Soil Association organic standards

annex 2
equivalence

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Equivalence

Soil Association standards are the foundation of our certification. They embody our core organic principles and key sustainable practices, which underlie consumer trust in our work. By certifying with us you can use the Soil Association symbol, which consumers recognise as a mark of organic integrity.

Our standards have evolved over a number of years, and have grown out of an understanding of best sustainable practice. They are more comprehensive than almost any other organic standard, both in the UK and abroad, although some other standards may be stricter in certain aspects.

Our licensees may use products certified to other standards – a significant volume of products are imported to supply the UK's vibrant organic market. When this happens, we check the provenance of the imported products before they can carry our symbol. It is not feasible to check all non-Soil Association certified products against all aspects of our standards: some standards are only relevant to UK conditions, others are of lesser importance. Therefore, we check only the Soil Association standards that are either the most important or the most vital for good organic practice, and those critical to Soil Association symbol integrity.

All ingredients that we recertify must demonstrate compliance with key Soil Association standards in addition to the standards legally required by the EU organic regulation. The Soil Association's elected council has approved the additional requirements in this annex as the key differences between our standards and the EU regulation. We check that imported products meet these additional requirements before approving a product. Please note that some areas of the Soil Association standards, such as aquaculture, are not covered by this chapter.

All ingredients used by licensees must meet all of the standards listed in this chapter unless the issue is marked 'New' and has not yet reached the stated implementation date.

Additional requirements

The list below identifies the additional checks we make for products to carry the Soil Association symbol if they are certified to the EU Regulation 834/2007 baseline standard.

1.0 Genetic engineering

Livestock products and feed (standards 3.6.10 and 3.6.16)

1.1 | **New** for livestock and dairy products – implement from January 2010, with compliance by 31 December 2010

All livestock products (which include dairy products) and livestock feed for use by SA licensed operators, must come from units able to demonstrate they have procedures in place to ensure:

- no genetically modified organisms (GMOs), derivatives of GMOs or contaminants are present in the organic feed above the reliable limit of detection (0.1%)
- no GM non-organic feed is used, and
- action is taken if they are detected.

Note – this has been implemented for livestock feed.

Reason

GM contamination is turning up even in organic livestock feed. Preventing this requires active vigilance. Soil Association standards state that a product may not be certified if it is contaminated above the level 0.1%, the reliable limit of detection.

Ingredients and contamination (standards 3.6.1 and 3.6.16)

1.2

GM ingredients and GM contamination are not accepted under Soil Association standards

Reason

An increasing number of GM crops are now grown worldwide making contamination of organic product an increased risk. However to make checks practical we look at the risk any ingredient presents. This is summarised on a risk matrix available on our website. It looks at the type of ingredient and the country in which it was produced and processed to determine what control measures are appropriate.

2.0 Non-soil based production (standards 5.1.14, 5.1.15, 5.2.12, 5.2.15 and 5.2.16)

2.1

We will only accept plant ingredients grown in a soil based production system. We will initiate checks on the basis of a risk assessment of the ingredients used.

Reason

Organic products take a wide array of forms, including potted plants. These are acceptable when sold direct to the end consumer as their non-soil nature is characteristic of this product. However it is not acceptable for normal organic production and therefore they cannot be used as an ingredient in further processed products.

3.0 Wild harvested products (standards 9.1 to 9.3)

3.1

We have summarised the additional requirements into the following six checks:

- All material must meet the requirements of CITES (www.cites.org) and all local, national and international legislation and action plans. No species must be collected, harvested or endangered by the collection process if the IUCN (www.iucn.org) red list classifies it as 'critically endangered'.
- The areas used for collection or harvesting must:
  - i. be at least 10 metres from non-organic farming operations or areas sprayed with products we don't allow
  - ii. be at least 50 metres from motorways and dual carriageways, 25 metres from major roads and 10 metres from other roads, and
  - iii. be a suitable distance from any other source of pollution or contamination.
- There must be:
  - i. a person responsible for the wild harvesting operations
  - ii. clearly identified collection and harvesting areas which are indicated on an appropriate scale map and which can be physically inspected, and
  - iii. a plan, that is reviewed and updated regularly.

- The plan must:

  i. include a register of all the groups or organisations involved in the collecting and harvesting
  ii. include a copy of their individual collection plans
  iii. indicate all other users or collection and harvesting operations in the same area
  iv. outline how operations are co-ordinated, and
  v. detail the controls on collecting and harvesting, such as times, areas, species identification by the operators, harvesting rules, quantities, species, qualities, 'making good' and other environmental management procedures, and records.

- There must be an ecological survey for each species harvested or collected, or equivalent assessment from an expert body. This must define the sustainable annual yield, details of the impact on other species in the harvest or collection areas and which details the general ecological impact of the operation.

- All collectors and harvesters must be sufficiently trained in:

  i. plant and species identification
  ii. life cycle of plants
  iii. hygiene, and
  iv. food safety, where appropriate.

