31 October 2012. The new organisation would have had a combined client base in excess of 2,700 farms and a smaller number of handling operations.

At the time of the announcement the Oregon Tilth membership had yet to approve the merger. At a membership meeting on 29 September, the proposal to rename Oregon Tilth as CCOF Tilth Foundation, revise bylaws, and transfer ownership of the certification programme received 61% of the members' votes, failing to achieve the two-thirds vote necessary for passage.

'We were disappointed that plans proposed by our board of directors to strengthen and expand programs were not endorsed by the required two-

thirds majority', said Oregon Tilth Executive Director, Chris Schreiner. 'However, our organisation is strong and we will continue to do the important work that we have been doing for more than 25 years.' The boards of directors of CCOF and Oregon Tilth proposed the restructuring of the two organisations to maintain quality service at competitive prices, strengthen the collective organic voice, and provide increased support for research and education programmes. 'CCOF and Oregon Tilth developed a strong bond through the process that unfolded during the past year', said CCOF Executive Director, Cathy Calfo. 'We will continue to work together as separate organisations to grow the organic movement.' ■

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Sources:

www.sustainablebusinessoregon.com/articles/2012/10/oregon-tilth-calls-off-merger-plans.html
www.ccof.org/pdf/marketing/press/2012/pr_10.2.12_CCOF_Tilth_Merger_Talks_Suspended.pdf

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Let's talk, let's listen

The EU Regulation is in the process of being reviewed from different angles and by different stakeholders, and more specifically its control system is being reexamined. So how could things be made better? In this regard, the conclusion of the review carried out by the European Court of Auditors (see TOS 135 July 2012) gives some important clues on what could be done. Many of these reflections can be applied to all regulations, and not just to the EU and the EU Regulation.

Would control be made more effective by setting stricter rules on certification bodies' performance? For example, would performance improve by setting a common sanction catalogue, or by establishing in more detail how many additional inspections should be conducted per year, how many tests should be done, etc.? But this raises the question, do more detailed rules lead to a more harmonised and effective implementation legislation on organic production?

According to the German experience described in the article on page 15 it seems not, in fact to the contrary: 'more detailed rules create even more interpretation space and might enable actors to hide behind the rules'. Generally speaking, it is important to set common procedures that avoid unfair situations such as some operators being controlled very strictly and others very loosely under the same set of standards. Or, for example, operators following the same regulation but certified by a different certification body (CB) or operating in a different country should receive similar sanctions for the same noncompliance. Nonetheless, in organic production a certain amount of flexibility is neces-

sary; many standards are applied in a range of situations and environments much more diverse than other schemes that work in a much narrower scope. Within this context, common sense has to be applied.

But what is common sense? It is not the same for everyone. So how should unfair situations be avoided while setting an efficient control system that, at the same time, leaves room for some necessary flexibility in applying those control measures? It is probably impossible to avoid some interpretations of the regulations; but everyone's interpretations should be known and kept under control.

To encourage the application of common sense in the work routine of controllers (CBs, authorities and accreditation bodies) more education is necessary. Staff working at the CBs, competent authorities and accreditation bodies must be knowledgeable and skilled. In addition to training programmes, more communication and transparency will also make a difference: we learn by talking to each other as well as through the formally organised training programmes.

One of the weak points in the control of organic production in the EU that the European Court of Auditors found was that 'the exchange of information within and between Member States, and between the Member States and the Commission is not good enough to ensure the control system works adequately'. A few years ago, I attended a seminar and witnessed representatives of competent authorities from different EU countries informally exchanging email addresses and other contact details so they would know whom to contact when they had to talk to the

authority of another country. Very good idea – but is it not astounding that they did not have such a contact list before?

Communication within the sector at all levels is fundamental, but to facilitate the participation of the general public in the whole process, including social control is also important. A well informed consumer may detect a possible fraud or irregularity that a CB or authority may not have detected because they cannot be everywhere all the time.

The EU has a lot to learn from the USA in regard to communication and transparency, and also how to facilitate public participation. We have said it many times before in TOS, but it cannot be repeated often enough, it is so obvious! However, facilitating the participation of everyone can also have a dangerous side. When the public has an influence in the power of the Tripartite Standards Regime – standards, certification and accreditation (see book review on page 16) – some interested parties may be tempted to influence the opinion of this public. This is what happened in the recent voting for GMO labelling in California, the Proposition 37, which was defeated because of a question of money and fear promoted by those with interests in the GMO industry (see page 14).

As a conclusion it can be said that all of us within the organic sector should talk and listen more to each other, and everybody, as an organic stakeholder or a member of the general public, should express her/his opinion. But we should try to be as well informed as possible so that our opinion is based on truth and is not overly influenced by the interests of somebody else. ■

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Listening to the people

The public comment process in the US

In the US, regulatory policy setting always involves public input of some kind before action is taken. Regulations governing organic standards and labelling, certification and accreditation are developed and implemented by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) through its National Organic Program (NOP). Any new rules or revisions to existing rules must always include publication of a proposal and a formal public comment period before a proposed rule can be finalised. Public comment also plays an important role in shaping anticipated regulatory changes, and the primary route for the NOP to receive input from the public about any aspect of its program is through the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB).

All federal regulatory action in the US starts with publication of a proposed rule in the Federal Register, a daily compendium of all rules, proposed rules, and other public documents issued by each and every agency of the Executive branch of government (see www.federalregister.gov). If the regulation concerns something routine, the public comment period can be brief. However, a major regulatory proposal will require at least 60 days, and in rare cases more. Along with the regulatory language the proposal will include a preamble in which the legal rationale and other basis for the proposal, such as public comments received by the agency or scientific studies, is explained. Comments can be submitted in writing by surface mail or by email. Once the comment period closes the agency must review each comment submitted and either revise the proposal accordingly or provide a response as to why they disagree with the comment. Once this is done the final rule must then be published in the Federal Register, along with all

responses to public comments. The rules for the NOP are all regulations that went through this process, and any time a revision is made, such as for the pasture rule or any amendment to the National List, this process must also be followed.

Sometimes a proposal may offer specific questions for which public comment is requested, so as to help the agency gather information about the possible consequences of its regulation on stakeholders. This will often help tease out areas of controversy about which the agency is truly undecided. This is the strategy that was used when the NOP published its first proposed rule at the end of 1997. In this case the proposed rule itself did not mention (therefore neither allowed nor prohibited) the so-called 'Big Three' issues – the use of GMOs, irradiation and sewage sludge. Instead it requested public comment on the compatibility of these practices with

organic production and handling. This was the first time that the option of submitting comments on-line was available, and the 280,000 responses received – most as form letters expressing opposition to the 'Big Three' – broke all previous records.

The role of the NOSB

Virtually all US government agencies consult with representatives of the industry that they are charged with regulating, and this relationship is both necessary and dangerous. In many cases a formal advisory body is established to make sure that the broad spectrum of interests in a given industry is heard. Such advisory boards, of which the NOSB is one, are governed by the Federal Advisory Committees Act or FACA.

