



INTERNATIONAL ORGANIC ACCREDITATION SERVICE

A non-profit organisation
40, 1st Ave West, Suite 104, Dickinson,
N.D. 58601, USA
Tel: +1 701 483 5504 Fax: +1 701 483 5508
E Mail: info@ioas.org
Web: www.ioas.org

The History of The IFOAM Accreditation Programme

The IFOAM Accreditation Programme came into being on November 21st 1992 at the IFOAM General Assembly (GA) in Sao Paulo, Brazil. On that day the GA unanimously approved agenda point 13. The proposal read: "The General Assembly hereby adopts the recommendations of the Programme Evaluation and Accreditation committee to implement the IFOAM Accreditation Programme as mandated by the IFOAM General Assembly in Budapest Hungary (1990)".

The origins of the accreditation programme lie further in the past. In the late 1980's IFOAM's Technical Committee, responsible for the development of the IFOAM Basic Standards, began to evaluate certification bodies. Evaluation included visits to the certification bodies and the writing of reports. Reports of evaluated certification bodies were then shared between those certifiers participating in the system.

The system had no published criteria and did not lead to any form of IFOAM approval. It was a system for exchange of information based on evaluation by an independent party. The purpose was to enhance trust between certification bodies, the absence of which had been identified as a block on the development of the organic movement.

Towards the end of the 1980's IFOAM realized the need to take this programme one step further and to institute a fully fledged accreditation programme. The technical committee was turned into three committees. A standards committee was constituted to continue the work on developing the IFOAM Basic Standards. The work of evaluation of certification bodies was taken over by the newly formed Programme Evaluation Committee (PEC). Finally a new committee, the Accreditation Committee (AC), was established to develop an accreditation programme.

These committee's first met in November 1990 at the IFOAM conference in Budapest, Hungary. At the same time the GA voted to proceed with implementing an accreditation programme.

Over the next two years the accreditation committee met several times. The work involved both developing the procedures for accreditation and establishing the criteria against which applicant certification bodies would be evaluated. Towards the end of the two year period the AC and PEC met jointly so that the PEC members could provide input into the development of the programme.

As the committee neared completion of its work, the value of the proposed accreditation system was questioned in light of the EU regulation which was in the process of being implemented. Based on the fact that the EU regulation was not an international system together with the recognition of the need for the private sector to take responsibility for the integrity of the organic system, the IFOAM World Board of the day decided to let the General Assembly decide.

The unanimous vote of the GA to proceed with accreditation system was followed by an intensive period of work. An interim IFOAM Accreditation Programme Board (IAPB) was appointed by the World Board of Directors. Gunnar Rundgren was appointed as the first Chair with Bo van Elzakker as the vice-Chair. While the basic procedures had been set down in an Operating Manual, more detailed procedures and policies and the accompanying forms had to be developed. To carry out this work the IAPB appointed Ken Commins as Accreditation Programme Executive on a half time basis.

As a result of this work programme the IAPB was not ready to accept applicants for accreditation until March of 1993. The first application filed was from KRAV (Sweden) in July of that year. By March of 1994 they had been joined by Biokultura (Hungary), Biodinamico (Brazil), FVO (USA), NASAA (Australia), OGBA (USA), Bioagricoop (Italy) and OCIA (USA). The first accreditation contracts were signed in December 1994 with KRAV, NASAA and Biodinamico.

In November 1994 the accreditation office moved from Ireland to North Dakota. Over the next three years' applications were received from the Soil Association (UK), the Ministry of Agriculture Czech Republic, Naturland (Germany), Oregon Tilth (USA), CCOF (USA), Bio-Gro (New Zealand), Bolicert (Bolivia), Argencert (Argentina), AIAB (Italy) and IBOAA (Israel). At the end of February 1997, twelve certification bodies were accredited and 6 were applicants.

The IFOAM World Board of Directors and the IAPB had been discussing the possibility of establishing a separate legal entity to operate the IFOAM Accreditation Programme for some time. This culminated in the signing of an agreement between IFOAM and the newly formed International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS) in March 1997. The IOAS was incorporated in the USA as a non-profit organisation. The IOAS has only one member, being IFOAM.

This change did not cause any significant disruption to the operation of the IFOAM Accreditation Programme. The IAPB became the Board of the new company. All policies and procedures related to the IAP were adopted by the IOAS.

1997 was also the year in which Gunnar Rundgren stepped down. Gunnar had served as the Chair of the IAPB and subsequently as the President of the IOAS from the IAP inception in 1992. Bo van Elzakker stepped up from his position as vice President to take up the Presidency.

Major landmarks in 1998 were the employment of a second professional person and the establishment of an accreditation committee. Both were necessitated by the increased volume of work the IOAS was undertaking. Jan Deane was employed in March 1998, initially as the

Assistant Programme Manager but subsequently took over as Programme Manager. At the end of 1998 there were 13 accredited certification bodies with an additional 6 applicants.

The Accreditation Committee was formally constituted in September 1998. Although the Committee was initially largely made up of board members, this changed as new members were recruited.

