Atlantic Certified Organic

Quality System for ISO Compliant Organic Certification

This document is the,

ACO Quality Manual Version 2

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Forward

The Atlantic Certified Organic Co-operative Ltd (ACO) was incorporated in 2008, to provide accredited organic certification to an ISO/IEC (International Standards Organization) Guide 17065 compliant standard and the Organic Product Regulations of Canada under the Canada Organic Regime (COR) for Atlantic Canada.

Atlantic Certified Organic combined the certification services of two existing Atlantic Canada associations, the Maritime Certified Organic Growers Co-op Ltd (MCOG) and the Nova Scotia Organic Growers Association (NSOGA). Each of these associations had an established history of providing organic certification and other services to their respective memberships. The Nova Scotia Organic Growers Association (NSOGA) was formed in 1983 by and for the Nova Scotia organic community. Maritime Certified Organic Growers (MCOG) was established in 1992 to provide certification services for the organic community of the Maritime Provinces. The mandate of Atlantic Certified Organic is to provide an accredited Atlantic Canada based certification body to meet the certification needs of the region's organic community.

ACO is an accredited member (in progress, pending approval) of the International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS). Atlantic Certified Organic subscribes to and administers the Organic Products Regulations, a part of the Agricultural Products Act of Canada. The IOAS is a recognized accreditation body by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). As an accreditation body IOAS has recommended (pending) to COR, a division of CFIA that ACO be approved as an accredited certification body and provide certification services to organic producers, processors and handlers (enterprises).

Organic Certification

Organic certification exists to provide consumers with assurance that claims made by sellers of organic products have met recognized standards. Certification is a system of application (by producers, processors, and handlers), on site evaluation by independent third party inspectors, and assessment by a certification committee against documented standards.

Organic certification refers to the products from production units (farms, or portions of farms, or processing or handling facilities). Certified Organic verifies that products were produced under conditions required by organic standards.

ISO/IEC Guide 17065 compliant certification requires safeguards to ensure there is no possibility of influence or conflict of interest in the certification process. This ISO Guide is intended to ensure that certification bodies operate third-party certification systems in a consistent and reliable manner, thereby facilitating their acceptance on a national and international basis and so furthering international trade.

Definitions

Accreditation - The procedure by which a government agency having jurisdiction formally recognizes the competence of an inspection and/or Certification Body to provide inspection and certification services. For organic production, the competent authority may delegate the accreditation function to a private body.

Accredited Certification Body – A certification body that has been accredited.

ACO - Atlantic Certified Organic

Agricultural Primary Products - Means livestock, plants or unprocessed single-ingredient livestock or plant products.

Appeal - The procedure whereby a certified enterprise or member of the general public requests a review of a certification decision.

Applicant - A person or enterprise that has applied for organic certification under the Organic Products Regulations of Canada.

Audit - A systematic and independent examination to determine whether activities and related results comply, are implemented effectively and are suitable to achieve objectives.

Board - Means the Board of Directors of ACO.

Canada Organic Regime (COR)- Means the documented framework of standardization and control measures necessary for the to implementation of the Organic Products Regulations (Canada) . The COR refers to all parts of the national organic regulations that are managed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Certificate – The document issued by the Certification Body that describes the organic status of an enterprise.

Certification - The procedure whereby a (officially accredited) certification body provides written assurance that products or production systems conform to specified requirements. Certification of products may be based on a range of inspection activities including verification of management practices, auditing of quality assurance systems, and in/out production balances.

Certification Body *(*CB*)*- Means a body that is accredited as a Certification Body in accordance with the *Organic Products Regulations*.

Certified Product - Any product subjected to certification by an accredited certifying body, be it a tangible product intended for consumption (finished) or processing (primary) in the form of an ingredient, and distributed by the enterprise responsible for ensuring that products meet and, if applicable,

continue to meet requirements upon which the certification is based.

Certification Scope- The parameters which define the product and product types certified and where applicable the acreage and volumes for the certification granted.

CFIA - Means the Canadian Food Inspection Agency

Chain of Custody- The concept that all relevant steps in the production chain including the growing, handling, processing and other processes have been inspected and certified as appropriate.

Claim - Means any statement in labelling, advertising or commercial documents about an agricultural primary product or food or food ingredient that is intended to highlight the presence or absence of a specific characteristic of an agricultural primary product or food or an ingredient or the food or ingredient itself.

Compliance - Means the state of conformity with the acts and regulations through inspections and the use of statutory powers and authorities.

Conflict of Interest- The situation where an individual's capacity for objectivity is put at risk by financial or personal interests in conflict with their interests in conducting fair and impartial inspection or certification.

Enterprise - A production, processing or handling business or establishment.

Equivalency - Is a mechanism to recognize and accept another system by acknowledging that variations between the systems uphold the respective systems. ISO defines equivalence as the sufficiency of different conformity assessment results to provide the same level of assurance (ISO/IEC). It, therefore, refers to achieving the same outcome even though either technical regulations and/or the conformity assessment mechanism is/are not the same.

Genetic Engineering – Is defined as anything made with techniques that alter the molecular or cell biology of an organism by means that are not possible under natural conditions or processes. Genetic engineering includes recombinant DNA, cell fusion, micro-and macro-encapsulation, and gene deletion and doubling, introducing a foreign gene, and changing the position of genes. It shall not include breeding, conjugation, fermentation, hybridization, in-vitro fertilization, or tissue culture.

Inspection- An on-site visit to premises for verification of compliance with standards.

Inspector - Person assigned by the Certification Body to conduct inspections.

Internal Audit/Management Review - A systematic periodic review and assessment of the objectives and performance of a program that is undertaken by the certification body itself.

International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS)- an accreditation body.

ISO - International Standards Organization.

Labelling- Means any written, printed or graphic matter that is present on the label, accompanies the food, or is displayed near the food, including that for the purpose of promoting its sale or disposal.

Licensee- An operator or enterprise that is in possession of a valid certificate.

Mark of Certification - Mark vouching for the certification control of a product and obligatorily including the name of the certifying body and optionally the logo of the certification program.

Materials List - A register of production and processing materials indicating their status (allowed, regulated and prohibited) for use in organic food production.

Operator- Means any person, firm, company or organization that produces, prepares, processes, handles or distributes with a view to the subsequent marketing of products referred to as organic.

Organic Product- Means an agricultural product that has been certified as organic in accordance with the Organic Products Regulations.

Organic Production- Means the use of organic production methods on the farm holding, as well as activities involved in the further processing, packaging and labelling of a product, in compliance with the objectives, principles and rules established in the Organic Products Regulations.

Preparation- Includes, in respect of an agricultural product, processing, slaughtering, packing, assembling, pricing, marking and labelling.

Processed - Means in respect of a food product, canned, cooked, frozen, concentrated, pickled or otherwise prepared to assure preservation of the food product in transport, distribution and storage, but does not include the final cooking or preparation of a food product for use as a meal or part of a meal such as may be done by restaurants, hospitals, food centers, catering establishments, central kitchens or similar establishments where food products are prepared for consumption rather than for extended preservation.

Quality System – Documented procedures that are established, implemented, and periodically audited to assure that production, handling, management, certification, and other systems meet specified requirements and outcomes by following standardized protocols

Trade-mark - A word, symbol or design (or combination of these), used to distinguish the wares or services of one person or organization from those of others in the marketplace.

1. Introduction

Atlantic Certified Organic administers a system of accredited certification based on the Organic Products Regulations (COR) and criteria of ISO/IEC Guide 17065, (Conformity Assessment for Bodies certifying products, processes and services). It is intended that these criteria will ensure that ACO manages a third party certification system in a consistent and reliable manner.