FACA committees must follow certain procedures, including open public meetings and receiving public comment on any matter under discussion. FACA committees are, by law, strictly advisory – that is, they do not set policy or dictate the content of any regulations for the agency of which they are a part. These committees may vary in composition and scope of their mandate, and are generally authorised in the legislation that governs the particular agency. Funding for their operations, which does not include compensation for their members, is provided under FACA and not through the agency itself. Members are always appointed by the agency, which in the case of the NOSB is the Secretary of Agriculture.

The Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA) established the NOSB 'to assist in the development of standards for substances to be used in organic

Sometimes a proposal may offer specific questions for which public comment is requested.

production and to advise the Secretary [of Agriculture] on any other aspects of the implementation' of the law (7 U.S.C. 6518 Section 2119). It is generally accepted as fact that the NOP cannot add any materials to the National List unless they are first recommended by the NOSB, but such authority by an advisory body is inconsistent within the stated role of FACA committees. The OFPA does require that the NOSB review and make a recommendation on any material being considered for addition to the National List, and does not allow the NOP (or 'the Secretary') to add any materials that were not first proposed and published for public comment in the Federal Register.

In reality, the NOP has made it abundantly clear that it will never choose to propose any material for addition to the National List without first receiving approval by the NOSB. Whether or not the NOP has the legal authority to do so, the political uproar that would be raised by such an action makes it unthinkable. For similar reasons, the NOSB's past concern about conflict of interest is misplaced – the input of NOSB members is valuable precisely because they represent the industry being regulated, and can bring the perspective of their active involvement in the industry to bear on the various questions under consideration.

Public comment and the NOSB

In addition to being able to comment directly on proposals made by the NOP (either for changes to regulations or guidance documents), the public is also invited to comment on proposals made by the NOSB (as outlined above). Although the NOP does not directly receive comments on NOSB proposals, they can and generally do consider relevant comments received by the NOSB when drafting their own

regulations or guidance documents.

As is true with any public comment process, members of the public can submit comments in writing or electronically, and are welcome to attend any NOSB meeting where they can sign up to present oral comments. The agendas are organised to allocate three to five minutes per person, with some exceptions when a particularly knowledgeable member of the public or organisational representative is invited to present information developed at the NOSB's request. In the past an individual could arrive at the meeting venue and sign up to deliver a comment on the spot, but more recently it has become necessary to sign up well in advance in order to secure a time slot. Written comments can be submitted starting six weeks before a given meeting, when the proposals being considered at the meeting are posted. Comments can be submitted in writing at any time, but to ensure the NOSB members are able to read them before the meeting they have to be submitted no later than three weeks before the meeting in question. Exact dates are always listed in the Federal Register notice and press release announcing the respective meeting. It is very simple to follow the link provided to submit comments electronically via www.regulations.gov.

The overflowing attendance at

NOSB meetings and thoughtful quality of public comments attests to the importance attached to these deliberations by a full range of organic stakeholders. Although the NOSB is not obliged to respond to comments in their recommendations as is necessary in the regulation writing process, by all accounts their recommendations are strongly influenced by the public input received. The NOP also relies heavily on both the NOSB's recommendations and the public comments that address those recommendations in developing its own policies – whether in the form of regulations or as guidance documents.

Although there may be cause for cynicism about the influence of ordinary citizens on public policy in many aspects of government, the process clearly works as intended within the NOP and its citizen advisory body, the NOSB. Inasmuch as the international organic community is affected by these decisions, everyone is also able to express their concerns and be heard. ■

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For information on past and future NOSB meetings, including public comments and transcripts of these discussions, visit www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/ams.fetchTemplateData.do?template=TemplateJ&page=NOSBMeetings.

news shorts...

Any readers with a news item that is relevant to the international organic movement please contact TOS at:

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Chilean nitrate and the NOP

Until recently organic growers in the US were able to use natural sodium nitrate to provide up to 20% of a crop's nitrogen needs. On 21 October, all that changed when it was removed from the National List of Prohibited Non-Synthetic Substances. This means that, for now, provided it is of natural or non-synthetic origin, sodium nitrate can be used without specific restriction. However, the situation is intended to be temporary, and once the NOP publishes new rules on the subject, natural sodium nitrate will be prohibited for use in organic production.

Often called Chilean nitrate, this material has inspired heated controversy since the inception of organic standard setting. This article offers some background on the material and the controversy over its use, and explains the regulatory situation in the US.

What is Chilean nitrate? Chilean nitrate is a naturally occurring (non-synthetic) substance found in a nitrogenous rock ore known as caliche, which is found in commercially viable quantities only in Chile. Caliche has a long history of use by indigenous peoples of the extremely arid Tarapacá and Antofagasta regions in Northern Chile. It became a primary source of export income for Chile in the 19th century, but sales of this material dropped dramatically after World War I, when the Haber process was developed to manufacture synthetic nitrogen. In addition to highly soluble sodium nitrate, caliche contains a host of micronutrients as well as some salts of other important crop nutrients such as calcium, potassium, magnesium and sulphur. Once refined for commercial use, however, these 'impurities' are largely removed, leaving a product that contains 16% available nitrate – a higher concentration than can be found in any organic material, such as compost or fishmeal, that may be used by organic producers

as a source of this essential nutrient.

Organic agriculture universally prohibits the use of synthetic nitrogen materials due to both the high energy demand of their manufacture and to the effect of repeated high doses of soluble nitrates on the soil ecosystem. Because Chilean nitrate is derived from a naturally mined source, it was considered by most early organic advocates to be an acceptable source of supplemental nitrogen. It has, as a consequence, long been an ingredient in commercial blended fertiliser products approved for use by organic producers in the US. Organic producers, for their part, also recognise that care must be taken when applying any highly soluble plant nutrient, but that such materials could be useful in situations where soils are too depleted, wet or cold to release sufficient nitrogen from organic matter to meet the needs of a demanding crop such as leafy greens.

Organic vegetable growers in northern regions of the US commonly produce early and late season crops,

which provide a market advantage and allow them to extend their growing season. Growers in places like California have also commonly used supplemental nitrate for crops produced during the winter months, when their soils are too cold to release adequate nitrogen. This material is seldom used for grain or other agronomic crops.

Chilean nitrate in organic standards

In 2005, SQM North America, an American fertiliser company, submitted a petition to the NOSB that requested continued allowance of one of its products, natural sodium nitrate, in organic crop production.¹ In the petition SQM North America stated, 'The use of sodium (Chilean) nitrate from natural deposits has been one of the most contentious and divisive issues throughout the organic agriculture's history. Much of the information in this petition was derived from a 2004 document prepared by the company that rebuts the arguments used by IFOAM to prohibit the substance.'²

Prior to implementation of the NOP, US organic standards generally designated sodium nitrate and similar highly soluble fertiliser materials as 'regulated' or 'restricted' substances. This means that producers were allowed to use them under specified conditions, but their use was not recommended as the best organic practice. In most cases a producer who wished to use such materials had to provide a justification to the certifier, and outline a plan to reduce or eliminate the need for the substance in the future. In the case of sodium nitrate, a common guideline was to permit its use for up to 20% of a crop's nitrogen needs.

