

# Soil Association Standards Department



## Overall standards work plan 2008-2009

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### 1. Introduction

As a result of the governance review the Standards Department is now prioritising and focusing on a carefully selected range of key issues. The Standards Board, working with the standards committees, has identified a range of work priorities. The Standards Board has then had to undertake a further prioritisation, due in part to extra staffing constraints. For each of these areas a work plan has been developed including the specifics of stakeholder engagement necessary to make the work inclusive and accountable. The work plans cover the period from Spring 2008 to Summer 2009 so that new standards can be printed for implementation from 1 January 2010.

### 2. Animal welfare

Informed by the report *Batteries not included*, and as a result of our continuing commitment to the highest standards of animal welfare, the Agriculture Standards Committee has identified five welfare priority areas – developing outcome-based standards, breeds, health plans, abattoirs, and poultry. In reviewing these, the standards board noted that the issues in breeds, health plans and poultry were all likely to be resolved with the introduction of the outcome-based approach. It was therefore agreed that the primary focus of the next phase of work should be outcome based standards and that as these are rolled out we should prioritise poultry, breeds and health plans.

The Standards Board agreed that the work needed on the abattoir standards was not urgent and should be postponed.

The Agriculture Standards Committee noted other areas of the standards that need addressing, including dairy sheep, camelids and increasing forage in ruminant diets. The number of licensees affected by the lack of standards for dairy sheep and camelids is low and increasing forage in ruminant diets is not an urgent issue. In prioritising the work of the committee (and the Standards Department) these areas have therefore been put after animal welfare.

#### 2.a Preparing for outcome-based standards

Our standards have traditionally been written in a prescriptive style giving where appropriate exact quantities or measurements of substances or environmental parameters which are desirable or undesirable. Although this approach gives concise criteria that are easily inspected against and are clear for licensees, it does not allow for any flexibility where different approaches result in equally good welfare outcomes.

A different approach to standards writing is to employ an 'outcome-based' methodology stipulating the welfare outcomes the standard aims to achieve. This allows licensees to use a system that suits their farm as long as they can demonstrate that it results in these outcomes.

Soil Association Certification (SACL) are already engaged in work which is an essential precursor to the development of outcome-based standards. This development work has concentrated on assessing welfare indicators for dairy and egg production and will expand in 2008 to include pigs and table birds. However this development work is currently rather separate from standards activity. It was therefore agreed that the first step for the agricultural committee was to familiarise itself with the development work, ensure it is fit for standards purposes and prepare the ground for the standards work that will follow later in 2008/9

In preparation for the main work anticipated for 2009: investigate whether using outcome-based standards is appropriate and if so, to what extent we use them. We will:

- hold an internal development team meeting to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using outcome-based standards; prepare a paper outlining the conclusions to inform the discussion at the Agriculture Standards Committee
- announce our intention to investigate using outcome-based standards
- do some preparatory work to inform this process and the timetable for completing it
- start to consider how we would implement outcome-based standards, in particular looking at poultry and dairy cattle (as these are the welfare priorities and the areas in which SACL's work is most advanced)
- engage the Agriculture Standards Committee with SACL's current outcomes work to ensure it meets the needs of the standards and the anticipated timetable, and
- publicise this in the form of a statement of intent.

<b>ANIMAL WELFARE TIMETABLE</b>	
6/7 Feb 08	<b>Standards Board</b> – <i>approve work plan</i>
Mar 08	<b>Internal Development Team</b> – <i>review SACL progress, identify advantages/disadvantages, do preparatory work and draw up proposals for the agriculture standards committee</i>
10 April 08	<b>Agriculture Standards Committee</b> – <i>hear SACL progress report and review IDT paper, review work plan, approve proposals for preparatory work and timetables, input into statement of intent</i>
2 July 08	<b>Standards Board</b> – <i>update on progress of agriculture standards committee, approve statement of intent</i>
Jul 08	<b>Statement of intent</b> – <i>publish statement of intent, press release, deal with attendant publicity</i>
Aug 08	<b>Internal Development Team</b> – <i>review progress with SACL outcomes work and identify key issues, gaps, etc</i>
Sep-Nov 08	Ongoing interaction with SACL outcomes work assessing implications for standards
Dec 08	<b>Agriculture Standards Committee</b> – <i>Review progress, identify key R&amp;D priorities for standards development, set up working groups</i>
Jan 09	<b>Internal Development Team</b> – <i>prepare for working group meetings, plan R&amp;D</i>
Mar 09	<b>Working Groups</b> – <i>evaluate and guide R&amp;D, identify stakeholder contacts</i>
April 09	<b>Stakeholder seminar(s)</b> – <i>introduce SACL outcomes work and outcome-based approach, get feedback on the concept</i>
May 09	<b>Agriculture Standards Committee</b> – <i>review R&amp;D</i>
July 09	<b>Standards Board</b> – <i>update on progress</i>
Jun/Jul 09	Meetings with individual stakeholders
Jul/Aug 09	<b>Working Groups meet</b> – <i>review feedback from stakeholder meetings &amp; identify further work/refining of work so far</i>