As an independent third party ACO strives to provide services in accordance with accepted industry practices and internationally recognized guidelines. All certification services are provided on a cost-recovery basis with fees as nearly equal as possible to the actual cost of providing the service.

The Quality System for the Atlantic Certified Organic Co-operative Limited consists of the **ACO Quality Manual** and related certification documents detailed in the Document List. The Quality System is the program by which the ACO will maintain an effective and credible internal structure. The ACO Quality Manual describes the Quality System of the association. This manual is for use by directors, management, and staff of the association and to provide information about the association to interested members of the public.

In order to reduce costs for publication and reduce waste from duplication of information, the **ACO Quality Manual** contains the information that would be found in an Administrative Procedure Manual and a Policy Manual.

2. Scope

2.1 General Requirements

Within the ACO Quality Manual the term “certification body” is used to cover the body managing a product certification system. In organic agri-food production, the term “certification system” is understood to include certification of the compliance to production standards relative to organic production systems.

The word “product” is used in its widest sense and includes processes and services; and the word “standard” is used to include other normative documents such as specifications or technical regulations.

Suppliers of certified products (operators) and approved service providers can be distinguished as follows:

a) Certified Product suppliers have full control over and are responsible for production or manufacturing process, the raw materials supplying and the sale of certified products,

b) Service providers only carry out a particular activity (packaging, transportation, slaughtering, etc.) within the production or manufacturing chain, according to specifications provided by the supplier (operator) who maintains legal ownership over the product throughout the entire process.

2.2 Certification Scope

2.2.1 Atlantic Certified Organic has been recommended for accreditation by CARTV (pending) to the CFIA to provide organic certification according to regulations under the Organic Products Regulations.

2.2.2 The scope of certification services provided as defined in the Organic Products Regulations include the following:

Unprocessed plants and plant products and livestock and livestock products to the extent that the principles of production and specific verification rules for them as described in the standard.

Processed agricultural crops and livestock products intended for human and livestock consumption from the above products.

2.2.3 The certification system used by ACO may include one or more of the following, which is coupled with assessment and surveillance of the supplier's quality system:

a) type testing;
b) testing or inspection of samples taken from the market or from the suppliers stock or a combination of the two;
c) testing or inspection of every product or a particular product, whether new or already in use;
d) batch testing or inspection;
e) design appraisal

2.2.4 ACO shall confine its requirements, evaluation and decision on certification to those matters specifically related to the scope of certification being considered and do so in consideration that it shall not supply or design products of the type it certifies or any other product or services which could comprise the confidentiality, objectivity or impartiality of the certification process.

2.3 Chain of Custody

2.3.1 ACO shall ensure that all previously certified products or ingredients have been certified under the COR.

2.3.2 ACO shall not allow the use of its certification mark or issue a certificate for any product unless it is assured of the chain of custody of the product.

2.3.3 Any entity in the chain of custody that has produced, processed or packaged an organic product shall have been certified. Contracted production shall have been inspected.

2.3.4 ACO shall require that the party owning the product at the point of transport shall be responsible for maintaining organic integrity in the transportation process, unless transport operators are certified in their own capacity.

3. Certification Body

3.1 General Provisions

Atlantic Certified Organic is incorporated as a membership co-operative in the province of New Brunswick. The purpose of ACO is to provide a regionally based accredited certification service to the organic community of Atlantic Canada and beyond.

The policies and procedures under which ACO as a certification body and its administration operate shall be impartial and shall be administrated in a non-discriminatory manner. Polices or procedures shall not be used to impede or inhibit participation by applicants, other than stated in this the ACO Quality Manual. Speeding up or delaying the processing of some applications is considered to be hidden discrimination.

3.1.1 ACO as a certification body shall make its services accessible to all applicants whose activities fall within its declared field of operation. There shall be no undue financial or other conditions. Access shall not be conditional upon the size of the membership of the association, nor shall certification be conditional upon the number of certificates already issued. To qualify for product certification, all applicants shall demonstrate that they have the responsibility for ensuring that these products comply with certification requirements.

3.1.2 The criteria against which the products of a supplier are evaluated shall be outlined in the specific standards of the Organic Products Regulations, COR.

3.1.3 The documents pertaining to the product conformity requirements shall be understandable by the supplier, ACO and all interested parities.

3.1.4 When a subjective judgment is required to determine compliance, the certification body shall document explanatory information, assuring consistent and uniform application of the requirement and certification decisions.

3.1.5 ACO shall confine its requirements, evaluations and decisions on certification to those matters specifically related to its scope of certification.

3.1.6 ACO shall take full responsibility for all activities operated or contracted out and maintain its responsibility for decisions relating to its granting, maintaining, extending, and suspending or withdrawing certification.

3.2 Organization

The structure of ACO shall foster confidence in its certifications. ACO as a certification body shall

a) be impartial;
b) be responsible for all decisions relating to its granting, maintaining, extending, suspending and withdrawing of certification;
c) Identify the management (committee, group or individual) which shall have overall responsibility for all of the following**:**

1) Certification Committee for the performance of testing, inspection, evaluation and certification as defined in this the Quality Manual,
2) Board of Directors for the formulation of policy matters relating to the operation of the certification body,
3) Certification Committee for the decisions on certification,
4) President for the supervision of the implementation of its policies,
5) Treasurer for the supervision of the finances,
6) President and the Board of Directors for delegation of authority to committees or individuals as required to undertake defined activities on its behalf,
7) Technical Committee for technical basis for granting certification.
8) Appeals Committee for the implementation of an impartial authority to deal with appeals from suppliers against the certification decision.

3.3 Membership:

3.3.1 The membership of ACO is open to any enterprise or person, for the purpose of acquiring the organic certification services of the association.

3.3.2 Membership to ACO is open to all applicants whose activities fall within the declared scope of certification. There will be no undue financial or other conditions for membership. Membership shall not be conditional upon the size of the association or upon the number of certificates already issued.

3.3.3 Membership shall be accepted by the Board of Directors as recommended by the Certification Committee of the association following successful completion of all phases of the annual certification process.

3.3.4 An enterprise or person shall cease to be a member of ACO;
By delivering his or her resignation in writing to the secretary of the association or by mailing or delivering it to the address of ACO.
On his or her death.
On being expelled
On having been a member not in good standing for twelve consecutive months.

3.3.5 The fees for certification will be determined by the Board of Directors annually, based on the cost of providing certification services and will be presented to the membership at the Annual General Meeting.

3.3.6 Certification fees schedule shall be made available to new and renewal applicants and shall be posted on the association website.

3.4 Directors

3.4.1 *Board Design, Election and Terms of Office*

3.4.1.1 The management of Atlantic Certified Organic shall be vested in a Board of Directors consisting of a maximum of ten (10) directors duly elected by the membership at the Annual General Meeting. Directors shall be elected in such a manner to represent equitable regional representation.

3.4.1.2 All elections of directors shall be for a three-year term after establishing a rotation whereby one third of the directors retires at each ACO Annual General Meeting (AGM). Directors maybe re-elected but shall not serve more than two consecutive three-year terms.

3.4.1.3 Board members shall have qualifications for their positions and may include but are not limited to the following criteria:
previous experience and/or knowledge of organic agriculture;
previous experience in volunteer boards;
previous experience in quality control systems or certification systems.

3.4.1.4 The Board of Directors shall appoint a Nomination Committee at least 30 days prior to the Annual General Meeting. The Nomination Committee shall endeavor to recruit candidates to represent equitable regional representation.

3.4.1.5 The Board of Directors shall elect amongst themselves the executive committee. The executive committee shall consist of the president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.

3.4.1.6 The Board of Directors shall meet as often as required to conduct the business of the association. Meeting of the Board will follow Roberts Rules of Order.