The NOP does not include a 'restricted' category of substances, but rather relies on a combination of regulatory language and annota-

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HALAL COSMETICS

A study by the University of Malaysia, Perlis, estimates the size of the current global market for halal cosmetics to be 5-14 bn euros, and the trend is rising. According to the Organic Monitor, the sales of halal products in the Middle East rose by 20% last year. Organic Monitor sees in the Middle East a connection between the rising demand for organic and natural cosmetics and halal cosmetics.

Standards Malaysia, an agency under the Malaysian Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, announced the development of a future standard for halal cosmetics. The most significant factor in the standards is that natural cosmetics are not tested on animals and no non-halal ingredients such as alcohol or materials derived from pigs should be included.

Standards Malaysia is fast becoming the global authority for halal certification. As such, it is in a perfect position to offer more reassurance and authenticity to this emerging market. ■

Sources:

Article by Karin Heinze in *Oneco-Organic News Community*, 25 October 2012. 'Halal Beauty and the Cosmetics Industry'. www.onislam.net/english/health-and-science/faith-and-the-sciences/409467.html

tions that address specific substances that are included on the National List as either 'allowed' if synthetic, or 'prohibited' if nonsynthetic. The NOP practice standard for soil fertility and crop nutrient management addresses the application of any materials in order to manage crop nutrients and soil fertility in Section 205.203(d), which requires any such material to be used 'in a manner that does not contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water by plant nutrients, pathogenic organisms, heavy metals, or residues of prohibited substances'. While a mined substance of low solubility, such as rock phosphate, is not otherwise restricted, a mined substance of high solubility, such as sodium nitrate, must be used 'in compliance with the conditions established on the National List of nonsynthetic materials prohibited for crop production'. Sodium nitrate was added to the corresponding section of the National List in 2007 as a prohibited nonsynthetic, 'unless use is restricted to no more than 20 percent of the crop's total nitrogen requirement'.

At the time the NOSB voted to add natural sodium nitrate to the National List, it recommended adding a much more extensive annotation, including a requirement that a producer's farm plan identifies strategies 'designed to substantially reduce the use of Chilean Nitrate over time', and a stipulation that certifiers monitor its use and 'decertify farmers that develop long term dependence on this material'. The NOP did not, however, include this lengthy annotation when it published the final rule.

IFOAM allowed some use of sodium nitrate in its first Basic Standards

in 1980, but later restricted its use to only during the conversion period. In 1989 the IFOAM General Assembly voted to prohibit sodium (Chilean) nitrate in the IFOAM Basic Standards. This prohibition was subsequently adopted by the EU, which did not include sodium nitrate in its Annex of substances allowed for use as crop nutrients. Other international standards followed suit, including those promulgated by Japan and Canada – presumably to ensure their organic products would be readily accepted in the EU.

Current status of Chilean nitrate

An excellent summary of the pros and cons of Chilean nitrate use, including a discussion of alternatives that may be more acceptable, is provided in an information sheet developed by California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) in 2010.³ This information sheet was developed in anticipation of the NOSB's vote in the spring of 2011 to remove the annotation allowing the use of sodium nitrate to provide up to 20% of crops' nitrogen needs. The recommendation to remove this annotation, which was subsequently approved, would mean that the substance would be prohibited in any amount.

The NOSB was planning to review the listing of sodium nitrate in accordance with the Sunset Review requirement to reevaluate every item that appears on the National List every five years. However, in September 2010 NOP Deputy Administrator, Miles McEvoy, sent a memo⁴ to the NOSB requesting that the NOSB 'evaluate the annotation under §205.602(g) that allows sodium nitrate to be utilised under the NOP

In 1989 the IFOAM General Assembly voted to prohibit sodium (Chilean) nitrate in the IFOAM Basic Standards. ■

news shorts...

AN ORGANIC NATION

Bhutan could become a country where a hundred percent of the food grown at home is organic. Or at least this is the aim.

Bhutan's policies for development certainly look different; for example they measure 'Gross National Happiness' rather than Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

It is part of this strategy of doing things differently that is responsible for their new policy to phase out artificial chemicals in farming in the next ten years. 'Bhutan has decided to go for a green economy in light of the tremendous pressure we are exerting on the planet', Agriculture Minister Pema Gyamtsho said.

'We have developed a strategy that is step-by-step. We cannot go organic overnight', Gyamtsho said. 'We have identified crops for which we can go organic immediately and certain crops for which we will have to phase out the use of chemicals, for rice in certain valleys for example.'

A previous article featuring the pro-organic and environmental policies of the Bhutan government, and the government and other stakeholders' support for the PGS model for the country, was published in TOS 108, April 2010. ■

Organic Monitor, Industry Watch Newsletter- October 2012

regulations and consider removing the annotation in order to facilitate trade for US organic agricultural products'.⁵ At the time of this memo the US was negotiating the much anticipated equivalency agreement with the EU, to which the allowance for Chilean nitrate was a major stumbling block. In addition, the US had already entered into an equivalency agreement with Canada, which included a provision requiring that US organic products entering Canada provide documentation that sodium nitrate had not been used in their production.

This memo left the NOSB in a bit of a quandary, since the facilitation of trade was not one of the criteria by which they are charged with reviewing substances for the National List. Despite this irregularity and ongoing concerns expressed in public comment about loss of a relatively benign tool that organic farmers had traditionally been able to use, the NOSB complied with the NOP's request and voted to leave sodium nitrate on the National List as a prohibited nonsynthetic substance, minus the annotation. However, the NOP then decided not to implement this change along with other Sunset Review decisions, but to address this recommendation in a separate rulemaking action. They explained their decision was 'due to the significance of the removal of sodium nitrate's annotation'.

The end result of this delay was that sodium nitrate was removed from the National List on 21 October, which means that it is no longer prohibited for use in organic crop production. The current NOP memo informs us that a proposed rule to address this substance is forthcoming, but it will

take some time before a final rule can be implemented. Producers must still use this substance only in compliance with the requirement to avoid any soil or water degradation, and must inform their certifying agent of any plan to use it. Products intended to be marketed in Canada or the EU must still not have been produced using sodium nitrate. There is some speculation among US producers that the NOP may provide a time frame for gradual phase out of this substance, so as to mitigate the burden on producers who continue to rely on this supplemental fertility boost. (See interview with Enid Wonnacott and Nicole Dehne from VOF in TOS issue no. 137, September and 138, October.)