Nov 09	<b>Agriculture Standards Committee</b> – <i>Review and approve draft standards proposals</i>
Dec 09	<b>Standards Board</b>
Feb 10	Publish standards for consultation in Certification News
May 10	<b>Agriculture Standards Committee</b> – <i>review feedback from consultation</i>
June 10	<b>Standards to Standards Board and Council</b> – <i>for approval</i>
Oct 10	Approved standards printed
<b>Jan 2011</b>	<b>New standards come into force</b>

### 3. Processing

During the review of our processing principles and criteria in 2003, we identified particular areas where our standards deviated from, conflicted with, or did not adequately address the principles. These included principles relating to the degree of processing ('minimally processed') and the use of additives ('minimum use of additives'). Both these principles are challenging for processing standards and there is clearly more work to do to bring the standards toward the principles. There are also a number of standards that are optional not mandatory ('shoulds') and we need to consider if we can make these standards mandatory ('musts') and if so, what the timetable should be for such change. The work will consist of three phases.

#### 3.a Green paper

The first phase will be to produce a Green Paper to explore what it would mean to move our standards closer to the principles. The consultation process will involve engaging with consumers, licensees and other stakeholders. The green paper will address four main questions:

1. What are our principles and their aims?
2. What is the current state of play within organic products?
3. What are consumers' and others' expectations of organic food?
4. What options are there for bringing our standards closer to these expectations and our principles?

The Green Paper will use case studies to highlight the issues. These will include:

- examples of processes where expectations and principles are significantly different from the current standards, exploring the possible options for addressing the gap
- a more in-depth case study of a particular product, for example bread (what 'organic bread' currently means, what ingredients, processes and additives are used, and what change could mean (depending on the level of a future standard), including the impact on the range of bread products available)

#### 3.b Developing the processing standards

The second phase will involve the development of some new standards and/or some enhancements to existing standards. We will review the options suggested in the Green Paper and the responses to that paper,, assess whether they will be effective in addressing the issues raised within the principles review and decide how far we think we should go. The involvement of stakeholders in this phase will be more focussed: we will now actively engage with particular groups identified during phase one, either as members of a working group or at stakeholder meetings to ensure the appropriate balance between what is achievable and what is desirable. Once we have drafted a particular standard, we will hold stakeholder meetings with the interested industry so their input can feed into the detail.

#### 3.c Public consultation

The final phase is public consultation of the proposed standards before they are printed. We will notify all licensees through Certification News, and Soil Association members through Living Earth. We will also inform

other key stakeholders directly and the amendments will also be on our website.

### 3.d Stakeholder engagement

There will be three main approaches to stakeholder involvement throughout the process.

- Regular articles in our publications describing the areas we are looking at; this could also extend to include appropriate external publications which would highlight the importance of standards and the areas we are reviewing.
- The use of our website, to provide information about timescales and the questions we are researching with links to standards for consultation. Work is already underway on the website and how we can make it more user friendly and signpost the work of the standards department.
- Face to face engagement with a range of relevant stakeholders from consumers to producers in workshops and other meetings. Contact with licensees, will be either through meetings with groups likely to be affected by possible changes, or one to one meetings with particular licensees, and a greater presence at events and shows. We will use events like the Food Festival, where both licensees and consumers are present. Literature would be available to take away and there would be facility to comment on proposed standards.