3.4.1.7 The Board of Directors shall appoint a Certification Committee that will be made up of a minimum of 3 members. No member of the Board of Directors may sit on the Certification Committee. The Certification Committee shall have sole authority for determining the organic status of an applicant based on the criteria of the Canadian Organic Products Regulations.

3.4.1.8 The Board of Directors shall also appoint an Appeals Committee to provide dispute resolution and a Technical Committee to provide interpretation of the standards.

3.4.1.9 The ACO Board of Directors shall form other committees as it sees fit for the operation and management of association.

3.4.2 *Responsibilities of the Board of Directors*

3.4.2.1 The Board shall always act in the best interest of the association. Directors at all times shall act in an impartial manner and maintain the confidentiality and conflict interest policies of the association.

3.4.2.2 Directors must disclose any potential conflict of interest when developing policies and procedures for the association or when making any other board decisions on any matter.

3.4.2.3 Directors with a conflict of interest shall be excluded from work, discussion or decisions regarding the potential conflict. The exclusion of such persons shall be recorded in the minutes or other records.

3.4.2.4 Individual directors are expected to attend regular board meetings and special board meeting when called and to participate in Board activities and discussions. They are responsible for preparing for each Board meeting by reading and understanding all communications issued thus staying informed on the affairs of the association.

3.4.2.5 The Board has the responsibility for the delegation of authority and/or to employ under contract, those individuals (i.e. Administrator) and committees (i.e. Certification Committee) as required to conduct the business of the association.

3.4.3 *Duties of the Board of Directors and Executive*

3.4.3.1 The Board is responsible for the overall direction of the association and the manner in which it fulfills the objectives and purpose of ACO including the following:

1. Develop polices and procedures for the association.
2. Budgeting and financial management of the association.
3. Hiring the management/administration staff of the association.
4. Appoint the committees following ACO polices and procedures.
5. Respond in a timely fashion to recommendations of the Certification Committee.
6. Oversee the communications of the association.
7. Ensure that there are adequate arrangements to cover liabilities arising from its operations and/or activities.

3.4.3.2 The President shall:

- Preside at all meetings of the association and of the directors
- As the chief executive officer of the association, the President, shall supervise the other officers and direct activities of the staff in the execution of their duties.
- Have ultimate responsibility for quality control within the ACO.
- Ensure that all other board members, committee members and personnel are aware of their personal responsibility with regards to impartiality, confidentially and conflict of interest and have documented verification of this.
- Ensure that each certification decision is made by a person(s) different from those who carried out the evaluation.
- Ensure that there is a policy and procedure for controlled limited access to all documents and records pertaining to certification and that they are instituted and

maintained.
• Ensure internal audits take place at the prescribed intervals
• Ensure results of internal audits are documented and results are made known to all that may be affected by them
• Ensure Management Reviews are instituted and documented at intervals described in the Quality Manual
• Ensure changes to ACO operations initiated by the Board are documented and are enacted.
• Act as the point of contact for ACO staff.

3.4.3.3 The Vice-president shall:
• Carry out the duties of the President in the absence of the President.
• When requested, assist the President in the execution of his of her duties.
• The Vice-president is responsible to the President and the Board of Directors

3.4.3.4 The secretary shall:
• Conduct the correspondence of the association.
• Issue notices of meetings of the association and directors.
• Keep the minutes of meetings of the association and directors.
• Maintain the register of members;
• The Secretary shall report to the President and the Board.

3.4.3.5 The treasurer shall:
• Be responsible for supervision of the financial affairs of ACO
• Keep the financial records and books necessary to comply with the relevant laws and regulations.
• Render financial statements to the directors and members.
• Prepare an annual budget
• Monitor the daily affairs of the association to ensure compliance with the budget
• Work directly with the Administrator and the President to ensure that a competent bookkeeping and accounting system is enacted and maintained.
• Keep the Board informed of any events or issues, which might affect the financial integrity of the association.
• The Treasurer will report to the President and to the Board.

3.5 Policy

The Board shall determine policy of the association arising from recommendations from the general membership, or in response to issues, which arise from time to time.
Policy decisions shall be recorded in the minutes of board meetings.
The president shall be responsible for ensuring implementation of policy changes and of ensuring that those policy decisions are reflected in this document.

3.6 Committees

3.6.1 Meetings of the ACO committees shall follow the criteria provided by the bylaws and Rules of Order of the association.

3.6.2 The Board shall appoint a Certification Committee, an Appeals Committee, a Technical Committee and may appoint other committees as it sees fit.

3.6.3 Terms of Office of Committees

1. Certification Committee members shall be appointed for one-year terms and they may be re-appointed, at the first Board meeting following the AGM. When replacing members of the certification committee consideration will be given to ensure continuity in the composition of the committee.

2. The Chair of the ACO Appeals Committee shall be appointed annually, and maybe re-appointed, at the first Board meeting following the AGM.

3. The Chair of ACO Technical Committee shall be appointed annually, and maybe re-appointed, at the first Board meeting following the AGM.

3.7 Certification Committee

3.7.1 The Board shall appoint a Certification Committee. The Certification Committee shall be made up of a minimum of 3 members of which no member of the Board of Directors may sit on the Certification Committee, nor shall any member of the committee be the same person(s) who carried out the evaluation.

3.7.2 Committee members will represent a balance of interests representing the scope of certification, where no one interest predominates.

3.7.3 The Certification Committee shall be free from any commercial, financial or any other pressures that might influence certification decisions.

3.7.4 The Certification Committee shall have sole authority for determining the organic status of certification applications. This authority may not be delegated.

3.7.5 The Certification Committee may use an Administrator (employed by the ACO Board) to provide administrative support in the certification process.

3.7.6 Members of the Certification Committee must observe the conflict of interest and confidentially provisions regarding the affairs of enterprises, which have made application for certification by ACO.

3.7.7 Certification Committee members shall have qualifications for their position. Such qualifications may include, but are not limited to:
- Experience in and knowledge of the Organic Products Regulations.
- Experience in quality control systems.
- Experience in or knowledge of organic agriculture.
- Participation in related agricultural organization.

3.7.8 Certification Committee members may receive payment for their services from ACO, as determined by the Board of Directors. They may not receive any payment, in kind, or otherwise from members of the association.

3.7.9 Each member of the Certification Committee shall be required to sign the ACO confidentially and conflict of interest agreements upon their acceptance of the committee position.

3.8 Certification Committee Contracts

The President will ensure that Certification Committee members have signed contracts stating their responsibilities and remuneration of their positions. Certification Committee Contracts will be renewed annually.

3.9 Certification Committee Performance Appraisals

The President will ensure that Certification Committee Members receive performance appraisals at least annually. This may coincide with the annual internal audit process.

3.10 Quality Objectives of Certification Committee Chair

The Certification Committee performs the vital task of assessing inspection reports and evaluating conformity with standards. This procedure must be accomplished with the utmost regards to quality control. The Chair of the Certification Committee shall:

1. Ensure that the Certification Committee performs its duties as described in the Quality Manual
2. Supervise the performance of Certification Committee members.
3. Request expert assistance whenever it is required including difficulties with interpreting the Organic Products Regulations standards, which will be forwarded to the Chair of Technical Committee through the program Administrator.
4. Continually assess the integrity of the certification program and make recommendations for improvements directly to the President
5. Respect all matters that require confidentiality and request only the required information from operators to complete the certification assessment.
6. Review Certification application forms determining if they may be compliant prior to proceeding with evaluation.
7. Work with the Administrator to arrange inspection scheduling.
8. Review Inspection Evaluation Forms with the committee to determine certification status of applicant.
9. When using electronic files, ensure that appropriate security is in place and that Certification Committee members are properly trained in the use of electronic files.