The long standing controversy about the status of sodium (Chilean) nitrate under organic standards appears to be nearing an end at last. However, this decision does not resolve the question of the compatibility of this substance with a system of organic farming and handling. It remains to be seen whether this decision will contribute to the NOP's goal of increasing the number of US farms and acres of land in organic production. ■

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¹ www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRD3479627

² *Comments and reply to IFOAM's evaluations (1989 and 2004) of Natural Sodium Nitrate (NSN)*. www.naturalnitrogen.com/_STUDIOEMMA_LIVE/images/pdf/IFOAM.pdf

³ www.ccof.org/pdf/advocacy/Sodium_Nitrate_Talking_Points.pdf

⁴ www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5100372

⁵ www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5086746

The end result of this delay was that sodium nitrate was removed from the National List on 21 October 2012. ■

■ news shorts...

USE OF VITAMINS AND MINERALS IN THE USA

Interim action by the USDA will allow the continued use of vitamins and minerals in organic foods after 21 October, the date these materials were scheduled to be removed from the permitted list. If the current allowance for vitamins and minerals was removed, Vitamins A and D, used to fortify fluid milk, and B-vitamins, used in bread and cereal to replace vitamins lost during processing, could no longer be used in organic products. Because the current rule references Food and Drug Administration's food fortification policy (21 CFR 104.20) that strictly defines essential nutrients, many nutrients, such as omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, inositol, and choline, have been petitioned individually and approved by NOSB. The interim regulation will allow time for those decisions and additional comment from the public before a final rule is developed. ■

Comments are due 26 December 2012 on docket number AMS-NOP-10-0083; NOP-10-091R at www.regulations.gov/#!submitComment;D=AMS-NOP-10-0083-0029.

NOSB takes some tough decisions

The US National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) held its public meeting on 15-18 October 2012, in Providence, Rhode Island.

Below is a report of the meeting.

As has become customary, the National Organic Program (NOP) provided an update on its activities, priorities, and on NOSB's substance review process. Over the course of the four days, the NOSB heard comments from approximately 80 members of the public on a wide range of issues. The NOSB discussed these and other suggested changes to their proposals from about 700 written public comments.

Many of the votes were fairly routine and uncontroversial, concerning materials petitioned for inclusion on the National List and for renewal of materials due to be removed in 2013. However, there were several items that provoked disagreement. Some proposals for which public comment was solicited were in the form of discussion documents, which are intended to elicit feedback from the community about the subject in question rather than requiring a vote to make a recommendation to the NOP. For background information, see TOS 137, page 17.

'The NOSB made some tough decisions' at this meeting, explained Bill Wolf, the Senior Partner at Wolf, DiMatteo + Associates, and a long time organic consultant and input supplier. He continued, citing strong farmer support and the opportunity to promote continuous improvement as

the reason NOSB was persuaded to vote in favour of adding biodegradable mulch film to the National List as allowed for use in organic crop production. A detailed annotation to this listing that addresses concerns from the public and some board members was also added:

'Biodegradable biobased mulch films to be reviewed and meet the following criteria:

- (A) Completely biodegradable as shown by 1) meeting the requirements of ASTM Standard D6400 or D6868 specifications or of other international standard specifications with essentially identical criteria i.e., EN 13432, EN 14995, ISO 17088 and 2) showing 90% biodegradation absolute or relative to microcrystalline cellulose, in less than two years, in soil, tested according to ISO 17556 or ASTM 5988;
- (B) Must be biobased with content determined using the ASTM 6866 method;
- (C) Must be produced without organisms or feedstocks derived from excluded methods; and
- (D) Grower must take appropriate steps to ensure complete degradation.'

The recommendation by the Crops Subcommittee to add the botanical insecticide Rotenone to the National

However, there were several items that provoked disagreement. ■

List of prohibited nonsynthetic substances was also controversial. The material is no longer registered for use in the US under the rules of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and has been supplanted by preferable alternatives that can be used by organic growers. However, this is an example of a problem that can arise when NOP certified producers in other countries still need to use a material that, for one reason or other, becomes prohibited for US producers. Despite concerns expressed on behalf of Latin American banana growers that Rotenone is the only material that is effective against red rust caused by thrips, the board voted unanimously to prohibit this material, effective from 1 January, 2016. The date of implementation was chosen to enable Latin American producers to research alternatives and phase out their use of rotenone for organic banana production.

The biggest area of controversy at this meeting centred on decisions concerning various 'supplemental nutrients' petitioned for use in organic infant formula. The NOSB voted against allowing any of these ingredients except L-Methionine, which was allowed for use in infant formula made with soy-based protein. All of the petitioned substances are currently allowed in organic infant formula, but a determination made by the NOP in 2010 that they were not covered by the general allowance for 'essential nutrients' has meant that each one has to be petitioned individually. The approval last year of fatty acid supplements DHA and ARA for use in organic milk and infant formula led to a storm of attacks by self-styled 'organic watchdogs' (see TOS 131, March). There were similar sentiments calling for avoidance of any unnecessary synthetic additives, expressed by public

comment, regarding the current list of petitioned substances. A well-reasoned comment by the Organic Trade Association (OTA) in support of 'the rational and safe addition of nutrients to foods in order to preserve a balance of nutrients in the consumer diet' failed to sway the board's decision. According to Bill Wolf, 'These votes threaten tens of millions of dollars of organic sales, putting at risk tens of thousands of organic field crop acres and thousands of gallons of organic milk production.'

A similar list of synthetic amino acids was petitioned for use in organic pet food. The NOP has long been working to develop proposed regulations addressing pet food requirements, which can be difficult due to the fact that such 'companion animals' have dietary needs distinct from those of farm livestock. Should organic pet food be subject to the same requirements as food for human consumption? The recommendation posted by the NOSB Livestock Subcommittee, postponed prior to the October meeting was incomplete, so the decision on the pet food nutrients petition was postponed to the NOSB meeting next April (2013).

Another controversial materials question on the NOSB agenda related

to the handling of 'inert' substances used in pesticide formulations. The board unanimously approved the proposal submitted by the Crops Subcommittee that would entail a review by the NOSB of all inert ingredients used in organic-approved pest control products, with a projected completion date of 2017. The review's procedure will include providing details on the changes to the regulatory language for the listing of inerts on the National List, how it will proceed within the groups, what proposed groups have been identified so far, and how technical reviews will be commissioned. The NOSB plans to reassess the timeline after reviewing the first few groups of inerts. ■

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The final recommendations and transcript from the Providence meeting are now available at www.ams.usda.gov/NOSBMeetings

All written public comments submitted in advance of this meeting can be found at: www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;rpp=25;po=0;D=AMS-NOP-12-0040

Sources:
October 2012 NOP Organic Integrity Quarterly: www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5100909
Newsletter from Wolf, DiMatteo + Associates: www.organicsspecialists.com

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Hundred percent organic – including additives

The aim to eliminate all non-organic ingredients from processed organic products continues.