<b>PROCESSING TIMETABLE</b>	
6/7th Feb 08	<b>Standards Board</b> – <i>approve work plan</i>
April 08	<b>Internal development team</b> – <i>discuss green paper proposal and work required and associated publicity (web, CN 10th March? OF 26<sup>th</sup> March, LE 28<sup>th</sup> April.)</i>
23 April 08	<b>Processing Standards Committee</b> – <i>establish research to be done and by whom</i> – <i>identify meetings/forum for gauging consumers expectations</i>
June 08	<b>Processing Standards Committee (email)</b> – <i>update on green paper and case study</i> – <i>review research to date</i>
August 08	<b>Processing Standards Committee (call)</b> – <i>update on green paper and case study</i>
September 08	<b>Internal development team</b> – <i>review final wording of green paper to take to PSC</i>
15 <sup>th</sup> October 08	<b>Processing Standards Committee</b> – <i>present green paper to PSC and agree wording</i> – <i>agree stakeholder engagement strategy</i> – <i>review timetable for phase two with publication dates.</i>
Jan – Mar 09	<b>Stakeholder engagement</b> – <i>publish green paper (CN copy deadline 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2008 doormats 6<sup>th</sup> Jan)</i> – <i>upload to website</i> – <i>hold stakeholder meetings (workshops, face-to-face, presentations, etc)</i>
April 09	<b>Processing Standards Committee meeting</b> – <i>review responses to green paper and stakeholder feedback</i> – <i>establish working group(s) for areas identified in the green paper</i>
May – Aug 09	<b>Internal Development team</b> – <i>draft wording</i> – <i>organise stakeholder meeting(s) and invite stakeholders</i>
Aug 09	<b>Processing Standards Committee or working group meeting/call</b> – <i>discuss wording for stakeholder review</i>
Sep 09	<b>Stakeholder meeting(s)</b> – <i>review draft wording</i>
Oct 09	<b>Working group meeting/call</b>

	<i>– redraft if necessary</i>
Jan 10	<b>Processing Standards Committee meeting</b> <i>– agree standards for consultation</i> <i>– print standards for consultation CN spring 2010 edition for consultation</i> <i>– print standards on website</i>
May 10	<b>Processing Standards Committee meeting</b> <i>– review responses from consultation</i> <i>– make any amendments if required</i> <i>– discuss final standards proposals to take to the standards board</i>
June 10	<b>Standards board</b> <i>– standards to standards board for approval</i>
July 10	<b>Council meeting</b> <i>– standards to council for approval</i>
October 10	<b>Standards printed for implementation January 1<sup>st</sup> 2011</b>

#### 4. Airfreight

The Standards Board have proposed we require air freighted products meet Ethical Trade standards or similar fair trade standards. We also recommend businesses develop plans for reducing their use of air freight. These proposals follow the public consultation in 2007 where we asked people if the Soil Association should address air freight within the standards.

##### 4.a Stakeholder engagement

Linking air freight with Ethical Trade, although suggested by several respondents and discussed with several groups, wasn't one of the options put forward in the initial Green Paper. The proposal is generally more complex than the simple 'ban'/'no ban'/'label' options a lot of people were anticipating. For these reasons, it is important that in the next consultation we focus discussions on how appropriate and feasible people think the proposal is.

The main aim of the consultation paper will be to detail the proposed changes to the standards and the plan for implementing them. Accompanying this will be the risks and benefits of each element of the proposal and their likely impact. In addition, we want to ask people for suggested options on how we might provide consumers with information about air freight and, more broadly, the carbon footprint of all organic products.

The Standards Board will continue to be responsible for overseeing the consultation as they are well positioned to take account of the broader political relevance of the consultation.

AIRFREIGHT TIMETABLE	
7 Feb 08	Standards Board Agree the air freight and Ethical Trade workplans. Approve the wording of the proposed standards
5 Mar 08	Open consultation – publish air freight consultation paper
April 08	Draft 'rough guide'
Mar – May 08	Separate meetings with individual organisations and stakeholder groups
April 08	Ethical Trade Taskforce to approve criteria for accepting other fair trade certification schemes under the air freight proposal
30 May 08	Consultation close

2 Jul 08	Standards Board to make a final recommendation to council on the changes to the standards
23 Jul 08	Council to approve the changes to the standards
Jul – Dec 08	Publicise the outcome of the final change to standards with implementation plan on the website and in all Soil Association publications
Oct 08	Publish air freight standards and the 'rough guide' with a timetable for implementation
Jan – June 09	Ongoing work on carbon labelling and any follow-on from labelling/information work
2008 –	Sustained support for air freighting businesses through the Ethical Trade scheme

## 5. Ethical trade

Over the last five years, we have been developing, refining and finding ways to implement standards which comprehensively reflect organic principles of fairness, social justice and rights – what we now call ethical trade standards. At present the only scheme members are the three companies that helped us to pilot the proposals. Council have agreed that we should consult on a proposal to make these standards compulsory for all those air freighting, from 2011. They have also agreed that we continue with the longer term programme of work for integrating the ethical trade standards into the main body of standards (rather than the voluntary stand alone they are at present), with the aim of making these mandatory for all licensees in the future.

### 5.a What to do

To progress the scheme we need to focus on the following areas:

- ensure that licensees are aware of the work that has already been done and the commitment that has been made to integration and mandatory application
- raising the profile of the standards
- greater clarity on equivalence in the certification process
- applying the standards to air freighted products, and
- working towards integrating the standards.

