

Terms of Reference

US/Canada Technical Working Group on the Organic Equivalence Arrangement

Objective

In June 2009, the Governments of Canada and the United States signed an organics equivalence arrangement recognizing their respective determinations of each other's organic certification program. Under this arrangement, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Canada Organic Office (COO) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Organic Program (NOP) have established a Technical Working Group to develop procedures to deliver, verify, report and document the elements of the US/Canada organic equivalence arrangement. The Technical Working Group provides recommendations to the US/Canada Steering Committee for approval.

Structure

The US /Canada Technical Working Group will be co-chaired by the NOP and the CFIA and will be comprised of members drawn from the COO and the NOP.

If necessary, technical experts may be invited by agreement of the co-chairs to provide information or clarification on specific issues.

The co-chairs will be responsible for scheduling and conducting meetings in accordance with the Terms of Reference and for preparing the meeting agenda.

Mandate

The mandate of the Technical Working Group is to:

- Discuss and provide guidance related to the Arrangement.
- Develop and implement a process to assess the effectiveness of each other's control system to fulfil the requirements of the above mentioned arrangement.
- Establish and agree upon assessment review criteria.
- Establish an assessment cycle which will identify the frequency of the visits.
- Report progress on the implementation of the US- Canada Organic Equivalence Arrangement to the Steering Committee.
- Provide policy recommendations to the Steering Committee for their consideration.
- Obtain approval from the Steering Committee prior to communicating with the organic industry, posting items on websites, or implementing new projects.

Guiding Principles

The following general principles will govern the Technical Working Group:

- The Technical Working Group members have full opportunity to voice their opinions and participate.
- Discussions and decisions should be made acknowledging the range of viewpoints from various stakeholders who could be impacted by decisions taken by the working group.
- Discussions will take place in the spirit of cooperation and final policy will be approved through consensus.
- Members are encouraged to discuss and share information on issues that impact both programs.
- Members will provide meaningful and timely input on draft requirements/policies/procedures when requested by the co-chairs or the Steering Committee.

Budget and Administrative Needs

Co-chairs of the Technical Working Group will be responsible for ensuring that their working group members look after their own administrative needs (e.g. meeting arrangements, document preparation and distribution, records of decision etc.).

Documentation and Reporting

- All documentation for the Technical Working Group meetings, including agendas and decision records will be sent to all members in a timely manner once approved by the co-chairs
- Reports and recommendations from the Technical Working Group will be sent to the Steering Committee in a timely manner.

Meeting Frequency

- The Technical Working Group will meet once per year or more frequently if necessary to ensure work plan timelines are met.