The use of additives in processed organic food is, by definition, very limited. Chemically synthesised and GMO components are excluded from organic production systems. Most standards and regulations, such as the EU Organic Regulation, lists the authorised additives and the few non organic ingredients still allowed in organic products in small quantities if not available in organic quality. For example the EU Regulation allows a maximum of 5% of non-organic ingredients, but many private standard setters and label organisations go far beyond these official regulations. The goal is to have organic processed products to be 100% organic quality, including the additives.

In recent years consumers have become more sensitive to various environmental, social and health issues, in combination with a greater awareness of the importance of health, diet and nutrition. This demand, natural and rightful as it is, is especially developed among the buyers of organic products.

‘100% organic’ on the way

The goal of ‘100% organic’, a target that is beyond the officially authorised exceptions for ingredients and additives, is therefore an important aim for the future of organic processing. The goal is already having an impact on the organic guidelines of many private standard setters and label organisations as an option to position their standards above the legally requested base for organic production.

Bio Suisse, a Swiss certifica-

tion body, for example, follows the principle, minimal use of additives and processing aids’. According to their standards, additives and processing aids cannot be used, unless the use of such substances is technologically indispensable. And even then the ingredients have to be of natural provenance, and produced without genetic engineering. Bio Suisse handles the approval process specifically for each new product, based on specific guidelines for each product category. Where the market situation allows it Bio Suisse demands organic quality even for natural additives (examples: E 410 carob gum, E 412 guar gum, E 414 Arabic gum, E 322 lecithin).

Closing the production circle

In order to reach the 100% organic goal a market has to be created for organic additives and functional ingredients in organic quality such as organic yeast, organic gelatine and traditional natural additives produced in an organically certifiable way. In Europe this process is well on the way, helped by the use of byproducts from organic production, which therefore improves the economic situation of organic producers as well. However, one of the traditional and widely used additives that is still unavailable is organic pectin produced as a byproduct of organic apple juice production.

In addition to the well known natural components used and produced or grown in Europe there is also a huge potential for importing other ingredients from all over the world. Two

well-known examples are lemons as a replacement for citric acid, and the tropical fruit acerola as a replacement for ascorbic acid. Containing a high quantity of Vitamin C the fruit of acerola is dried and ground into a powder to be used instead of ascorbic acid in the synthesised form. Acerola has been available in organic quality for many years and used in various products such as bread and bakery products and drinks. Acerola has become so common that it is now also used in many non-organic products as part of a ‘clean label’ strategy, that tries to reduce or replace additives with natural products and the use of improved production processes. A ‘new’ natural ingredient with a similar function is aro-nia. Not only does this ingredient have interesting qualities for processing but also is important in health products.

‘Unknown’ potential worldwide

Many more ‘new’ ingredients can be found in developing countries such as Peru, Bolivia or Asian countries. Some can be marketed as interesting market innovations or as ingredients for enriching product recipes such as granola mixes. Beyond the organic market the growing need for safety, efficacy and quality has resulted in an increased demand by the food industry for high quality natural ingredients.

How can these products be found? As a reaction to the market development, importers from EU, Switzerland and other EFTA countries are actively seeking new suppliers in their quest to satisfy this demand. An important player in this process is the Swiss Import Promotion Programme (SIPPO), which connects European importers with suitable suppliers for a great variety of natural ingredients. The product spectrum handled by SIPPO ranges from spices, dried fruit and vegetables, nuts and seeds, fruit pulps,

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WAYS OF COOPERATION

The Italian certification bodies (CBs) cooperate beyond their country's borders. This is an example of what can be done to combine efforts and offer a wider scope of services altogether.

The Italian CB Mediterranean Institute of Certification (IMC) has some offices located in other Mediterranean countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Turkey. The CB has been recognised by the EU Commission in all these countries to import following the equivalency route.

At the same time IMC Italy is a member of the association CONSORZIO il BIOLOGICO, where there is another Italian CB: the CCPB srl. For this reason both CBs are used to sharing their experiences, a fact that has facilitated CCPB in offering schemes such as organic cosmetics, textiles and others that IMC does not have within their scope of services. IMC inspectors conduct the visits for these other schemes in all the Mediterranean countries where they are installed, and CCPB completes the process issuing the certificates. ■

Source: CCPB

vanilla and cocoa extracts, tea and coffee extracts, natural sweeteners, frozen food, essential oils, and medicinal plants. European importers are supported by SIPPO in their search for trustworthy business partners from Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Republic of Macedonia, Nepal, Peru and Ukraine. European importers also benefit from the high quality and service SIPPO offers, a good price-performance ratio, in addition to supplier flexibility and readiness to cater for special requests from buyers.

Organic and fair as basic conditions

The developments described above have intensified the demand for high quality goods from organic and sustainable sources. Consumers prefer natural ingredients that are grown, harvested and processed in an ecological manner. Organic certification, fair trade and further sustainability standards are also very important in protecting the natural resources and biodiversity of the growing areas. The EU organic food label and/or fairtrade certification is, therefore, a selling point not to be underestimated by suppliers. SIPPO pays particular attention to this development and offers support to EU and EFTA importers as well with their task to find suppliers that provide high quality organic and/or fair trade products.

Food quality and processing

The FiBL-Division 'Food Quality and Processing' is involved in projects along the entire food production chain (from farm to fork). These projects focus on the aspects of product quality, food safety, food processing, and risk assessment. Various research methods are used to assess qualitative differences between organic foods and foods from other agricultural

production systems, and their effects on animal and human health. Organic products must be protected from undesirable inputs along the entire goods flow chain. FiBL also strives to develop and integrate the 'organic concept in processing. To this end, strategies for environmentally-friendly processing are being developed, and new technologies evaluated in terms of their risks. In addition to its basic scientific programmes, FiBL also offers concrete instruments for the food processing professionals. The 'FiBL-Liste Öko-Verarbeitung 2010' (so far the name is only in German) lists a large number of products that only contain additives and ingredients authorised for organic processing. Many of the ingredients are themselves certified organic products.

Organic early birds fly ahead

It will be a long time before some of the harder to find additives and processing aids will become available in organic quality. For the credibility of organic processing it is important to develop the standards further, step by step, based on the question 'which organic processing do we want?' and not 'which additives am I still allowed to put in?'

In short, '100% organic' is a doable aim for ambitious processors and standard setters who want to be among the 'early birds' of the future of organic processing. ■

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For more information see:

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www.zusatzstoffe.org

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FIND YOUR ORGANIC NEIGHBOUR

In Denmark all organic land certified in 2011 can be found on the webpage viskort.dk/okomark. The page is published by the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries to be of help to municipalities and conventional farms to not use pesticides or fertilisers too close to an organic farm. Go to the website: viskort.dk/okomark, zoom to see the map in a bigger scale, then click on kortinhold in the right upper corner and choose 'Økologiske marker 2011'. All the plots with a green line drawn around it around are organic. The map does not identify natural grasslands (land which is not under the plough). ■

ORGANIC SALES GROW IN THE NETHERLANDS

According to data from *Bionext*, sales in the Netherlands grew by 12% in the first half of 2012, continuing the trend of ten years of consecutive growing.