3.2

The harvest operators must:

- take all appropriate measures to minimise the impact on the local environment and on the species' ability to mature or reproduce
- only harvest the parts of plants actually needed, and
- harvest in ways that encourage plant regeneration – species numbers should be sustained not depleted.

These needs must be reflected in the timing of the harvest in terms of the reproduction cycle, the amount of material left viable or replanted and the use of non-terminal methods (e.g. coppicing rather then felling).

Reason

The EU regulation lacks the detail that is so important for the practical protection of the environment and the habitat of wild-harvested products. This is a key consideration given the sensitivity of some sites and the need to preserve them.

4.0 Livestock Products

Organo-phosphate and organo-chlorine veterinary treatments (standard 10.10.31)

4.1

Meat, dairy and other livestock products must not originate from farms using organo-phosphate or organo-chlorine compounds as veterinary treatments, unless these are required by law.

Reason

The EU regulation does not prohibit the veterinary use of organo-phosphate and organo-chlorine on livestock. Because of their toxicity, the environmental damage they cause, the availability of viable alternatives and the risks to human health, we will not accept any livestock product from animals treated with organo-phosphate and organo-chlorine veterinary treatments.

Access to pasture for livestock (standards 10.12.4, 11.3.5 and 12.4.2)

4.2 | **New** for dairy products – implement from January 2010, with compliance by 31 December 2010

All herbivores used for meat, dairy or other livestock products must have a minimum of 150 days access to pasture each year. Alternative methods of demonstrating high welfare practices may be considered. All alternatives must first be approved by SA Certification's Certification Committee.

Note – this has been implemented for meat products.

Reason

The EU regulation does not require sustained, free-range access to pasture. To reflect best practice, we stipulate at least 150 days access to pasture. This is a sound indication that good welfare practices are in place. It also enables livestock to exhibit their natural behaviour.

Pig welfare (standard 13.2.2)

4.3

Pigs must not come from farms where the following are practised:

- ringing
- castration
- tail docking
- teeth cutting or grinding
- prophylactic iron injections.

Reason

Ringing stops the pigs rooting (a key instinctive behaviour). Teeth cutting and tail docking are practices which prevent pigs damaging others in the group. However, most of these problems only occur in intensive farming systems where the ability of individual animals to express normal behaviour is limited. In addition, these mutilations can cause pain and distress to the pig, and interfere with natural behaviour.

Castration is practised solely to influence the flavour of meat produced from older hogs. Unlike other domesticated livestock, pig castration is effectively a surgical process which causes the animal a great deal of distress.

Iron injections for piglets are a substitute for the iron derived from foraging. With systems based on free range, they are usually unnecessary.

Pigs: access to pasture (standards 13.3.1, 13.3.2 and 13.3.3)

4.4

All pigs must have access to outdoor range/pasture (not concrete) except in extreme weather conditions. Fattening pigs must have access to outdoor range/pasture (not concrete) for 80% of their lives (weather permitting – for a minimum of 150 days per year). Units must rotate and rest pasture (or otherwise maintain animal health, welfare and pasture quality) and ensure pigs have access to forage on the range at all times. Whenever temperature could cause distress or discomfort pigs must have access to wallows, spray or shade.

Reason

The EU regulation does not require free-range systems for pigs. We do require this, as a key point of principle. This helps ensure pigs are integrated into the farming structure and also ensures they can exhibit their full range of natural behaviour, both in terms of their social interactions and their foraging habit.

Pigs: farrowing crates (standard 13.6.4)

4.5

All organic pigs must come from operations that do not use farrowing crates.

Reason

The EU regulation does not prohibit farrowing crates within organic operations. We will not allow pig products to carry our symbol if the pigs have been reared using farrowing crates.

5.0 Honey products

Hive sites (standards 15.4.2, 15.4.3 and 15.4.5)

5.1

In order to accept honey products, the hives must come from sites which are far enough away from potential sources of contamination (urban centres, motorways, industrial areas, waste dumps and waste incinerators) and are:

- either surrounded by four miles of land that is organic, compliant with wild harvest requirements, or managed under recognised low input schemes, or
- the honey is tested to verify it is free from pesticide contamination.

Reason

The quality of honey depends on the areas the bees use to forage. Four miles is the usual extent of any one hive's foraging distance. Because land use in a 50 square mile area (four mile radius from the hive) cannot always be known, we accept analysis of each batch as an alternative to ensure no contamination.

Artificial insemination of bees (standard 15.2.8)

5.2

You must **not** practice artificial insemination.

Reason

Artificial insemination is a practice of intensive bee keeping systems.

Pasteurised honey (standards 41.2.10 and 41.2.11)

5.3

We will not certify pasteurised honey. This includes honey liquefied with temperatures over 60°C, honey held at liquefying temperatures for over 6 hours and honey held above 50°C for more than 8 hours.

