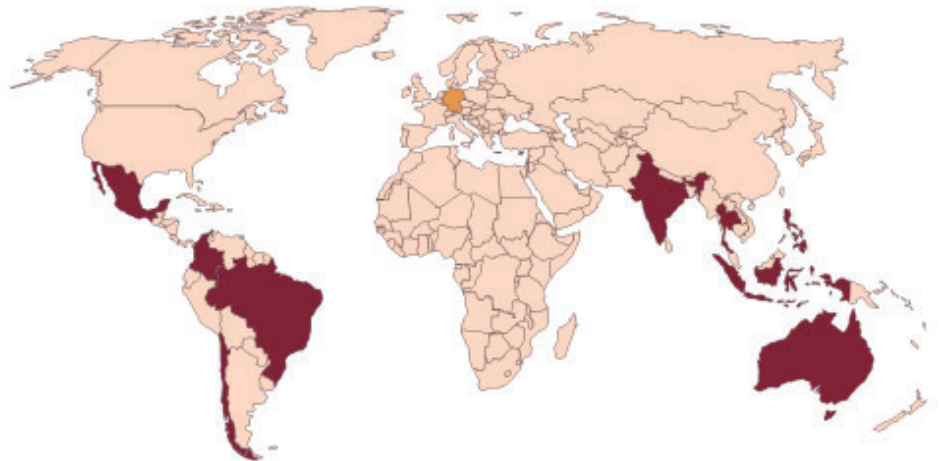


Complete Inclusivity: *How Group Integrity is helping grower groups access the global market*

and certifiers developed group certification systems to reduce the cost and time involved in certification. As a grower group, it is the group that is certified by the certifier, leaving the group responsible for ensuring that its members are in compliance

When was the last time that you ate a piece of certified organic chocolate or drank a cup of certified organic coffee? Chances are good that either one of these products started on a small farm. How is it that cocoa beans grown on a small farm in Ghana eventually wind up in your chocolate bar? How do these smallholder farmers get involved in the global market?

For individual small-holder



Group Integrity map: Group Integrity implementation partners can be found worldwide.

farmers, opportunities to enter the global market tend to be either limited or non-existent. The costs of joining the organic market or another certification market, such as Fair Trade, UTZ, or GLOBALG.A.P., can be prohibitive; hence, the emergence of the grower group. Grower groups are organised small-holder producers. By banding together, they are able to increase their economic power, providing evidence of the old adage that together, we are stronger.

With organising, however, comes greater complexity. With great foresight, different groups

with the standards to which it is certified. Through an internal control system (ICS), the central body of the grower group is able to administer its compliance with the standards. This body also oversees marketing activities since individual members are not able to use the certification on their own.

How do these grower groups, the businesses who contract them and the certifiers who certify them manage the administrative burden that has been placed on them given the limited budgets that many of them have? They can do this on paper or

news shorts...

OFRF PUBLISHES SOIL EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) has published a new educational guide, entitled Soil Microbial Interactions and Organic Farming. The publication talks about the role of the 'diverse communities of micro-organisms' in creating healthy soil for organic farming and about the methods for regenerating soil health. There are other issues, too, such as the role of micro-organisms in eliminating environmental pollutants through bio-remediation, disease and weed control. ■

Source: <http://ofrf.org/>

Groups and certifiers developed group certification systems to reduce the cost and time involved in certification. ■

standards & regulations

with Excel, but they soon realise that the documentation needed to fulfil compliance requirements can easily become overwhelming, especially as the number of members grows. These approaches place groups at a greater risk of losing data and also make updating this data more difficult.

There are notable differences in the level of documentation that grower groups are able to provide, with some groups unable to produce a complete list of their farmers and/or consistent data on these farmers' certification status, crop area, estimated harvest, or the last internal inspection date. Furthermore, groups must be able to present compiled ICS data eg, a list of conditions imposed in case of non-compliance, a sanction list, and the number and findings of unannounced internal inspections performed by the ICS.

When this data is incomplete, then external certifications are much more difficult or even impossible to conduct. This difficulty is further compounded when groups are certified to more than one standard, each of which has unique requirements. Looking to more complex data application tools leaves grower groups either empty-handed or in shock at their price.