We must move these different agendas forward alongside each other. To do this we need an integrated programme of work between standards, certification, policy and marketing to develop and roll out what are currently voluntary standards. The Ethical Trade task force will co-ordinate and review this programme of work.

Mandatory integration in the long term will only be possible with steady growth in the number of products certified to these standards. Key to achieving this is persuading licensees that the ethical trade standards are necessary and ultimately beneficial to licensees. We need to make it clearer why standards for fairness and social equity are essential for prescribing food systems that conform with organic principles and consumer expectations. In addition, to improve the efficiency and scope of certification we need to devise a clear framework for accepting other certification schemes as equivalent.

In 2009 we will set a target date for mandatory integration and a timetable over which this will be implemented. We should review the standards again once we have gained more experience of applying these standards to various sectors and to different kinds of supply chain. The review should indicate which parts of the standards could be integrated first and which areas need a longer lead in time

<b>ETHICAL TRADE TIMETABLE</b>	
7 Feb 08	Proposed Ethical Trade workplan discussed and agreed by the Standards Board
Apr 08	First meeting of the Ethical Trade task force <i>Agree detailed implementation plan and framework for SACL to accept equivalent schemes.</i>
May 08	Have a framework in place for accepting equivalent schemes
Jul 08	Review the current research looking at consumer attitudes to fair trade and organic
Sep 08 –	Tell licensees and members about the ET standards; what they mean, the aims, how to be involved
2009	Establish a programme for full integration of ET standards into the general organic standards <i>Set a target date for full integration and decide which areas to integrate and when</i>
2009	Review the standards
2010	Consult on changes to the standards
Jan 2011	Publish any changes to the standards

## 6. Symbol

### 6.a Our symbol and the EU logo

Traditionally, the use of our symbol has always been voluntary and most licensees are proud to display it and recognise the benefits of doing so. However, some products don't carry it and in particular some of the major supermarkets have a policy of not displaying other logos.

The new EU regulation (834/2007) introduces a requirement of a mandatory EU logo on all packaged goods when it comes into force in January 2009. The Soil Association stands opposed to an EU logo both for principled and practical reasons.

The obvious response is to make sure that our licensees display the symbol whenever they use the EU logo. Consumers will then be able to differentiate between base-line and better organic standards, to identify when a product is produced to our higher standards and so can continue to have confidence in what they buy.

### 6.b Stakeholder engagement

Such a proposal is likely to be welcomed in some quarters and prove very controversial in others. The stakeholders to involve include consumers, consumer bodies, processing licensees (primarily), box schemes, retailers, including particularly the supermarkets and regulatory authorities.

<b>SYMBOL TIMETABLE</b>	
22 Jan	<b>Multiple Retailers Working Group</b> <i>- Presentation of options, offer to hold 1-to-1 meetings</i>
6/7 Feb	<b>Standards board</b>
March	<b>Agreeing a stakeholder engagement plan</b> <i>- working with marketing, policy, SACL divisions, committees and boards</i>
Feb/Mar	<b>Meetings with stakeholders</b> <i>Explore views, get feedback, identify key issues</i>
March	<b>General meeting with stakeholders</b>
March	<b>Devise standard</b>

March/April/ May	<b>Consultation</b> <i>Articles in Organic Farming (mid March) Living Earth (mid April)</i> <i>Draft standard on website</i> <i>Article in Certification News (mid May)</i>
2 July	<b>Standards board</b> <i>Approve standard</i>
July	<b>Council</b> <i>Approve standard</i>
Aug	<b>Prepare for publication</b>

## 7. Health and beauty

The health and beauty standards underwent a significant review and were printed in plain English in 2007; therefore they do not need any major extra work at this stage. However, four issues are ongoing and will need further work. These topics are primarily to do with implementation, development of new technology and a move to harmonised standards within the EU:

- European harmonisation.
- Systems/Procedures for approving ingredients
- Herbal medicines
- Parabens

HEALTH AND BEAUTY TIMETABLE	
Jan 15 <sup>th</sup>	<b>HPSC conference call</b>
Feb 6/7 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Standards board</b>
Mar 5/6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>European cosmetics working group meeting</b> - Brussels
April 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>European cosmetics working group meeting</b> - NL
April 29 <sup>th</sup>	<b>HPSC</b> <i>- Review work to date. Discuss issues and areas of concern</i>
May 6/7 <sup>th</sup>	<b>European cosmetics working group meeting</b> - Germany
May	<b>HPSC conference call</b> <i>- Agree Draft European organic cosmetics standards</i>
June 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>IFOAM Congress</b> – Italy <i>- Public announcement of Draft European organic cosmetics standards</i>
Mid July	<b>Meeting Bristol – stakeholders (am) and HPSC (pm)</b> <i>- present proposals to stakeholders and feedback responses to HPSC. HPSC agree next actions.</i>
Aug/Sep	<b>Consultation through Living Earth and Certification News</b>
Oct	<b>Standards Board</b> - <i>Approve new standards</i>
Nov	<b>European cosmetics working group meeting</b> - <i>Approve new standards</i>
Jan 2009	<b>Council approval</b>

