

Can certification encourage organic operators to become better organic operators?

Susanne Padel, ORC



Introduction

- ☉ Since the 1970's the organic sector has been characterised by a system of private standards.
- ☉ Peer review was replaced through a formalised third party certification system
- ☉ Now part of the standards and governmental and international regulations
- ☉ Control manuals
- ☉ Accreditation of control bodies

Weaknesses of organic certification

- ☉ lack of risk orientation in control and inspection
- ☉ lack of consumers knowledge
- ☉ lack of harmonised procedures
 - ☉ penalties and follow up related to irregularities & infringements
 - ☉ approval and surveillance of CBs
- ☉ **weak emphasis on operator responsibility for organic integrity and working in line with principles**

Source: Padel et al. (2009) The European regulatory framework and its implementation in influencing organic inspection and certification systems in the EU

Certification requirements

- ☉ Operator are inspected mainly on minimal requirement for being organic
- ☉ Most are zero-tolerance criteria similar to failing a driving test or an exam
- ☉ Further achievement is not rewarded and thus not encouraged

Could the organic standard be an improvement standard?

- ☞ Aiming for continuous development of the systems
 - ☞ HACCP aims for reduction of food safety risks through setting objectives for improved management and continuous training
 - ☞ Geographical Indication and ICS Group certification also emphasises high quality in small holder production

Examples of a progress standard:



☞ Related to human resource management

☞ Improving business performance

☞ Three fundamental principles

☞ Plan

☞ Do

☞ Review

☞ Gold, Silver & Bronze award



Animal welfare and organic

Principles (EU regulation):

Management systems that enhance the health of soil, water, plants and animals,

respect high animal welfare

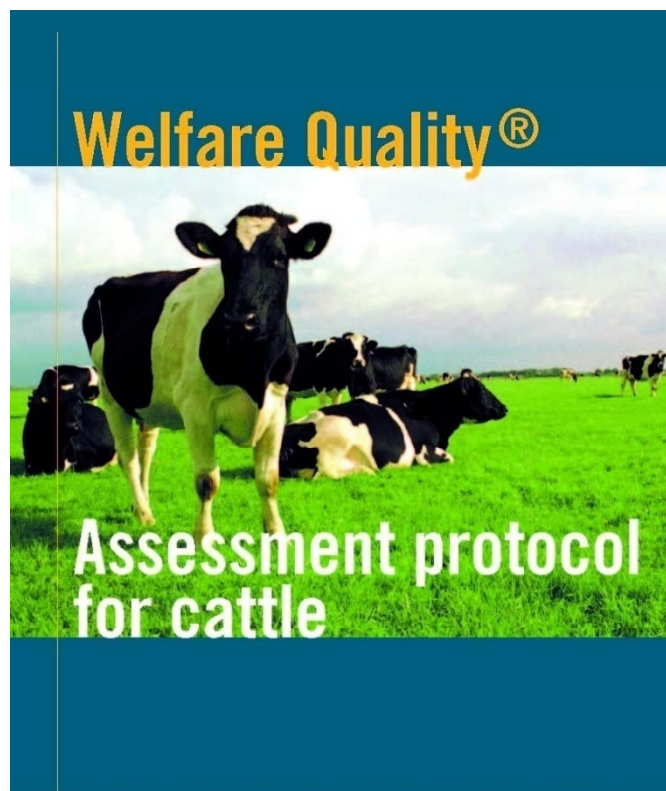
and are aimed at producing products of high quality” (Art 3 of EC/834/2007)

Certification criteria for livestock

(based on Article 76, Regulation (EC)
889/2009)

- ☞ Description of holding
 - ☞ Buildings, pastures, open air areas
 - ☞ Installations and storage of manure
- ☞ Management plan and records
- ☞ Identification of stock
 - ☞ Arrival, conversion, veterinary records, leaving date
 - ☞ Losses
 - ☞ Feed materials and diet
 - ☞ Date of treatment, diagnosis, drugs used
- ☞ Does not address animal welfare outcomes

Exploratory case study UK welfare



- From resource based indicators of welfare (such as amount of space per animal)
- To animal-based (outcome) measures (such as the presence of visible skin lesions)

Changes in the inspection visit



- ☞ Soil Association has included some animal based indicators
- ☞ Subset of those in the Bristol Welfare Assessment Programme (BWAP) (Leeb et al.,2004).
- ☞ 20 animals at random
 - ☞ cows: lameness, swollen hocks, cleanliness and body condition
 - ☞ Layers: feather loss, comb colour, abnormal beaks, soiling of feathers and normal behaviour (dustbathing and ranging)
- ☞ Inspectors attend a two day practical training course before beginning the assessments on certified farms
- ☞ Farmers are given the results in their inspection report
- ☞ At present no direct impact on certification outcome

What have we done?

- ☉ Interviews with 18 farmers (10 dairy/ 8 poultry) certified by the Soil Association (August and September 2011)
- ☉ Inspection included welfare assessment
- ☉ Response to increased emphasis on welfare during inspection

Results farmers

- ☉ 6/10 dairy farmers and 2/8 poultry farmers had not noticed any change but the practise has now been in place for several years
- ☉ Some were not aware of having received feedback
- ☉ Contrasting views whether inspection should include animal observations

From “None of their business !”

“Yes, certification has to include welfare; it's claimed that welfare (on organic farms) is better, or that's what people believe”.

“Is the inspector competent to do it?”

And the inspectors?

☞ The system is helpful

- ☞ Allows better standardisation

- ☞ Possible to observe improvements over time

- ☞ or the emergence of problems

Potential for progress element?

“Drawing a conclusion on one day is not it. Isn't it better to say there's progress?”

“ .. monitoring on a monthly basis shows how these (health) aspects are progressing”

- ☉ This suggests there is potential for target-based assessments
- ☉ Has the monitoring lead to any improvements?

And, what if there are problems?

“I feel a bit out on a limb”

“you need to be able to get advice from the inspectors who are out on the farms seeing how it is done”

☞ Requires access to support to put things right through information, through training and advice?

Discussion

- ☉ Not clear that operators share the need for welfare assessment (poultry more so than dairy)
- ☉ Willingness to engage is important

Advantages of progress element in the standards

- ☞ Allows operators to demonstrate willingness to tackle problems (Schmid 2010)
- ☞ Individual goals and monitoring criteria taking the specific circumstances into account
 - ☞ Likely to lead to improvement and strengthen personal responsibility
 - ☞ Allows control bodies/standard setters to gain more experience with monitoring criteria in new areas of standard development

Conclusions

- ☞ Animal based assessment could allow a progress element to be included in certification
- ☞ Impact on time spent for certifications needs to be considered
- ☞ No likely to fully replace existing minimal requirements
- ☞ However, a mixed approach with some improvement elements and some minimal requirements could be envisaged

Acknowledgements

Financial support from the European Community under the 7th Framework as part of the CERTCOST Project (Agreement no. 207727 (<http://www.certcost.org>) is gratefully acknowledged.

The presentation reflects the views of the author(s) and not those of the European Community, which is not to be held liable for any use that may be made of the information contained

 **Thank you for listening**