The Certification Committee Chair is responsible to the President but the affairs of the Certification Committee shall at all times remain confidential to as few numbers of persons as possible. This shall include Certification Committee members, the president (when required) and the administrator.

3.11 Appeals Committee

3.11.1 The Board will appoint a Chair for the Appeals Committee from among its number or from the membership. The Appeals Committee shall have the responsibility to rule on appeals of certification decisions according to criteria described in the Complaints and Appeals section of this document. The Appeals Committee shall also rule on complaints from the public.

3.11.2 The Appeals Committee shall convene only when there is a need for its services. The Chair of the committee shall appoint two ACO members to serve on the Appeals Committee. ACO members so appointed shall be obligated to serve on the committee.

3.11.3 Members of the Appeals Committee shall be entirely disinterested from the affairs of parties involved in a complaint or appeal. Members of the committee shall be required to sign the ACO confidentially and conflict of interest agreements and must stand down if there is any concern regarding a conflict of interest.

3.11.4 The ACO administrator shall ensure a record is kept of all complaints, appeals or disputes.

3.12 Technical Committee

3.12.1 The ACO Technical Committee is responsible to provide interpretation of application of the Organic Products Regulations. The Technical Committee cannot rule on an operations certification status, but can provide interpretation of the standards to the Certification Committee.

3.12.2 The Certification Committee members will refer technical questions to the Administrator, who will request clarification from the Technical Committee Chair.

3.12.3 The Administrator in turn shall document and maintain on file the interpretation of the standard provided by the Technical Committee and provide this document to the Certification Committee.

3.12.4 Such clarifications will become precedents for further enquiries.

3.13 Consulting and Advising

3.13.1 ACO shall not provide consultant services to operators.

3.13.2 Specific advice given by inspectors shall be limited to explanations of the standards or certification requirements. This information shall not be offered for additional fees and shall not prescribe solutions.

3.13.3 ACO may provide general information including training, newsletters and seminars and advice concerning regulatory requirements and this shall be offered to all operators.

3.13.4 ACO may provide a list of consultants (not employed by ACO) as a service to their members.

3.14 Sub-Contracting

ACO may subcontract services related to certification such as inspections to an external body or individual. The subcontractor must sign a contract or agreement with ACO detailing the expectations of each party. Such an agreement shall include clauses for confidentiality and conflict of interest. ACO shall:

a) take full responsibility for such subcontracted work and maintain its responsibility for granting, maintaining, extending, suspending or withdrawing certification;
b) ensure that the subcontracted body or individual is competent and complies with the applicable provisions of these criteria and other standards and requirements relevant to the scope of the contract such as inspections or testing.
   I. Inspectors shall have relevant professional training and experience;
   II. Inspectors must have signed a formal agreement to refuse any work that would create a conflict of interest situation with the enterprise that is applying for certification, either because of family link or a business relationship with the applicant during the two years proceeding its application for certification;
   III. Obtain the applicant's consent.

4. Quality System

4.1 Authority for the Quality System

4.1.1 The president of the ACO shall be the individual with executive responsibility for the quality system and shall ensure that this policy is understood, implemented and maintained at all levels of the organization

4.1.2 ACO shall operate an effective quality system that is appropriate for the type, scope and volume of the work performed. The quality system shall be documented in a Quality Manual and shall be available for use by all staff involved in the certification process.

4.2 Policy Objectives of the Quality System

4.2.1 The purpose of ACO is to provide accredited certification services to its members, that is ISO/IEC17065 compliant and meets the requirements of Organic Products Regulations of Canada. In order to provide a competent service to its members, the following principles must be maintained:
1. Confidentiality
2. Transparency – disclosure of all conflicts and potential conflicts of interest.
3. Third party – certification evaluations are not subject to influence, in that all decisions pertaining to certification are made by persons different from those who carried out the evaluation (inspection)

4.2.2 All Board and committee members and personnel shall subscribe to these

principles and all evaluations, internal audits, and management reviews shall use them as reference objectives.

4.2.3 The ACO Manager is designated and will report directly to the President to:
a) ensure that the quality system as documented in the Quality Manual is implemented and maintained
b) report on the performance of the quality system to the Board of Directors for review and as a basis for improvement of the quality system

4.2.4 ACO has documented policies and procedures for use by ACO personnel in maintaining the quality system including but not limited to the following:
1) policy and procedure for management reviews and internal audits
2) administrative procedures including document control
3) the procedures for the recruitment, selection and training of certification body personnel and monitoring their performance
4) procedures for handling non-conformities
5) the procedures for evaluating products and implementing the certification process
6) policies and procedures for dealing with appeals and complaints policies and procedures for use and control of the ACO Mark

4.3 Internal Audits and Management Reviews

4.3.1 ***Internal Audits***

4.3.1.1 ACO shall conduct periodic internal audits covering all procedures in a planned and systematic manner, to verify that the quality system is being implemented and is effective.

4.3.1.2 ACO shall conduct an internal audit at least once a year and if it so wishes will perform only partial internal audits, so that over time shall cover the whole quality system.

4.3.1.3 ACO shall ensure that:
a) all personnel responsible for the area audited are informed of the outcome of the audit;
b) any corrective action is taken in a timely and appropriate manner; and
c) the results of the audit are documented

4.3.2 ***Management Reviews***

4.3.2.1 The President, as the management of ACO with executive responsibilities shall review its quality system annually to ensure its continuing suitability and effectiveness in satisfying the requirements of the quality system and its stated quality policy and objectives.

4.3.2.2 Records of internal audits and management reviews shall be maintained.

4.4 Documentation and Records

4.4.1 ***Documentation***

4.4.1.1 ACO shall provide, through publications, electronic media (website) or other means, updated at regular intervals, and make available upon request the following:

a) information about the authority under which the certification body operates;
b) a statement of its product certification system, including its rules and procedures for granting, maintaining, extending, suspending and withdrawing certification;
c) information about the evaluation procedures and certification process related to each product certification system;
d) a description of the means by which ACO obtains financial support and general information on the fees charged to applicants and to suppliers of certified product;
e) a description of the rights and duties of applicants and suppliers of certified products, including requirements, restrictions, or limitations on the use of ACO's certification mark;
f) information about the procedures for handling complaints and appeals;
g) a directory of certified products and their suppliers (company name and brand name) and the program standard that it meets.

4.4.1.2 ACO has established and shall maintain a procedure to control all documents and data that relates to its certification functions (application, inspection forms, etc).

a) These documents shall be reviewed and approved for adequacy by the President or other authorized personnel prior to issuing any documents following initial development or any subsequent amendment or change being made.
b) A listing of all appropriate documents with respective issue and/or amendment status identified shall be maintained.
c) The distribution of all such documents shall be controlled by the Manager to ensure that the appropriate documentation is made available to ACO staff, contractors or suppliers when they are required to perform any function relating to ACO activities.

4.5 Records

4.5.1 ***Maintenance and Retention***

4.5.1.1 ACO has established and will continue to maintain an up-to-date record system that meets its need and conforms to existing regulation. These records demonstrate that the certification procedures have been effectively fulfilled, particularly with respect to application forms, evaluation reports, supervisory activities and other documents relating to granting, maintaining, extending, suspending or withdrawing of certification.

4.5.1.2 Records shall be identified, managed, and eliminated to ensure the integrity of certification process and the confidentially of information.

4.5.1.3 All records, either paper or electronic shall be securely stored, with limited access determined by the President.

4.5.1.4 All records shall be kept for a period of five years so that continued confidence may be demonstrated. The records created by ACO for initial or renewal of the certification process shall be maintained for a period of ten years.