Identifying this need, Organic Services developed Group Integrity, a software tool that facilitates the certification of small-holder groups, businesses with small producers under contract and the workflow of small- to medium-sized certifiers. Organic Services worked directly with the certifier CERES to ensure that it developed a tool that best serves the needs of this industry, in addition to consulting the Instituto Biodinamico, IMO, Ecocert and the Naturland Association on its development. Group Integrity supports audit



Internal Compliance management

Applicable for Grower Groups, Contract Farming

- Production data
- Inspection data (electronic checklists)
- Certification data
- Non-conformities
- Documentation of transactions



3rd party Compliance management

Applicable for 3rd party Certification (local Certification Bodies (CBs))

- Production data
- Inspection data (electronic checklists)
- Certification data
- Non-conformities
- Documentation of transactions



Supply Chain Management

Applicable for CBs, Traders (Import/ Export/ Processors)

- Visualization of supply chains
- Show certification status as traffic light
- Allow single/ mass verification
- Confirmation of transactions
- Mass balance



Organic Services overview: An overview of Organic Services' integrity tools.

management, audit documentation, non-compliance follow-up, external reporting (market, certification) and internal quality verification system management processes (eg, ICS, PGS and GLOBALG.A.P. Option 2). Organic Services believes that all producers should have access to professional tools, regardless of their size.

What makes Group Integrity unique is its combined support of a variety of processes in one tool, not only for grower groups, but also for businesses who contract these grower groups and for the certifiers who certify them, covering these connected stakeholders with one tool.

The Rev. Fr. Jilson James, Joint Director of PDS Organic Spices, India, explains his organisation's reasoning for choosing Group Integrity: "We decided to go with Group Integrity for our ICS needs because it enables us to efficiently manage our organic and Fair Trade

group certification activities as per the different certification standards (including changes in standards as and when they occur) using one platform; scalability, and a price that fits our budget."

Group Integrity is multi-lingual, can be implemented globally and is available via the internet, meaning that it does not have to be manually installed. Group Integrity also recently added its own traceability function, which registers deliveries to storage facilities, improving transparency between farmers and traders. Being based on Ecert, the leading audit management software in the industry, means that Group Integrity is a proven solution and is already being used by a number of grower groups and certifiers around the globe.

Looking to the future, Organic Services will combine the functionalities of Group Integrity and Check Organic, its supply chain



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

integrity tool, giving grower groups the opportunity to connect to supply chains in the global market. Since grower groups produce internationally traded goods, and with the food sector in general trending towards greater transparency, Group Integrity,

through Check Organic, will also help its clients meet this budding expectation. The linking of these tools means that grower groups' production data, recorded as part of their ICS, will be available in Check Organic. Connecting this data to grower groups' certification statuses means that businesses which contract these groups will have real-time data to ensure the integrity of their supply chains. The supply chain tools available in Check Organic will be able to pull this data from Group Integrity when these grower groups are part of clients' supply chains.

The further professionalisation of grower groups through administrative disburdening can only benefit the organic industry as a whole. It means that these suppliers of heavily consumed goods will be better integrated into the global market. Group Integrity aids them in their efforts to further professionalise, so that they can shift their focus to increasing their market presence. Ultimately, the linking of Group Integrity and Check Organic will open up a whole new level of data sharing for a critical stakeholder that can only help the organic industry to further ensure its integrity.

If you are interested in learning more about Group Integrity or Check Organic, please contact us and we'll be happy to speak to you about how our tools can make your life easier. ■

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news shorts...

ORGANIC LABELLING FOR CATERING IN DENMARK

The certification of food in large-scale kitchens, restaurants, cafés, hospitals, schools, and larger businesses in Denmark started in 2009. The standard for this certification defines three organic labels according to the percentage of organic raw materials used in the food preparation: 30-60%, 60-90% or 90-100%. Nowadays, there are more than 1,500 eating places which use this organic label and 248 of them are using 90-100% organic raw materials in the meals they serve. ■

Source: Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of Denmark

