

Terms of Reference

US/Canada Steering Committee 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 Parties agree to establish a high level policy Steering Committee consisting of representatives from the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). In addition, CFIA, Canada Organic Office (COO) and the USDA, National Organic Program (NOP) have agreed to establish a Technical Working Group to develop procedures to deliver, verify, report and document the elements of the US/Canada Organic Equivalence Arrangement.

The purpose of the Steering Committee will be to oversee implementation of the Arrangement and to guide the activities of the Technical Working Group.

This document outlines the membership, roles and the responsibilities of the Steering Committee during the process of fully implementing the US/Canada Organic Equivalence Arrangement as well as its potential transformation into a full equivalence arrangement.

Structure

The US /Canada Steering Committee group will be co-chaired by the USTR and the CFIA and will be comprised of members drawn from FAS, DFAIT and AAFC.

The COO and the NOP Technical Working Group will develop proposals and other information for the consideration and approval of the Steering Committee.

In addition, 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 Steering Committee is to:

- Oversee implementation of the Arrangement.
- Provide policy guidance to the respective national organic programs.
- Work collaboratively on messages which are of importance to industry in both countries and agree upon common language and approaches in order to ensure consistency of messaging
- Monitor the development and implementation of a process to assess the effectiveness of each other's control system to fulfil the requirements of the above mentioned arrangement.
- Approve ongoing assessment review criteria.
- Approve the assessment cycle which will identify the frequency of visits.
- Monitor progress on update mechanisms and offer guidance on the ongoing implementation and maturation of the US-Canada Organic Equivalence Arrangement.
- On occasion, to meet with interested stakeholders to explain the Arrangement and its requirements.

Guiding Principles

The following general principles will govern the Steering Committee:

- The Steering Committee will invite the Technical Working Group members to raise issues of concern regarding implementation of the Arrangement and participate in the decision making process.
- The Steering Committee will encourage and welcome a wide range of viewpoints from various stakeholders regarding implementation of the Arrangement.
- The working group will provide meaningful and timely delivery of draft requirements/policies/procedures

Budget and Administrative Needs

Co-chairs of the Steering Committee will be responsible for their own administrative needs (e.g. meeting arrangements, document preparation and distribution, records of decision etc.).

Documentation and Reporting

- All documentation for meetings, including agendas and decision records, will be sent to all members of the Steering Committee in a timely manner

- The Technical Working Group should provide regular reports to the Steering Committee on their schedule of planned activities and a meeting report within two weeks of a meeting.

Meeting Frequency

- The Steering Committee will meet on an as-needed basis. It is suggested the group convenes at least one face-to-face meeting annually. The Steering Committee will, if and when required, call teleconference meetings to discuss and settle disagreements, etc related to the ongoing implementation of the US/Canada Arrangement.