The biggest growth was reported for organic fish (94%), meat (55%) and coffee, tea and cocoa (25%).

The only food group that did not grow in this period was meat alternatives. ■

Source: Kai Kreuzer, ONECO; Organic News Community, 25 October 2012.

AFI continues to analyse fraud

The Anti Fraud Initiative (AFI), started in 2007, was established by a number of stakeholders in Europe worried about the increasing number of notorious fraud cases in organic products, which had started to rise parallel to the last decade's substantial development and diversification on the international organic market. It was clear that more communication between the different actors (certification bodies, trade companies, label owners and authorities) was essential, and common strategies were necessary to fight this problem. Thus AFI was created and started to hold meetings and workshops, which continue today.

Recently, AFI has studied the two biggest cases of fraud known in the EU: the Italian case known as 'Puss in boots' (see TOS 128, December 2011) and the case of contamination with quaternary ammonium compounds (QAC) of fruit and vegetables imported from third countries. The goods were contaminated after using several post-harvest inputs certified as usable for organic production.

These cases were analysed in regional workshops implemented by AFI in co-operation with the regional organic movement. It was proven once again that communication between the different players is the key. In this regard, discussions within the sector, including those organised by AFI, produced results; in Italy, where the 'Puss in Boots' fraud occurred, the private organic sector proposed a number of changes to avoid such episodes in the future. In addition, the Italian Ministry responded by taking immediate action, such as, for example, prohibiting

double certification, which was very common in Italy before.

The last AFI seminar on Quality Integrity took place in Amersfoort, Netherlands. The seminar was jointly organised with VBP (Vereniging Biologische Producenten en Handel).

Several presentations were given at the seminar; all of them by speakers with relevant experience in organic control and in dealing with fraud cases. The viewpoint of the presenters came from different angles, based on their experience in their workplace. There were representatives from certification bodies, the organic industry (self-control) and from the European Court of Auditors, who presented the findings of their recent audit of the control system governing the production, processing, distribution and imports of organic products (see TOS 135, July 2012).

Also at the seminar – held in the Netherlands where most of the QAC contaminated goods, for example bananas, were imported – AFI dis-

It was proven once again that communication between the different players is the key. ■

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HOW WELL KNOWN IS THE EU 'LEAF' LOGO?

According to the Special Eurobarometer 389 on 'Europeans' attitudes towards food security, food quality and the countryside', 24% of European citizens recognise the new 'Euro-leaf' organic logo.

The participants in this survey responded on their recognition of five different logos that identify the nature of food products in Europe. In addition to the EU logo that represents organic food, the other logos shown were the Fairtrade logo, recognised by 36% of those polled, the Traditional Speciality Guaranteed logo (TSG) recognised by 15%, the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) logos, both recognised by only 14% surveyed.

Regarding the EU organic logo, Danish citizens are the most aware (39%) about the organic logo, followed by French (38%), then Luxembourg (37%) citizens. ■

Special Eurobarometer 389: Europeans' attitudes towards food security, food quality and the countryside http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_389_en.pdf

Source: IFOAM EU Group Newsletter No 59, November 2012

cussed the need to improve quality assurance for organic inputs; not necessarily by certification of inputs, but by a better evaluation of the inputs permitted.

Laboratories must talk too

The presentations included one on laboratory techniques and tools. AFI events usually include presentations that provide knowledge of new techniques and on how to use existing ones more efficiently. In the talk the presenter on analysis and laboratory techniques explained that the analysis of organic samples to find pesticides has to deal with specific challenges. It is critical that laboratories involved must know these challenges in order to avoid inaccuracies and undesirable situations such as missing positive residues findings or alternatively, identifying false positives.

Laboratories must depend on qualified staff and appropriate equipment, but they should also compare their performances with other laboratories. The speaker talked on the Ring Test method, used in the case of the QAC residues, as an example of cooperating laboratories in which the six relana®¹ members and the five state laboratories in Germany participated. In this method, the evaluation is achieved by combining the individual results of every participant and getting an average reading.

AFI needs support

AFI does not receive any financial support and this is why the impact of their discussions and findings has not achieved its highest potential. Jochen Neuendorff, one of the initiative founders declared to TOS: 'I am sure that AFI will continue to play an important role in analysing the origins of fraud cases and drawing conclusions to better avoid these cases in future. It is a pity that we cannot make more out of this, but due to the lack of financial support, we cannot do more at this moment'. He believes that the fraud problems will continue to grow and suggests that this is the right moment for AFI to ask for financial support for their work. ■

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Presentations can be found at: www.organic-integrity.org/meetings/afi-9-2012/

TOS has covered AFI activities from its beginning. The last reports were in TOS 125 (September 2011) and in TOS 106 (February 2010).

¹ relana® (www.relana-online.com) represents a circle of laboratories in the field of residue and contaminant analytics for labs. Their aim is to offer a high competence service 'not just during an audit or on paper – but day to day in routine'. In the presentation in their last AFI seminar it was explained how relana® dealt with the case of QAC and other cases of pesticide searching as glyphosate residues. After following an established procedure on sample preparation, homogenisation and validation, exchange and discussion of analytical questions and information provided by relana® as a platform and network for the participants.

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Proposition 37 defeated

GMO labelling effort continues

In addition to the US Presidential election this November, Californians had another very important vote to cast – and like the political elections the results were watched by the whole country. The vote was for a ballot on whether products containing GMO ingredients should be labelled.

In the final weeks and days leading up to election day in the US, support among Californian voters for the ballot initiative that would have required any GMO-containing product to be labelled seemed to evaporate. After early polls suggested a two to one majority in favour of the labelling initiative, the election results produced a defeat by a margin of 55% against and 45% in favour of the measure.

What happened?

Supporters of the 'California Right to Know' campaign are quick to point to the huge disparity in funding directed at persuading voters. While opponents of the measure, including agribusiness interests such as Monsanto, Dupont and BASF, amassed over \$40 million to defeat it, only about \$8 million was raised by supporters of the ballot. Through television, radio and print advertising, opponents barraged voters with misleading messages, especially the fear-inducing statement that, if successful, the measure would result in significantly higher food prices.

The opposing 'No on 37' campaign went so far as to commit a criminal offence, according to a complaint filed with the US Department of Justice on behalf of the California

Right to Know Campaign. The complaint, now being investigated by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, cites several instances of deliberate misinformation, most prominent of them a mailer featuring the logo of the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) with a statement that the proposed labelling policy would be 'inherently misleading'. No such statement was ever made by the FDA.