4.6 Confidentially and Conflict of Interest

ACO has developed safeguards for the confidentially of the information obtained through the course of its certification activities at all levels of the organization, including committees and external bodies or individuals acting on its behalf through agreements for confidentiality and conflict of interest.

4.6.1 **Confidentiality Agreement**

4.6.1.1 ACO has a developed a confidentially agreement for the protection of confidentially of information obtained from the certification process.

4.6.1.2 All employees and contract workers shall be required to sign a confidentiality agreement annually.

4.6.1.3 All directors and committee members shall be required to sign a confidentiality agreement annually.

4.6.2 **Conflict of Interest**

4.6.2.1 Directors, contractors, employees and committee members shall be required to disclose any direct or indirect conflict of interest in their relationship with ACO.

4.6.2.2 All persons with a conflict of interest shall be excluded from work, discussions, or decisions regarding the potential conflict. The exclusion of such persons shall be recorded.

4.6.2.3 The confidentially agreement may contain a disclosure of interest clause.

4.7 ACO Personnel

4.7.1 *General Requirements*

The personnel of ACO shall be competent for the functions they perform, including making required technical judgments, framing policies and implementing them.

Clearly documented descriptions of the duties, roles and responsibilities shall be available for of all personnel and shall be kept up-to date.

4.7.2 *Qualification Criteria*

To ensure that the evaluation and certification are carried out effectively and uniformly, the Board of Directors shall define the minimum relevant criteria for the competence of all personnel.

4.7.2.1 ACO shall require all personnel involved in the certification process to sign a contract or other document by which they commit themselves:

a) to comply with the policies as defined by ACO, including those relating to confidentiality and independence from commercial and other interest.
b) to declare any prior and/or present association on their part, or on the part of their employer, with a supplier or designer of products to the evaluation or certification of which they are to be assigned.

4.7.2.2 Information on the relevant qualifications, training, and experience of each member of the personnel involved in the certification process shall be maintained by ACO. Records of training and experience shall be kept up to date, in particular the following:

a) name and address;

b) organizational affiliation and position held;

c) educational qualifications;

d) experience and training in each field of ACO's competence;

e) date of most recent updating of records

f) performance appraisal.

4.7.3 ACO Inspectors shall have the appropriate knowledge and training for the scope of certification offered and shall be assigned to inspection work that is appropriate to their skills. Inspectors shall have at a minimum the following qualifications:

a) IOIA organic inspection training
b) Knowledge and understanding of the current Canadian Organic Standards
c) Knowledge and experience within the scope of ACO certification
d) Related knowledge and experience of agriculture industries and systems

4.8 Changes in Certification Requirements

4.8.1 ACO shall give due notice of any changes it intends to make in its requirements for certification and any changes made to the standards of the Organic Products Regulations.

4.8.2 ACO shall take account of the views expressed by interested parties before deciding on the precise form and effective date of the changes. Following decision on, and publication of, the changed requirements, it shall verify that each supplier makes any necessary adjustments within such time as, in the opinion of ACO is reasonable amount of time.

Requirements pertaining to the granting of certification include:
a) standards to which the products must be compliant;
b) control plan;
c) procedures relating to certification granting

4.8.3 ACO shall verify (during the next scheduled evaluation) the operators have made the necessary changes to their own operation. The Administrator and Certification Committee Chair shall be responsible to ensure that the inspectors accomplish this verification during the inspection process. Confirmation of this verification shall be included in the inspectors report.

4.9 Appeals, Complaints and Disputes

4.9.1 Appeals and complaints brought before ACO by suppliers or other parties shall be subject to the procedures of ACO. All complaints and appeals must be submitted in writing to ACO, providing sufficient information to allow a thorough understanding of the appeal or complaint by the members of the Appeals Committee.

4.9.2 The Administrator shall keep records of all complaints and appeals, ensuring that confidentiality is maintained.

4.9.3 Certification Appeals

The appeals process is designed to provide any enterprise participating in ACO certification with the opportunity to have a decision made by the ACO Certification Committee reconsidered when the operator believes the decision was not made in accordance with applicable standards or procedures. The appeal process encourages detailed discussion of the case and endeavors to reach a decision that is fair.

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ACO shall:
a) keep a record of all appeals, complaints and remedial action relative to certification.
These records shall in particular include:
1) appeals related to certification;

2) complaints or objections from operators regarding the certifying body's program application;
3) complaints or objections from outside persons or organizations about the certifying body's operations.

b) take appropriate action and ensure proper follow-up;
c) the action taken and its result shall be documented.

4.9.4 ***Complaints from the General Public***

4.9.4.1 Complaints from the general public shall be handled immediately. The Chair of the Appeals Committee shall investigate all public complaints against ACO members and report their finding and decision to the Board of Directors. The chair shall have the responsibility to ensure that the complainant receives a response to their complaint and the decision of the committee.

4.9.4.2 The committee shall notify the member regarding the complaint lodged against them, but at no time shall the name of the complainant be made known to anyone but the committee members.

4.9.4.3 The committee shall be fair and reasonable in handling a complaint from the general public against one of its members. The committee must allow the operator adequate rebuttal to the complaint.

4.9.4.4 In the event, the Appeals Committee finds in favor of the complainant, the committee shall make recommendation to the Board. The Board will be obliged to carry out such recommendations.

4.9.4.5 In the case of misrepresentation, ACO may require the operator to comply with directives, decertify the enterprise, or report the offence to the CFIA.

5. Certification Process:

5.1 Certification Decision

The Certification Committee has overall responsibility for all certification decisions. In the discharge of its duties, the committee may require the Administrator to provide assistance and to issue Certificates based upon documented criteria, but the Certification Committee and its chair must oversee the certification process.

5.2 Certification Standards

The OAC shall adhere to the standards in force of the Organic Products Regulations of the Canada Organic Regime. These standards are available from the ACO, and current standards are posted on the ACO website at
www.atlanticcertifiedorganic.ca

5.3 Information for Applicants

5.3.1 ACO shall provide to applicants an up-to-date detailed description of the evaluation and certification procedures, appropriate to each certification scheme and the documents containing the requirements for certification, the applicants'

rights and duties of suppliers, which have certified products including the fees to be paid by applicants and suppliers of certified products.

5.3.2 Requirements of Applicants

ACO shall provide a document that is contractual in nature that details the responsibilities of the applicant for certification including;

a) always complies with the relevant provisions of ACO's certification program;
b) makes all necessary arrangements required for the inspector to conduct the evaluation, including provisions for examining documentation and all access to all areas, records and personnel for the purpose of the on-site evaluation and the processing of any complaints directed towards them;
c) makes claims regarding certification only in respect of the scope for which certification has been granted;
d) does not use its product certification in such a manner as to bring ACO, the certification body into disrepute and does not make any statements regarding its product certification which ACO as a certification body may consider misleading or unauthorized;
e) upon suspension or cancellation of certification or voluntary surrender, discontinues its use of all advertising matter that contains any reference thereto and returns any certification documents as required by ACO;
f) uses certification to indicate only those products that are certified as being in conformity with the Organic Products Regulations;
g) endeavors to ensure that no certificate or report or any part thereof be used in a misleading manner;
h) in making reference to its product certification in communication media, such as documents, brochures or advertising, complies with the requirements of ACO;
i) does not put up for sale any product for which it has requested certification; and bearing the word organic or its derivates and the certification body's mark, for as long as it has not been informed of the decision made by ACO stating that its products are certified;
j) reveals beforehand to ACO the identity of any other company for which it intends to manufacture products under license, and thus as a result can use the certifier's mark (name and logo) on the label of products that it intends to market under its own brand name even though it does not hold a compliance certificate for these products.
k) allows representatives from the CFIA and CARTV to access during normal working hours, documentation and sites used to produce certified products, for the purposes of examination and copying within the framework of accredited certifier evaluation;
l) pays the corresponding fees requested by ACO, the certification body;
m) acknowledges that unannounced inspections are part of the quality system of the certification process of ACO and that these inspections are performed at no additional cost to the operator;
n) makes all the necessary arrangements for the processing of complaints directed towards them.