## 8. Influencing organic standards worldwide

We work in an international environment and our work has to reflect that. This means we need to:

- a) be aware of the external influences on our standards, in particular the regulatory framework, and
- b) influence the direction of these as far as we can to ensure the development of organic standards is going where we want.

- 8.a Engagement with Defra and ACOS**
- Participate in stakeholder meetings preparing the UK negotiating position on the new regulation
  - Respond to consultations
  - Seek representation on ACOS.
- 8.b Active participation in the IFOAM EU Group (and therefore influence on the EU)**
- UK board member (representing UK view)
  - President
  - Regulation revision taskforce
  - Commission advisory group on organic farming.
- 8.c Engagement with IFOAM on the IFOAM Basic Standards**
- Respond to consultations on the IFOAM Basic Standards
  - Attend IFOAM Congress and General Assembly
- 8.d Collaborative initiatives with other like minded bodies**
- Global organic textile standards
  - European organic cosmetics standards working group
  - Meeting for higher standards organisations

<b>INFLUENCING STANDARDS TIMETABLE</b>	
14 Feb	<b>Defra stakeholder group</b>
21-23 Feb	<b>Biofach</b> - <i>Global organic textile standards working group meeting</i> - <i>Climate change (airfreight) standards seminar</i> - <i>Ethical trade / fair trade meetings</i> - <i>Implementing rules seminar</i>
3-5 April	<b>IFOAM EU Group seminar and board meeting</b> – Bulgaria
21-22 April	<b>Higher standards meeting</b>
16-24 June	<b>IFOAM Congress</b> – Italy
18-20 Sep	<b>IFOAM EU Group seminar and board meeting</b> - Hungary
Nov/Dec	<b>IFOAM EU Group seminar and board meeting</b> - Brussels

## 9. Governance implementation

We have almost completed implementing the new governance arrangements, but there are some final arrangements that are outstanding and that need finishing.

- 9.a Grower representative**
- Advertise, interview and appoint a grower to represent the interests of that community on the standards Board
- 9.b Communications**
- Redesign standards web presence in conjunction with external relations team
  - Investigate, design and implement internet-based information and communications system for standards committee members.
- 9.c Induction**
- Compile more comprehensive induction pack

- Consider options for practical induction sessions
- Run chairmanship training course

#### 9.d Review committee memberships

- Work with each committee to review membership and make proposals to the standards board for change
- Advertise for new committee members where appropriate
- Select and appoint new committee members

#### 9.e Forestry standards committee chair

- In due course, but not as a priority: Advertise, interview and appoint forestry standards committee chair.

GOVERNANCE TIMETABLE	
Feb-April	<b>Review committee membership</b>
Mar	<b>Certification News and Organic Farming</b> - <i>Copy deadline for advertising standards committee members and grower representative</i>
27 Mar	<b>Chairmanship training</b>
April-June	<b>Website design</b>
July-Aug	<b>Internet-based information and communications system</b> - <i>Review options, design and implement</i>
July	<b>Standards committee members and grower representative selection</b>
Oct	<b>Standards Board</b> - <i>Appoint new standards committee members</i>
Oct	<b>Council</b> - <i>approve new grower representative</i>

## 10. Resting committees and other activities

There are a number of other activities that need mentioning, including the ongoing, but less intense work of the resting committees (generally one meeting per year) and involvement in printing the standards:

#### 10.a Horticulture Standards Committee

- Hold one meeting to compile a response to the ACOS proposals on glasshouse standards in preparation for developing our own glasshouse standards in 2009
- Address emerging/urgent issues and review priorities to feed into the future work programme

#### 10.b Aquaculture Standards Committee

- Review the work of the aquaculture development programme in preparation for more detailed engagement when the committee is active
- Address emerging/urgent issues and review priorities to feed into the future work programme

#### 10.c Textile Standards Committee

- Keep under review the developments of the Global Organic Textile Standards
- Address emerging/urgent issues and review priorities to feed into the future work programme

#### 10.d Standards reprint

- Amend the standards to include essential changes resulting from the new organic regulation
- Work with SACL to ensure the standards reprint is accurate and complete with all approved amendments (primarily June – Sep).