

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS



Organic certification is a guarantee that food production was undertaken according to a set of organic standards. These can be national organic standards, which some countries have, or they can be organic standards adopted by certain economic regions. All standards align to the organic principles and practices set out by the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM)–Organics International. They differ sometimes in the level of strictness or volumes of paperwork required. The benefit of organic certification for producers is that they can enter a niche market – often international markets where demand for organics is high – and they can often receive a price premium. For consumers, organic certification provides the assurance that the food bought and consumers was produced according to organic standards, including not containing pesticides or other chemical residues.

1ST PARTY ASSURANCE

When a farmer claims that s/he produced according to a set of organic standards. 1st party assurance works in community contexts where farmers and consumers know each other and trust the quality of production.



2ND PARTY ASSURANCE

When other people in the community provide assurance that the farmers are producing to organic standards. 2nd party assurance works in local market settings where relationships can be traced. It provides a collective guarantee according to collectively agreed standards.



3RD PARTY ASSURANCE

When an external auditor who works for an accreditation or certification body visits the farm to check that it meets the organic standards of a selected certifying body. 3rd party work in contexts where no relationship exists between producers, the market and consumers.



BENEFITS OF THESE SYSTEMS

- It is free.
- There is no administrative burden of proof.
- It encourages short value chains.
- It encourages a strong relationship of trust between farmers and consumers.

- It is affordable. The group that sets itself up as an assurance body can set the costs for farm visits and assessments.
- It is inclusive, drawing often on groups of farmers plus consumers, retailers and others interested in the local food system.
- It builds stakeholder knowledge of local food systems.
- Uses a logo to indicate certification.

- It enables entry into formal retail chains and export markets.
- Provides external communication (logo) to unrelated parties that a set (usually publicly accepted) standard has been met.

DISADVANTAGES OF THESE SYSTEMS

- It is open to abuse and incidences of fraudulent claims of organic production are increasing in Southern Africa.
- It doesn't enable entry into organic niche markets or formal retail chains.

- It works well at the local level and national levels, but 2nd party assurance is not yet accepted for export purposes. Although there is a move in the West African region to accept 2nd party assurance for export purposes to other countries within the region.

- It is expensive as all the costs of the auditor need to be covered. There are not many certified auditors in Southern Africa and often the person has to be brought in from overseas.
- Comprehensive record keeping is required
- It is characterised by untraceable relationships.