5.4 Application and Procedures for Certification:

5.4.1 Application

1) All applicants applying for certification from ACO must complete an application form that is contractual in nature and signed by a duly authorized representative including the following information:

a) scope of certification desired;

b) a statement in which the applicant agrees to comply with the requirements for certification and to supply all information required for the evaluation of products for certification.

2) Information on the application form shall include the following:

a) corporate entity, name, address and legal status;

b) definition of the products upon which the application is based, indicating their nature as selected from the following:

I. tangible products to be certified relative to the certification system and also the standards against each product must be certified, to the best of the applicants knowledge;

II. services (intangible products) to be approved, consisting of operations to be carried out by a supplier at the request of the client, within the framework of an activity applied to a tangible product, in order to ensure or maintain its conformity to prescribed standards;

III. inputs to be approved, consisting of non-edible substances used in the organic production process that will not remain within the processed product;

IV. for products containing more than one agricultural product, a statement setting out the percentage by weight of each of those products and the percentage by weight of each of them that are organic products;

V. pre-certification period attested;

b) production and/or preparation specifications for products to which the applicant applies;

c) evidence that the site(s) where operations take place and from where products listed in the application are produced are indeed operated by the applicant, and if not, the names of the other companies involved in the production of the products, along with a description of the business connections linking them and the applicant, and transaction flows between them;

d) the names of all certifying bodies to which prior application for certification, recognition, or evaluation were submitted by the applicant for the past five years including the details regarding the process of the application and the decision made by the certifying body.

3. Upon application submission to the office of ACO, the Administrator shall obtain permission from the applicant to verify any information provided relative to previous certification applications made to all other certifying bodies, if applicable, and to obtain from each body any additional information regarding evaluations made previously concerning production or preparation operations carried out by the applicant's business.

5.5 Preparation for Evaluation

5.5.1 If the submitted application has incomplete or inaccurate sections, the Administrator will contact the applicant in order to ascertain the correct information for the application and ensure that any difference in understanding between ACO, the certifying body, and the applicant are resolved. Specific advice given to the applicant shall be limited to explanations of the standards or certification requirements and shall not prescribe solutions. If necessary, the Administrator may consult with the Chair of the Certification Committee to determine the best course of action.

5.5.2 If the applicant sends incomplete or no application fees the applicant shall be notified by the Administrator that ACO shall not begin the review of the application until such fees are received in full.

5.5.3 If there are no abnormalities in the application, and the requirements for certification are clearly defined, documented and understood the Administrator sends a copy of the completed application to the Certification Committee Chair.

5.5.4 Before proceeding with the evaluation, the Certification Chair shall conduct and keep a record of the review of the application for certification to ensure that:

a) the requirements for certification are clearly defined, documented and understood in a way that the applicant seems to be or could be compliant with the certification requirements;
b) any difference in understanding between ACO and the applicant are resolved;
c) ACO, as the certifying body, has the capacity to perform the certification services with respect to the scope of certification sought and, if applicable, the location of the applicant's operation

5.5.5 The Certification Chair of ACO shall prepare a plan for its evaluation activities including the following:

a) an evaluation of the applicant regarding its admissibility to the certification program as a supplier;
b) a review of the support documents accompanying the application, including specifications for the production or preparation submitted by the supplier, followed by communications of relevant remarks to the applicant, within a reasonable deadline;
c) once the review of the provided documented information confirms that the operation carried out by the supplier seems to comply with the specifications, an inspection of the operation site(s) and the suppliers premises will be arranged;
d) and having determined that ACO, as the certifying body, has the capability to perform the certification service with respect to the scope of certification sought the Certification Chair shall advise the Administrator to arrange for an inspection of the operation site(s) and the suppliers premises.

5.6 Site Visit Considerations:

5.6.1 For pre-certification, certification or any other service for which approval is

requested, ACO must conduct an initial inspection of each production unit, building, or site (including vehicles) where production or preparation of agricultural and food products are carried out.

5.6.2 When the application concerns ingredients approval or the verification of ingredients within a non-certifiable product or even an input approval, ACO may omit the visit if it considers a document evaluation is sufficient for control purposes.

5.6.3 The timing of the site inspections by ACO will be determined according to the following:

a) In cases of agricultural operations the site inspection must take place during production season. This period begins as soon as all operations subject to inspection (seeding, tapping, etc) begin and ends with the packaging or placing in containers for storage of products to be certified.
b) Where agricultural producers carry out split (parallel) production, inspections must allow visual determination of what is being planted in all cultivated fields within the production unit,
c) In cases involving processing operations, inspections may be carried out any time during the year. However, for split/parallel productions (when both certifiable and non-certifiable products are manufactures at the same facility), the inspection must be carried out at a time when the products that are targeted for certification are being processed.

5.6.4 Applicant firms whose production systems are not yet in operation may be exempted from inspection for as long as their system is not in operation.

5.7 Access Required

ACO and its designated inspector must be provided with access to the premises, documents or persons in charge for whatever is referenced in the certification application.

5.8 Assignment of Inspector

5.8.1 The Administrator of ACO will assign an inspector that is appropriately qualified to perform the tasks for the specific evaluation.

5.8.2 Inspectors shall not be assigned if they have been previously involved with the enterprises either due to a family link or business relationship including having been employed by a body engaged in, the design, supply, installation or maintenance of such products in a manner and within a time period of 2 years which could conflict with their impartiality. Nor shall the inspector undertake any contractual relation or resume employment with a certification applicant that they have inspected for a minimum of 2 years following the certification decision.

5.8.3 Operators shall neither have the right to choose nor to recommend inspectors. Except in the case of unannounced visits, operators shall have the right to be informed about the identity of the inspector before the inspection visit. Operators shall in any case have the right to raise objections based on conflict of interest or other reasons. ACO shall rule whether reasons are acceptable.

5.9 Documents for Inspectors

The Administrator shall arrange to provide the inspector with the appropriate working documents to ensure a comprehensive and correct evaluation is carried out. These documents must include among others:

a) production description/design;
b) maps and plans;
c) lists of inputs (ingredients and agricultural substances);
d) a copy of production and /or handling specifications;
e) remedial actions required by the certifying body during the previous certification cycle, as well as any corrective measures implemented by the operator concerning these requests;
f) appropriate inspections forms

5.10 Evaluation

The ACO Certification Committee shall evaluate the products of the applicant to be certified against the standards covered by the scope defined in its application against all certification criteria.

5.10.1 **Site Inspection Requirements**

5.10.1.1 All applications for pre-certification, initial product certification or pertaining to its renewal, approval of services or inputs must be the subject of an evaluation. Regardless of the case, the evaluation must concern a production system that is currently operational (being actively managed).

5.10.1.2 The evaluation of a product shall cover all production and processing operations, including packaging and labeling pertaining to the product. For an applicant for pre-certification and also for certification (including renewal), systems and facilities upon which the firm relies to produce and/or prepare each product included within its application must be visited by the ACO inspector to ensure that the standard is fully applied, corresponding to the submitted production and preparation specifications. The complete application of standards implies an active management of the production system, and not only the non-use of prohibited substances or the operational records maintained by the operator. To this end the ACO inspector must witness the way the operator proceeds at any given point within the production cycle when grounds, premises, and activities subjected to compliance requirements may be observed.

