

Soil Association Standards Board

Proposals for new standards setting governance

October 2007

1. Standards Board

Current

Membership and appointment:

- Chair (SA Council member or independent) – chosen by the SA Council
- Chairs of the 8 standards committees – appointed by the SA Council, on the recommendation of the Standards Board who choose from amongst the committee members
- Chairs of the Producer Board and Processor Liaison Group – elected by the members of those groups
- 2 SA Council members – chosen by the Council

Terms

- No fixed term
- Quorum of 6

Role

- To assist the Council in upholding organic principles through maintaining and developing the Soil Association standards

Procedures

- Seek to agree a consensus which will then be put to Council for ratification
- In the event that a consensus is not possible, Council will take a decision
- Council have final authority on standards

Proposed

Membership and appointment:

- Independent/lay chair – open recruitment, Council appointment
 - 3 Standards Board members who chair standards committees – all standards committee chairs will be recruited openly from amongst the SA membership and appointed by Council
 - Chairs of stakeholder groups currently producer board and organic trade group, plus likely addition of grower board – elected by their members and appointed to the board ex officio
 - Chair of the Citizens' Panel – open recruitment, Council appointment
 - 2 lay members (non-commercial but 'fellow travellers') – open recruitment and Council appointment
- In all the above the Standards Board Chair will make appointment recommendations to the Council.

- If none of the above is an SA Council member, an additional place will be created for a Council nominee

Terms

- Three year terms with three years renewable
- Quorum of 6
- Staggered terms of office, to avoid wholesale re-appointment in three years

Role

- To uphold organic principles through maintaining and developing the Soil Association standards
- To generate trust and confidence in the standards for external audiences

Procedures

- As at present

2. Standards Committees

Current

Scope and working

- Cover each area of standards: agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, forestry, textiles, food processing, health products, ethical trade
- Some committees very busy, some not and no clear task specification.
- Some have specialist working groups

Proposed

Scope and working

- Committees for each standards area (as now) which they "mind"
- 'Working' and 'resting'
 - Working committees handle work-plan priorities
 - Resting committees help with urgent issues and annual work-plan development

Members and appointment

- Majority of licensees, production chain (technical/marketing), researchers/advisors, one/two lay members (amount to over 100 expert volunteers - very impressive people who make a great contribution)
- Appointed – by Standards Board
- All chairs of committees on the Standards Board

Terms

- Take on new issues and/or amendments without clear prioritisation
- No quorum

Recognition and communication

- No formal mechanism for recognising committee contribution or keeping committee members in touch

- Cross-cutting issues dealt with in taskforces e.g. ethical trade
- Committees can establish and task specialist working groups

Members and appointment

- Members – as currently
- Appointed – as currently
- Chairs of working committees on Standards Board
- Chairs of working groups/taskforces/resting committees invited to Standards Board when relevant
- All committee chairs appointed as potential Standards Board members

Terms

- Tighter terms of reference for committees, including tasks and timetable for each committee
- Quorum of 6

Recognition and communication

- Mechanisms for keeping in touch with members

3. Work Priorities

We anticipate three types of work for standards committees and task groups:

1. Periodic reviews of sections of the standards, thinking about where the standard could be improved and enhanced to better meet organic principles;
2. Single issues of substance such as air freight or ethical trade; and
3. Ad hoc and sometimes urgent issues relating to the implementation of standards.

Likely standards priorities for 2007/8 are:

- In the first category we have:
 - animal welfare (including dairy bull calves, livestock markets, feed, poultry),
 - a review of standards against processing principles (including additives, processing aids, flavourings), and
 - catering (food for life input).
- In the second category we have:
 - implementation of health and beauty care standards and input to the common EU cosmetic standards,
 - air freight and wider climate change issues (including glasshouses)
 - ethical trade (further development and eventual integration into standards).

In the third category we have an endless stream of day to day issues some of which are urgent and some not:

- For urgent issues we will:
 - identify the relevant specialists or committee,
 - find the most appropriate approach (meetings, teleconferences, e-mail, one to ones, etc),

- act or consult as necessary.
- For non-urgent issues, we will collect the issues together for either:
 - the next periodic review of that standards area, or
 - the annual meeting of a resting committee.

We anticipate that the need for working committees will change over the next 2-3 years. In particular, we expect that several of above will probably have completed their main tasks. At this stage we are committed to a review of:

- Aquaculture, and
- Textiles.

And there are other priorities:

- In waiting (eg camelids and other livestock species),
- On a wish list (eg cleaning products), and
- On the horizon (eg building materials).

4. Working committees and task forces for 2008/9

Working committees:

- Agriculture,
- Food processing,
- Health and beauty care.

Task forces:

- Ethical trade,
- Air freight

Resting committees:

- Horticulture,
- Aquaculture,
- Forestry,
- Textiles.

5. Caring for our standards specialists

There have been many suggestions about the best way to ensure that the 100 or so people who contribute to standard setting have a better picture of the standard setting environment, see how their work fits in and feel it is properly valued. Here are some ideas:

- Create pass-worded web area and newsletter(s) to:
 - keep specialists in touch with standards work, and
 - provide opportunities for discussion;
- Bring together in committees once a year to input to work planning;
- Gathering at the SA annual conference or other occasion;
- Formalise arrangements:
 - establish the normal length of commitment,
 - be clear about expectations of responsibilities, work load and benefits of being involved,

- introduce an induction programme;
- Establish a database to identify who can help on urgent issues.

6. Robust and proactive consultation

In the future we will aim for consultation that reaches those who standards changes may affect, so they have a chance to be heard. For this, we will need robust and transparent consultation processes that reach out proactively both to individuals and to their representative bodies.

We will develop a consultation plan for each major consultation. The plan will need to cover who is being consulted, how and to what timetable. It should particularly cover how we propose to seek out those respondents less likely to respond (small growers, poorer consumers, etc). It will also include meetings with members of SA boards, groups and panels. As now, we will publish consultations in SA publications such as *Living Earth*, *Certification News*, and on our website.

The plan will be agreed by the Standards Board, published on the website and, where appropriate, press released.

We will establish a minimum consultation period of 30 days with a second period of 30 days for major issues.

In considering the consultation responses, the Standards Board will get a report of the consultation, including the number and nature of the respondents and their responses. The relevant committees will also be involved where appropriate. We plan to report on the results of consultation through our website, giving some account of our response to the consultative comments received.

7. Transparency

We propose to develop further the standards element of the SA website to provide full information about the standards structures and our work.

We intend to open up our planning process. Our scoping and horizon scanning for emerging issues will include requesting input from standards specialists, SA panels and boards, and key external stakeholders. There will be an open invitation on the website. We will then consult formally on the priorities we propose to address and publish the work plan and progress against it on the website.

We will make board and committee agendas available on the web along with short minutes. We will also produce an annual report of standards work.

Finally, we will carry out a periodic review of the standards strategy and system inviting interested parties to give us their feedback and help us improve further.

Ends.