Reason

Pasteurisation destroys beneficial enzymes and increases levels of hydroxymethylfurfural (HMF).

6.0 Poultry

Beak tipping (standards 20.4.5 and 20.5.4)

6.1

We will not usually accept poultry or eggs from beak-tipped flocks. Case-by-case applications can be made to Soil Association Certification's Certification Committee if it is felt there are grounds for granting an exceptional permission.

Reason

Beak-tipping is an unnecessary mutilation if welfare and other factors are optimal.

Solid floor area (standard 20.7.3)

6.2

The housing used for poultry must not have a slatted floor that exceeds 50% of the total floor area.

Reason

Slats are an unnatural surface for birds to walk on and are usually free of bedding materials. However they do play an acknowledged part in maintaining the welfare of birds in the house by minimising guano levels in high movement areas and areas subject to heavy soiling. Housing that restricts the use of slats to those areas, and is no more than 50% of the floor area, is acceptable.

Aerial perch space (standards 20.7.4 and 20.7.6)

6.3

The perch space available to each bird must be at least:

- pullets: 15 cm
- laying birds: 18 cm.

Reason

Aerial perches allow birds in a house to exhibit a much greater range of their natural behaviours.

Flock size (standards 20.7.10, 20.7.11 and 20.7.12)

6.4

The number of birds in a poultry house must not exceed 500 birds for laying and table chickens, ducks and guinea fowl, or 250 birds for turkeys and geese, unless:

- There is a livestock management plan, effectively implemented, that ensures high levels of bird health and welfare, good environmental conditions inside the house and out on the range
- There has to be sufficient range within 100m for layers, geese, and guinea fowl and 50m for table chicken, turkeys and geese to achieve the minimum stocking densities
- The operator can demonstrate that they are checking and taking appropriate action to address any occurrences of:

  i. beak tipping above 10% in any one house
  ii. clipping of flight feathers
  iii. skin lesions
  iv. poor comb colour
  v. respiratory problems
  vi. feather loss/pecking, and
  vii. high mortality rate: above 10% for the life of the flock

If the certifier can verify that these requirements are in place, then the number of birds in a house may reach, but not exceed:

- 2000 for laying chickens, and
- 1000 for table chickens, ducks, geese, guinea fowl and turkeys.

Reason

Larger poultry houses are only acceptable if there is excellent welfare, especially as problems may be difficult to eradicate once present in the flock.

Ground cover on poultry range areas (standards 20.8.2)

6.5

It must be the aim of all poultry producers supplying Soil Association compliant products to maintain 75% pasture cover on the range used by poultry birds. Where less than 75% cover exists there must be steps in place to improve grass coverage levels through:

- introducing harder wearing grasses or cover crops
- use of wood chip or hardcore around the perimeter of the house or
- a concrete apron around the perimeter of the house
- any other appropriate measure.

Reason

Poultry welfare is intrinsically linked to the birds' environment. The range area accessible to a flock is an important factor in this. When grass cover is low poultry conditions can rapidly deteriorate, for example, in wet weather.

Shelter on poultry range (standard 20.8.2)

6.6

Sufficient cover must be in place to encourage the birds to range.

Reason

Weather and climatic conditions play an important part in determining animal behaviour. Suitable cover for the flock means they can exhibit a full range of natural behaviours and make the most use of the range areas available.

Access to and resting of pasture for poultry (standards 20.8.3, 20.8.5 and 20.8.6)

6.7

Birds must have easy daytime access to pasture. Layers must have access for the remainder of their life after their first 12 weeks. Table poultry must have access for at least two thirds of their life. Pasture must be rested between batches. The length of time is determined by the type of production:

- for layers: nine months, and
- for table poultry: two months per year and one year in three.

Reason

Free-range access is vital for poultry health, welfare and nutrition. Adequate resting of pasture is necessary to enable built up fertility to be used, allow vegetation to grow back and break cycles of infection.

7.0 Processing

Sulphur dioxide in wines and ciders (standard 40.8.7)

7.1

Wine and cider recertified to Soil Association standards must meet the limits on sulphur dioxide levels stated in the standards.

Reason

We consider these levels are sufficient to maintain the quality of alcoholic drinks, consistent with good manufacturing practice. At higher levels, sulphur dioxide is more likely to cause reactions in sensitive people, especially affecting people with asthma.

8.0 Slaughtering (standards 42.8.2 and 42.8.11)

8.1

All animals must be stunned before slaughter. This process must cause unconsciousness and insensibility instantaneously, without distress, and until the animal dies. If a carbon dioxide (CO_2) system is used to slaughter pigs, the overall welfare gain of the system must outweigh the welfare disadvantages of CO_2 stunning.

Reason

Animal welfare is important right up the end of an animal's life. Stunning before slaughter is vital to protect their welfare. Carbon dioxide is aversive and causes distress before unconsciousness. However, some systems have better welfare management that can offset the negative welfare effects of carbon dioxide.