This defeat hardly spells the end of the fight to have GMO containing foods labelled, according to all reports. In addition to numerous other US states where similar measures have been or will be considered, ongoing efforts by organisations, such as the 'Just Label It' campaign, will continue pressing for legislation on the federal level. In fact, the Natural Products Association, which opposed the California initiative, has recognised that some kind of consistent federal regulation would be preferable to a patchwork of different state laws that address GMO labelling requirements.

The day after the ballot vote the movement opposing GMOs in the US was re-energised. The launch of a new coalition, called the 'GMO Inside' campaign, whose goal is to 'to catapult the energy from the fight for Prop 37 to the next level', was announced. 'Our goal is to bring greater awareness to consumers nationwide about the dangers of GMOs and educate on

what they can do to make a change', explained John W. Roulac, CEO and founder of Nutiva. According to a press release, the GMO Inside campaign will provide Americans with actions they can take in their homes, grocery stores, and communities to call attention to genetically engineered foods. It will provide tools and resources for Americans to find the GMOs in a wide-range of products and brands on grocery shelves, and give people organic and non-GMO alternatives. It will also create communities of people who are concerned about GMOs and who will support each others' efforts to label GMOs and avoid products containing them. GMO Inside steering committee members include Food Democracy Now!, Green America, Institute for Responsible Technology, Foodbabe, Nature's Path and Nutiva. ■

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This defeat hardly spells the end of the fight to have GMO containing foods labelled. ■

Germany's new regulation

In Germany, as in most EU Member States, organic certification is undertaken by private certification bodies that are approved and supervised by a competent authority. However, in Germany a new national regulation – the ‘Verordnung über die Zulassung von Kontrollstellen nach dem Öko-Landbaugesetz’ (regulation for the approval of control bodies based on the organic agriculture law) – has been introduced that may change the process. The regulation, which came into force on 12 May 2012, defines in detail the approval criteria for the certification bodies. It also specifies and develops the EU Regulation requirements on control, including how the certification bodies must perform the implementation of their inspections. It details the percentage of unannounced inspections that must be done, how many samples must be taken, which risk classification criteria need to be applied and how nonconformities must be handled. It also sets the minimum qualification criteria for organic inspectors and contains a common sanction catalogue.

The body that is responsible for the accreditation of the certification bodies in Germany is the ‘Deutsche Akkreditierungsstelle (DAKKS)’. Certification bodies also need to be officially approved by the Federal Agency for Agriculture and Nutrition, or ‘Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (BLE)’, which is the competent authority. The supervision of the certification bodies is the responsibility of the federal state authorities, the 15 ‘Öko-Länderbehörden’. The legal basis for this work division was traditionally the ‘Öko-Landbau Gesetz’ (ÖLG), or the Organic Agriculture Law, and the details were defined in two sets of

guidelines; one produced by the BLE (now replaced by the new regulation) and the other produced by the Federal Agency for Agriculture and Nutrition.

Is the new regulation an improvement?

The German organic movement was very actively involved in the development process of the new national regulation. Several institutions, like the German umbrella organisation for organic farming (BOELW) and the association of German certification bodies (KdK), were involved. First drafts were substantially criticised, and several elements subsequently changed. For example, the sanction catalogue originally contained over 200 sanctions, but this was narrowed down to just the most relevant ones.

During the discussion about the new national regulation, Professor Achim Spiller, an agronomist at the University of Göttingen and Dr Jochen Neuendorff, Managing Director of the German certification body ‘Gesellschaft für Ressourcenschutz Göttingen’ (GfRS), published an article in *Agra Europe* that questioned whether more detailed rules lead to a more harmonised and effective implementation of the EU Regulation on Organic Production. Their answer was essentially ‘No’ as more detailed rules create even more interpretation space and might enable actors to hide behind the rules, i.e. ‘I have done what was prescribed and was not authorised to do more’.

The way forward

Many years of organic certification have shown that the processes involved need to be able to be improved and adapted continually by the private sector itself, which has the best practi-

cal know-how.

Instead of the current focus on managing the different certification bodies Prof Spiller and Dr Neuendorff believe the more ambitious approach of setting and aiming for goals that could be achieved would be better. They list the following goals they consider necessary for an effective certification in organic farming:

- Promote the innovation potential and reputation of certification bodies with best practice to highlight the quality element in organic certification.
- Maintain independent quality rankings of organic certification bodies.
- Constantly raise the qualification level of all people involved in organic certification, including the staff within the supervising authorities.
- Establish the minimum percentage of inspections necessary for target-orientated surveillance by the accreditation bodies and competent authorities to minimise bureaucracy.
- Ensure coordination between the accreditation bodies and the state authorities – in Germany and possibly everywhere – is fully optimised.

Though the main issues of effective organic certification are the same everywhere, national organic control systems are also very specific regarding the various approaches taken towards legal supervision. The practical know-how of applying and certifying the regulations usually lies with the professionals actually involved with production or with any business along the whole food chain. To promote and value the quality of this will be the key factor for a reliable organic certification in future. ■

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More information available from www.ble.de/DE/02_Kontrolle/08_Oekolandbau/

Standards as tools for power

Book review of:

Standards: Recipes for Reality by Lawrence Busch,
The MIT Press, 408 pages

We hear the news every day about the price of oil expressed in dollars per barrel. The standard barrel of crude oil is 42 US gallons (34.9723 imperial gallons; 158.9873 litres). This measurement originated in the early Pennsylvania oil fields. Oil has not actually been shipped in barrels since the introduction of oil tankers, but the 42-US-gallon size is still used as a unit for measurement. Interestingly enough, the 'standard oil drum' that is commonly seen in use is a 55 US-gallon barrel! The two sizes of oil drums represent some of the millions of standards that shape the society we live in. Almost all products and services we are exposed to are subject to one or, mostly, many standards. A life without standards is almost incomprehensible today. Just think about how simple trade could be conducted without standards. There would be no agreed measures (scales), no clear quality standards, no agreed value reference (currency), and there would be no standard terms of trade, etc. It would be back to the situation of two unrelated civilizations experiencing their first encounter. Standards, and their cousin 'norms', give us predictability in an otherwise rather chaotic world.

Within most professions, such as the organic sector, there are heated debates about the standards to apply, and people spend a lot of time arguing over them, writing them and revising them. But very few people actually think of standards as a social

institution, nor do they consider their governance and how they can be used in the interest of some groups against others. In the excellent book, *Standards: Recipes for Reality*, Lawrence Busch, Professor at Michigan State University, makes us aware of how standards shape our lives every day. More importantly, he puts standards in a wider economic, social and political context.

Busch questions many of the claims normally related to standards. For example, in the language of ISO and others, standards are developed based on consensus. Busch argues that consensus is not at all a salient feature of standards. It is rather that they are taken for granted or forced upon people that ensures that people conform to them. The organic sectors show ample evidence of this; the EU Organic Regulation was certainly not developed in a consensus process, and its acceptance is based on law rather than content. Even more striking is how certain proprietary technical standards can dominate markets, e.g. Microsoft Windows and its associated programs. Even governments yield to their powers in many cases.