During 1998 the IOAS commissioned an independent consultant to review the IOAS procedures against the ISO Guide 61 for accreditation bodies. This study was completed in 1999 and showed the IOAS to be fully compliant.

Between 1998 and the present the IOAS and the IFOAM Accreditation Programme has continued to grow. By December of 2005, 36 certification bodies were within the programme, of which 33 were accredited and 3 were under evaluation.

The number of staff has also continued to increase to take care of the increase in workload and to ensure a high level of service. David Crucefix was appointed as Assistant Executive Director in 2000 and in early 2002 Stephanie Goldfinch was appointed as Assistant Programme Manager and Amaia Aldana as an Accreditation Officer.

The IFOAM Accreditation Programme has undergone many changes over the years. A complete overhaul of the procedures was undertaken in 2000. Yet it has also seen much stability. Some Board members have served from its inception in 1992. Over the course of the 10 years only 7 people have filled the seats on the three person Executive Board. The Executive Director has remained unchanged for the decade.

There were times in the early years when many doubted the ability of the IFOAM Accreditation Programme to continue to exist. Confusion over the relation with regulations and a high level of debt were only two of the factors that threatened its continuation. However, it has not only overcome these challenges but has continued to grow.

In 2004 the IOAS was recognised as operating both the IFOAM and ISO65 Accreditation Programmes in line with ISO61 by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, part of the US Department of Commerce. Increasingly the IOAS works in collaboration with governments and national accreditors and is a force for harmonisation of regulation of the organic sector.

Ken Commins
January 2005

People who have served in establishing and operating the IFOAM Accreditation Programme

Bold indicates served on the Executive Board or as Chair of the AC

The IFOAM Accreditation Committee 1990-1992

Patrick Holden (UK)	Rudy Lemmens (France)	Rainer Loser (Germany)
Ken Commins (Ireland)	Franz Rivetti (Italy)	Frank Williams (Belgium)
Sampsa Heinonen (Finland)	Antonio Compagnoni (Italy)	
Judy Gillan (USA)	Reginbert Keller (Germany)	

The IFOAM Accreditation Programme Board (IAPB) 1993- 1997

Gunnar Rundgren (Sweden)	Robert Beauchemin (Canada)	Ong Kung Wai (Malaysia)
Bo van Elzaker (Holland)	Jim Riddle (USA)	Joe Smillie (USA)
Reginbert Keller (Germany)	Beate Huber (Germany)	William Friedman (USA)
Gerald Hermann (Germany)	Roger Blobaum (USA)	Perry Spiller (New Zealand)
Sampsa Heinonen (Finland)	Ahmed El Araby (Egypt)	Tim Marshall (Australia)
Franz Rivetti (Italy)	Roberto Ugas (Peru)	

The IOAS Board of Directors 1997-present

Bo van Elzaker (Holland)	Roberto Ugas (Peru)	Robert Duxbury (UK)
Roger Blobaum (USA)	Sampsa Heinonen (Finland)	Gunnar Rungren (Sweden)
Jim Riddle (USA)	Franz Rivetti (Italy)	Paolo Foglia (Italy)
Beate Huber (Germany)	Ahmed El Araby (Egypt)	Michael Slight (USA)
Ong Kung Wai (Malaysia)	Vitoon Panyakul (Thailand)	Jenny Barnes (Australia)

The IOAS Accreditation Committee 1998-present

Roberto Ugas (Peru)	Paolo Foglia (Italy)	Urs Meier (Switzerland)
Ahmed El-Araby (Egypt)	Ong Kung Way (Malaysia)	Robert Duxbury (UK)
Roger Blobaum (USA)	Vitoon Panyakul (Thailand)	Melanie Adcock (USA)
Bo van Elzaker (Holland)	Jochen Neuendorff (Germany)	Denis Paul Bouffard (Quebec)
Elke Roder (Germany)	Michael Sligh (USA)	Frank Rumpe (Switzerland)
Roberto Setti (Italy)	Anne Macey (Canada)	Patricio Parra (Chile)

IOAS/IAPB Staff 1992-present

Ken Commins (USA) Exec. Director 1992-	Office Administration
Jan Deane (UK) Program Manager 1998-	Diane Gahner 1997-2000
David Crucefix (Spain) Asst. Exec. Director. 2000-	Susan Hepper 2001-
Stephanie Goldfinch (Australia) Asst. Program Manager 2002-	Bonnie Schmitz 2005-2006
Amaia Aldana (Spain) Accreditation Officer 2002-	

The following external evaluators have been used during the 10 years: Jean-Marc Aube (Canada), Pete Gonzalves (USA), Michael Michaud (UK), John Myers (UK), Hugo Skoppek (USA), Kenneth Green (USA), Peter Brul (Holland).

IFOAM Liaison persons: Tom Harding (USA), Rainer Bachi (Switzerland), Linda Bullard (Belgium), Suzanne Vaupel (USA), Diane Bowen (USA).