5.10.1.3 Regular ACO inspections must include, among other things the following:

a) a visit to premises, storage units and fields where production operations take place, thus ensuring that they properly correspond to the specification submitted by the applicant;

b) a visit to all locations where preparation operations, including those of processing, packaging and labeling take place, thus allowing ACO inspectors to

ensure that they properly correspond to specifications submitted by the applicant;

c) identification and investigation of any area of risk;

d) an examination of records related to production (inventory, sales, purchases, etc) and the management (accounting, complaints, etc) pertaining to certified products;

e) for producers, an estimate of the potential yield for the coming year, as well as an audit of the balance in quantities produced and sold over the previous year, including amounts still in inventory (trial balance);

f) for applicants carrying out operations related to food preparation (processing, packaging, repackaging and brokerage), an audit of the balance-statement for the acquired commodities, and for the corresponding commodities included in the products sold and in inventory;

g) trace back audits applying to certain products taken from the supplier's inventory or from a commercial outlet where its products have been placed for sale;

h) verification that previously imposed conditions have been fulfilled;

i) sampling, if necessary;

j) interviews with supervisory personnel;

k) a closing meeting at the end of the inspection intended to inform the firm's management of observations made concerning the compliance with certification requirements, without any corrective action request from the inspector.

5.10.1.4 The inspection must cover the entire agricultural production system being managed by the firm, even if only part of the firm's operations were targeted by the certification application. The land, premises and equipment not included in the certification application must be identified and inspected, and must at a minimum include the following: crop areas or harvesting zones, harvest storage locations, preparation, processing and conditioning sites, application dates for phytosanitary products and administrative follow-up.

5.10.1.5 In the event that a sample was taken by the inspector, the inspector shall provide the operator with a receipt for each sample.

5.11 Evaluation Report and Notification

5.11.1 The Inspector appointed to evaluate the conformity of products shall provide an inspection report in electronic and hard copy in the required reporting format to the ACO Administrator within the required time frame of 10 business days. Within the report the inspector shall report findings as to the conformity with all certification requirements and include the following data regarding the inspection visit:

1) date, time and duration of inspection

2) names of interviewees;
3) identification of land and premises visited on the production/handling site
4) types of documentation audits performed (in/out balance sheet, yield/sales, audit trail by batches, etc)

5.11.2 The Administrator reviews the inspection report to ensure all sections are completed and forwards the report to the Certification Committee for review.

5.11.3 Based on a review of the information, if the ACO Certification Committee has reason to believe that an applicant for certification is not in compliance with the certification requirements, a full report on the outcome of the evaluation shall be issued to the applicant within a reasonable amount of time. The report will indicate all non- compliances that must be eliminated in order to comply with all the certification requirements and the extent of any further required evaluation or testing. This report shall serve as written notification of non-compliance to the applicant and shall include:

1) the description of each non-compliance;
2) the facts upon which the notification of non-compliance is based;
3) the request for remedial actions for each non-compliance
4) the date by which the applicant must demonstrate that the non-compliance no longer exists or the remedial actions have been taken.

5.11.4 If the applicant can show that remedial action has been taken to meet all the requirements within the specified time limit, ACO shall repeat only the necessary parts of the initial procedure, meaning that it must ensure, based on submitted documentation and if necessary, an on-site inspection, whether or not non-compliance conformities have been corrected.

5.12 Interruption of Certification Process

At any point within the certification cycle preceding the certification decision of ACO, the applicant may request that the processing of its application be stopped. The applicant shall, however, be liable for the costs of services provided up to the time of the withdrawal of its application. In such case ACO will not issue a decision regarding the products that were the subject of the certification request.

5.13 Certification Decision

5.13.1 Sole Authority for Decision

ACO shall not delegate authority for granting, maintaining, extending, and suspending or withdrawing certification to an outside person or body.

5.13.2 Basis for Decision

The decision as to whether or not to certify a product shall be made by the ACO Certification Committee on the basis of the information gathered during the evaluation process and any other relevant information.

5.13.3 **Approval of Certification**

5.13.3.1 The decision to certify a product shall be made if the Certification Committee of ACO determines that all the procedures and activities contained in the production or preparation plan of the applicant are in compliance with the certification requirements and that the applicant is able to conduct operations in accordance with this plan or after the correction of requirements (minor non-compliances). This acceptance is valid until the next annual evaluation takes place and that a new decision is made.

5.13.3.2 ACO shall issue a written notice of approval of certification to any applicant for whom it accepts to certify their products, specifically with the intent of issuing a license authorizing the operator to use ACO's certification mark (name/logo) under the conditions specified in the license agreement for its use. ACO shall specify in this notice or other appropriate document the limits of use of its mark according to the status of the company:

a) A company producing and marketing a product.
When a company has obtained certification for its products, it may then obtain authorization to use ACO's mark within all methods it uses to market its products.

b) A company producing a product exclusively for a company that holds the certificate in order to market the product.
'When the company does not hold the certificate but has an exclusive affiliation with the operator it supplies, and the operator also holds the compliance certificate for the products being supplied, then the compliance mark must only be used on the labels of those products it packages, in an exclusive manner with the supplier and on a site falling under its responsibility.

c) Company producing and marketing a certified product in addition to supplying another company that holds a certificate in order to market it as well.

1. When in a nonexclusive manner a company supplies a client that had obtained a certificate from a certifier for products being marketed under a private brand, and this company already holds for its products a certification granted by another certifying body, ACO's mark must only be used on labels placed on products prepared and packaged for this client, on a site falling under the company's responsibility, and as a result of an extension to the license granted to this client by the certifier.
2. In order to have the license extension granted, the certifier granting it must guarantee its own certification, meaning that the other certification body was approved by CFIA, that its evaluation and certification procedures include the products concerned, and following what these two certifiers have agreed, the body may access either the evaluation report by the other certification body or to the suppliers operation site, thus allowing it to proceed with an inspection.

d) Company temporarily not producing any certified products.
When the firm does not hold a certificate because its production system is currently inactive and no certified product are available for sale, even though the system that was set up is compliant with standards, the certifier's mark may only be used on an official letter from ACO attesting the compliance of its production system and can be presented to any prospective client for its products.

e) Company not holding a certificate but marketing under its own brand a certified product.

When under its own brand the company distributes products provided by a supplier to whom certification was granted by a certifying body, this means that the company uses the body's certification mark to market products. Thus even though the company itself possesses no certification for its private brand products, the certifier must require that the company:

1. inscribe on the packaging of products being resold under a private brand, a reference to the certified product supplier, indicated such that the supplier may be identified by both the competent authority and the certifier concerned;
2. maintain a registry of all certified products received from the supplier, distributed, and eventually sold under either one or more previously approved labels;
3. accept that the certifying body whose name is indicated on product labels be allowed to inspect these records when required and that records kept allow product movement to be traced, from the entry point (records concerning products obtained from suppliers) up until the product leaves the premises (product sales reports and inventory reports).

5.14 Denial of Certification

ACO shall issue a written notice of denial of certification to any applicant to whom it refuses certification, either because operations leading to production are still non-compliant with requirements or simply because the applicant did not respond to notification of non-compliance. This notice shall state the reason(s) for denial and the applicant's right to:

a) file an appeal of the denial
b) reapply for certification to any accredited certifying body, including the one who refuses certification.

5.15 Publication of Decision

ACO shall inform CARTV Accreditation Board and those that apply for certification of products in accordance with these criteria, of any:
a) notice of non-compliance that would prevent the immediate acceptance of certification;
b) decision to refuse certification once review and appeal deadlines have expired.

ACO shall forward copies of non-compliance notices as well certification refusal, suspension or withdrawal notices to CARTV Accreditation Board. ?

