

## Monitoring Sustainability Functioning, aims and results of the BNN-Monitor on Sustainability

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### Author's Background

The authors of this paper work in different fields of BNN: Karin Wegner works in the field of quality affairs, Hilmar Hilger and Marion Schlage are concerned with press and public relations and Hans-Josef Brzukalla is involved in the further development of the BNN-Monitor on Sustainability. The different working areas reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the BNN-Monitor on Sustainability: From finding of indicators, over data collection, analysis of results to presentation of results and press work – as well as the continuous advancement.

### Summary

*The BNN-Monitor on Sustainability was developed to analyze, communicate and coordinate sustainability performance of processors and wholesalers of organic products. It was developed in a joint process by BNN and its participating members. It is built on about 140 criteria in a three columns model of ecological, social and economic issues. A yearly report shows the achievements, makes them comparable and gives a basis to communicate on company and organic sector level.*

### Background

Sustainability is a core value of organic farming and the whole organic sector. Being seen as a matter of course for the sectors protagonists, communication of sustainability performance has long been neglected in the organic sector – differently to the conventional sector. As sustainability is getting more and more important for consumers, it becomes crucial to present ones efforts in sustainable development for the organic sector as well. For these reasons it seemed important to better transport the sustainability performance of the organic sector and of organic companies. To communicate achievements in sustainability successfully, achievements need to be measured consequently and need to be made comparable. Therefore the BNN (Bundesverband Naturkost Naturwaren e.V., Association of Organic Processors, Wholesalers and Retailers) developed and introduced a system comprising a set of indicators, analysis, communication and coordination of sustainability performance. The system is focused on sustainability performance of processors and wholesalers.

Work was carried out together with the consulting firm "imug" specialized on social-ecological innovations (imug Beratungsgesellschaft für sozial-ökologische Innovationen mbH). Development was funded by the German foundation "Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt".

### Main chapter

Before developing the set of indicators various aims in the fields of analyses, communication and coordination were defined:

- Analysis:
  - o Coverage of ecological, social and economic activities of the BNN member companies (analysis of the current state), providing the base for self-assessment
- Communication:
  - o Presentation of the sustainability performance of individual companies
  - o Joint report of the BNN member companies and communication according to the German Sustainability Codex
  - o Raise awareness among companies and employees, creating networks on sustainability within companies and the organic sector
  - o Promote dialogue (internal / external)
- Coordination:
  - o Promoting competition by creating transparency and providing a management tool for continuous improvement of sustainability performance of companies

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For the development of the sustainability monitor requirements for the different indicators had to be defined, such as relevance, comparability, easy data collection and options for communication. To avoid an isolated solution, various reference systems were taken into account (e.g. BDIH, BÖLW, BNN, ECOCERT, Global Compact, GRI, ICADA, imug GmbH, low, ISO 26000, Eco-Institute, TU Berlin). In addition, the BNN members were involved in the development (late 2010 to mid-2011) via a moderated participative approach. Half of the indicators ask for quantitative information, half for qualitative. For quantitative indicators precise formula, units or methods are specified. Therewith the risk of mistakes is reduced and data is made comparable and it is quite easily workable for participating companies. The individual criteria are grouped into indicator groups, which in turn are grouped into the columns of ecology, social issues and economics.

The sustainability monitor is meant to be carried out on an annual basis. Therefore participating BNN-members provide their data for the different indicators. The individual data is then analyzed and summarized in a report by imug. The report follows the criteria given by the German sustainability codex (Deutscher Nachhaltigkeitskodex). With the report member companies could see the average of participating companies and compare their achievements with the achievements of the average.

After each round of data collection and its analyses the set of indicators is being evaluated to improve or update it if necessary. For example, after the first round of data collection in 2011 (based on data from 2010), the number of indicators was enlarged from about 120 to about 140. This was mainly due to splitting indicators into a qualitative and a quantitative part. More recent developments in the set of indicators until October 2014 will be presented.

Based on the report several measures were taken to reach the above mentioned aims in the fields of communication and coordination. An overview including the most recent measures from data collection in 2013 will be given during the presentation. Following some examples of measures are given, referring to the first two rounds of data collection in 2011 and 2012: Results of the first round of data collection were presented at BioFach 2012. To get an insight into efforts which are already implemented and to spread them the consulting company imug identified benchmark examples. They were spread via different means to give further companies the possibility to orientate on them. This can help to improve the sustainability performance in the organic sector in the course of time. Benchmark examples do not cover all achievements in sustainability, but show achievements within single indicators. The means for spreading the benchmark examples were the following: Some were printed on postcards which were distributed in big German cities. Others can be seen in video-clips via youtube ("BNN-Kanal"). The benchmark examples from the second round of data collection (data from 2011 collected in 2012) are made available on the BNN-homepage. And all of them were sent together with the report from imug to the participating BNN-member companies. With the report member companies could see the average of participating companies and compare their achievements with the achievements of the average.

For the results of data collection in 2013 further measures in the fields of analysis, communication and coordination are to be implemented. They will be presented at the conference. They might aim at options for internal and external communication.

There are ideas about having requirements on measurement and improvement of environmental performance in the EU regulation on organic farming (reg. (EU) 834/2007). For further development of the sustainability monitor these ideas will be closely followed to allow a matching of the requirements with the BNN-Sustainability Monitor.

### **Core messages and conclusions**

The BNN-monitoring on sustainability is a unique instrument developed to analyse, communicate and coordinate the sustainability performance of single companies and the organic sector. There is no conventional pendant. The instrument can help to bridge consumer expectations and companies' or the sectors achievements by measure and communicate the achievements in sustainability.