Busch categorises standards in four broad categories: filters, ranks, divisions and Olympic standards.

- Olympic standards measure a winner or a small elite. Academy awards, best restaurant in London are ex-

amples of Olympic standards.

- Filters are standards that set acceptable minimums. Organic standards are a good example, another example is standards for specific professions, such as teachers or medical doctors.
- Rank standards prioritise. While filters are either/or, rank standards place things in an ordered hierarchy. The grading of vegetables is a good example of ranking standards.
- Division standards define different categories. The different varieties of grain is one such example.

Busch calls the triple combination of standards, certification and accreditation the Tripartite Standards Regime (TSR), and sees the TSR emerging as an alternative mode of governance for most aspects of social life. He is rather critical towards the TSR and one of his claims is that audits often do violence to the subject of certification. This is particularly the case when the audits are weakly related to the real purpose of the standards; when audits take attention away from other important but difficult to measure aspects; when their approach is of 'mechanical objectivity', which relieves the certification body from responsibility; or when they intrude into the subject's pursuance of whatever goals they have. It seems to me that all four of those points apply to how organic certification is conducted. The problem, and the violence done, is exacerbated when standards are written into law, says Busch. Busch concurs with Michael Power in his book, *The Audit Society*, that one of the major consequence of the TSR is that organisations subject to certification are forced

The triple combination of standards, certification and accreditation is called the Tripartite Standards Regime.

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DANISH ORGANIC MILK TO CHINA

One third of the organic milk produced in Denmark is exported to Germany, but now Arla, the giant dairy cooperative, has set its sights on China. It has just had inspection visits from the Chinese authorities to clear 65 farms for organic milk exports to China. They expect that the Chinese elite will be willing to pay up to 4 euros for organic UHT milk. ■

Source: Økologi & Erhverv

HEALTHY COWS IN DENMARK

In a study of 50 organic cow-herds with in total 5,500 cows the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries checked if cows were healthy, if sick animals were adequately treated and if the farmer had good control over sick animals and their treatments. The result was that of the 5,500 cows only three were not treated according to the requirements of the general and organic legislation. Sick animals were taken care of and treated with veterinary medicine when required and the general health statuses in the organic herds were good. ■

to reorganise their work to make them more easily auditable, but that such a reorganisation to satisfy the auditors may backfire, and risk confusing predictability with trustworthiness.

Food and agriculture have long been subject to various standards. A striking example in agriculture is in the development of new plant varieties and animal breeds. In the food business, quality and safety standards stretch a very long way back, with the Bavarian Reinheitsgebot, a beer quality standard, as a five hundred year old example. As late as 1919, there were 23 different grain bushel measures in use in the USA. Today, food is enormously standardised; in the Chicago Board of Trade, which I recently visited, millions of corn futures contracts are bought and sold every day. A corn future is a highly standardised product. Apart from a set quantity, it is for a certain quality delivered at a certain place at a fixed date. It is this standardisation that allows food to be treated as a commodity in the market place.

In his book Busch sees the standards movement of the last century as part of the industrialisation concept, linked to the division of labour, economies of scale and to the whole organisation of the factories. The same standardisation enables global markets and unlimited competition. Through standardisation in transportation, such as containerisation, improved communications etc., the competition is now also truly global in many markets. The container itself was standardised in 1965, and it now determines not just the shape of ships but also of pallets, boxes and goods that fit into the standardised boxes.

This competition, in turn, drives the 'technological treadmill' – producers can't raise the price (as the quality is fixed), which means that the cost of production must be lowered, e.g. by using chemical fertilizers or by using more efficient machinery.

As a counter-reaction to this development in the last decade there has been a drive to use standards for differentiation. This is an aspect that readers of TOS must be familiar with as organic standards and certification is one of the most prominent examples of such differentiation. Classic standardisation leads producers down the path of 'commodity hell'. It has cleared the market from unique products, made to order or in a one-by-one production process, and transformed it to 'same' products. With the new standards differentiation, we get a market where we can 'choose between hundreds of different, but equally standardised – varieties of ketchup, automobiles or airline tickets'. But Busch also notes that 'their [the differentiating standards] value as such is diminished as their numbers increase'. Busch explores how this contradiction came into being.

He sees the rapid increase in use of standards coinciding with the neo-liberal project, with less central planning and retreating states. He also sees an inherent conflict in which managers of companies, on the one hand, want less regulation, but on the other hand, are afraid of the vacuum created by the retreating state. The total free market situations favoured in most liberal economic theories have been abolished by the companies themselves through the development of closely knitted supply chains,

In his book Busch sees the standards movement of the last century as part of the industrialisation concept. ■

which in turn are a pre-condition for lean management, outsourcing and other modern trends. To make all participants in a supply-chain subject to standards and certification means they are tied together and the market is less free, and therefore more predictable. 'No large firm can afford to subject itself to the instabilities and risks associated with the free market'. In this way, the Tripartite Standards Regime becomes a new model for governance. The lead firm, or lead firms, in a supply-chain or value-chain will mostly impose their standards on others. The standards themselves often also distribute burden and costs unevenly in the value-chain. Busch mentions GlobalG.A.P. as such an example, where small farmers are not able to carry the substantial direct and indirect costs involved. He also discusses how NGOs have turned to certifications and supply chains in an attempt to advance their goals, instead of lobbying increasingly powerless governments.

Busch shows how standards are intimately connected to power – that they often serve to empower some and disempower others and that standards tend to be dominated by those with power; 'in our modern world standards are arguably the most important manifestation of power relations'. By

Standard definition according to ISO

What is a standard? A standard is a document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose.

Source: www.iso.ch

means of standard, conflicts are seemingly resolved or at least transferred from a political domain into a technical, technocratic domain. The claimed 'voluntary' nature of standards also adds to the perception that the use of the standard is just an economic choice made in the market place. In this way, standards are stealthily becoming weapons for power and are blurring power relationships. Because of the perceived technical nature of the standards, the standards governance model (the TPR) falls short of ethics, justice and democracy.

'Standards' is a book to read for those professionally engaged in the tripartite regime of standards, certification and accreditation. It will pose some hard questions, and offer some ideas for improvements. While the tone is critical, Busch makes no attempt to trash standards as a whole: 'Thus, the challenge is not to eliminate standards, to return to some mythical past during which standards were of trivial importance, Instead [...] to ensure that seemingly benign standards do not lead to gross injustices.' Before embarking on making a standard, we should ask the central question: are standards the most appropriate form of governance in this particular situation? There are laws, regulations, statutes, norms and customs that could perhaps be a better alternative. Busch makes a list of qualities – standards for standards if you so wish – that he believes standards should have: subsidiarity; take a cautious approach; do minimal violence; make actionable standards; encourage participation in standard setting; and review standards frequently.

Read and enjoy. ■

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