

International Standards

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Organic farming is practiced throughout the world, with an estimated 23 million hectares (56.83 million acres) now under organic management. Australia and Argentina have the largest production areas with extensive land devoted to grazing livestock. Europe has over five million hectares (12.35 million acres) under organic management, with Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy accounting for the largest shares of that acreage. Italy also has the largest number of organic farmers in the world. When working with producers who are selling into export markets, one must be aware that standards vary around the world. Not all importers accept the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) Rule as equivalent.

European Union Regulations

EU member states follow European Union Council Regulation 2092/91. Each member state has a national law that conforms to the regulation and a competent authority responsible for implementation. Once in the EU, imported product has free movement within the borders. Also, the EU recognizes a number of countries outside the EU as having equivalent organic regulations, including Australia, Argentina, and Israel. Products shipped to these countries and processed also need to meet EU regulations. The US does not, at this time, have an equivalency agreement with the EU. Thus, the EU does not automatically and may not necessarily accept for importation products certified by an NOP-accredited certifier.

Japanese Agricultural Standards

The Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry established the Japanese Agricultural Standard (JAS), accredits certifiers, and enforces organic labeling laws. The Japanese government and U.S. have established an equivalency arrangement for the trade in products labeled organic with a few specific exceptions. However, some buyers still insist on full JAS compliance rather than accept equivalence.

Codex Alimentarius

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and World Health Organization have developed a set of guidelines for organically produced food as part of an overall international project known as Codex Alimentarius. The Codex guidelines for organic food labeling are used to help various countries establish a consistent set of laws and to help harmonize different existing national standards. In the event of an international dispute, the World Trade Organization is expected to treat the Codex Alimentarius guidelines as neutral and consensus based.

IFOAM

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) is a non-governmental organization that has established a set of Basic Standards. IFOAM has contracted with the International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS) to accredit certifiers to these voluntary standards. Several large retailers in Europe rely on the IFOAM standards and IOAS accreditation as the basis for their certification rather than any particular national standard.

For export markets, U.S. certified organic producers must understand the organic standards of the country to which they sell in order to successfully capitalize on marketing opportunities.

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