5.16 Certificate

ACO shall provide to each supplier offering certified products, formal certification document such as a letter or certificate signed by an officer who has been assigned this responsibility. This formal certification documents shall permit identification of the following:

a) the name, address and phone number of the certifying body;
b) the name and address of the supplier whose products are being certified;
c) the scope of the certification being granted, including as appropriate:
    1) the products certified, identified by type or range of products including their specific name and if applicable, the one or more trademarks under which they are being marketed;
    2) the product standards under which each product or product type is certified;
    3) the applicable certification system with the type(s) of operations and subject of the evaluation by ACO, among the following:
        - crop production
        - livestock production
        - grain production
        - maple syrup production
        - specialized production (i.e. honey)
        - food processing
        - repackaging
        - brokerage or handler
d) the effective date of certification (initial date of certification for a given standard)
e) the date of the most recent certification maintaining the decision, an indication of its duration and the terms of the certificate if applicable.
f) The location of each operations site (town, province /state, country)

5.17 Amendment of Certification:

In response to an application for amendment to the scope of a certificate already granted, ACO shall decide what, if any, evaluation procedure is appropriate in order to determine whether or not the amendment should be made and shall accordingly.

5.18 Transaction Certificate

In addition to the compliance certificate, ACO may issue, upon request, other documents proving the certification of products and insuring better traceability, such as transaction certificates.

5.19 Certificate or License

No certificate shall be issued to a company when it has no products for sale that are compliant with the prescribed standards, either because its production system is not yet operational, or because the operator is currently inactive. In these cases, the certificate shall only be issued following inspection of the system once the firm begins operations, thus validating the certification decision.

ACO may grant a license to these companies while they are waiting to obtain their certificate, thus allowing them to prove to any party concerned that they have the capacity to produce products meeting these standards.

5.20 Surrender for Non-compliance

Certificates must be surrender to ACO if the enterprise no longer meets the certification criteria requirements. In the case of suspension, ACO requires that from the date of notification of suspension and during the following period that the supplier makes no misleading clams as to the status of certification and ceases to use the ACO certification mark on the products that have been suspended. If relevant, ACO may require in addition that no certified product is put up for sale (embargo) and that potentially non-conformed existing product be subjected to corrective action, including recall and label correction.

5.21 Terms of Certificate:

The term of the certificate remains valid as long as the applicant has current paperwork filed with the ACO office or the applicant has been informed by the ACO office that their certification has been suspended or revoked.

The possession of a certificate is not, by itself, a guarantee of certification. The applicant must complete a renewal application, undergo an annual inspection and meet the certification standards prior to ACO issuing a new certificate.

5.22 Certification Renewal

5.22.1 Where ACO authorizes the continuing use of its mark on products of a type, which have been evaluated, ACO shall periodically evaluate operations resulting in the marked products in order to confirm that they continue to comply with standards.

5.22.2 The operator shall complete an annual renewal application, pay annual certification fees, submit all information requested by ACO including mandatory update of production or preparation system plans.

5.22.3 The applicant shall then be re-evaluated based on the inspection and provided documents from which the Certification Committee shall make the decision either to maintain or deny certification.

5.22.4 The ACO re-evaluation shall include the following;

a) A regular annual site inspection to each location where each supplier is operating, with the intention of determining whether the certification shall be maintained.
b) If the regular inspection visit must occur on a date beyond the period of twelve months following the inspection from the previous year, this postponement must not exceed six months and must be justified by reasons.
c) When the interval between two regular inspections has exceeded twelve months, ACO shall ensure that subsequent inspections restore the parity

between the number of calendar years and the number of inspections over a given period of time.

5.22.5 If the renewal application is not received, certification status ends on the expiration date marked on the certificate and the enterprise must surrender its certificate.

5.22.6 Products that remain in inventory after the term of the certificate expires may be marketed under the certification upon written approval of ACO. ACO shall require appropriate documentation and inspection consistent with the requirements for certificates, so long as the product remains in inventory.

5.23 Withdrawal of Certification Status

5.23.1 **Voluntary Withdrawal**

Operators must inform ACO of their withdrawal from the certification program of any production unit or processing facility due to use of prohibited practice or material.

5.24 Decertification

Assigned to operators, which were certified, but no longer meet ACO production or processing standards and the certificate is revoked.

6. Surveillance

6.1 Documented Surveillance Program

ACO shall document its surveillance activities and in particular:

a) the controls of requirements stipulated by ACO following the evaluation;
b) all inspection visits to suppliers;
c) investigations made to find evidence pertaining to a compliant regarding a supplier

6.2 Unannounced Inspections

6.2.1 At the beginning of each year ACO shall determine the selection and timing of its unannounced inspections under the applicable criteria for the scope of its certification system, including consideration given to inspections at various stage of the production process.

6.2.2 Unannounced inspections will be in addition to scheduled annual inspections.

6.2.3 Annually ACO will conduct unannounced selected inspections on 3% of their primary producers and 5% of the other operators for products certified by ACO.

6.2.4 ACO shall secure the rights to conduct unannounced inspections within the contract signed with the operator.

6.2.5 Unannounced inspections shall normally be without forewarning. However ACO may develop alternative procedures for particular circumstances where this can be justified.

6.2.6 The alternative procedure shall address that the possible forewarning shall not be so extensive as to allow for the operator to correct substantial non-conformities.

6.2.7 The basis for the selection of operators to be subjected to unannounced inspections shall include both random and targeted selection.

6.2.8 A record of unannounced inspections shall be maintained.

6.3 Notification of Changes

ACO shall require that suppliers inform it of any changes to its production, such as intended modifications to the product, manufacturing process or, if relevant quality system, which could affect the conformity of the product. ACO shall determine whether the announced changes require further investigations. If such is the case, the supplier shall not be allowed to release certified products resulting from such changes until ACO has notified the supplier accordingly.

7. Use of Licenses, Certificates and Marks of Conformity

7.1 Authorization

ACO shall exercise control over ownership, use and display of licenses, certificates and marks of conformity.

Every operator using the ACO certification mark for products it has ownership of, shall first get authorization from ACO through a license agreement.

7.2 Withdrawal of License

7.2.1 The license will be withdrawn from an operator if:
a) ceases doing business with the certifier
b) ceases to supply, as an affiliated operator, a customer whose products are

certified by the certifier.
c) ceases, if it sells private products without itself owning a certificate, to purchase from suppliers whose products are certified by the certifier.
d) cannot demonstrate that it is able to comply with prescribed standards for operations included in its certification application.

7.2.2 The company affected by the reduction, expansion, and extension or by the simple withdrawal of a license shall be officially informed by ACO.

7.2.3 ACO may have procedures to monitor products using its certification mark and being sold on the market, to detect any improper or fraudulent use.

7.3 Control of the Mark

1) ACO shall supply guidelines and criteria for use of its certification mark, including information on the approval process of product labels on which it will be displayed.
2) ACO shall have a written procedure allowing it to process cases of abuse of the mark have occurred, particularly those involving false statements regarding the product's certification status or improper use of the mark as defined within the license agreement.
3) Incorrect references to certification systems or misleading use of ACO licenses, certificates or marks, found in advertisements, catalogues, etc., shall be dealt with by suitable actions. Such actions could include remedial actions, withdrawal of certification, publication of offence, and if necessary, any other legal action.

8. Complaints to Suppliers

ACO shall require the suppliers of certified products to:
a) keep a record of all complaints made known to the supplier relating to a product's compliance with the requirements of the relevant standard and to make these records available to ACO upon request.
b) take appropriate action with respect to such complaints and deficiencies found in products or services that affect compliance with requirements for certification;
c) keep records of the actions taken

9. References

ISO/IEC Guide 17065, Conformity Assessment_Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services. First edition 2012-09-15

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