



IFOAM Organics Europe's definition of "Organic Supply Chain Integrity"

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ORGANICS EUROPE

MAKING EUROPE MORE ORGANIC

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1 IFOAM Organics Europe’s definition of “Organic Supply Chain Integrity”

Organic supply chain integrity is based on the availability and accessibility of certification, production system, and product data for relevant actors to monitor and maintain authenticity along the entire supply chain.

2 What is integrity?

In any context where the word integrity is used, it is, ultimately, about ethics, morality, and honesty. The British writer C.S. Lewis coined the phrase “Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is looking”, expressing that integrity should be an in-built quality of a person or a business rather than a strategic element to boast with. The word stems from the Latin word “integer”, which means whole and complete. If a person or a business is with integrity, there is nothing to hide, there is no hypocrisy or corruption. Frequently used synonyms for integrity are honesty, truthfulness, and accuracy of one’s actions.

3 What is organic integrity?

When a product is labelled and marketed as organic, it carries an ethical claim and raises moral expectations regarding its production, processing, handling, and distribution. The moral aspect stands out in IFOAM’s definition of organic agriculture as a “system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people”.

In the globalised economy, it is difficult for consumers to verify whether these moral expectations are met, whether trust is deserved or not. Where personal contact between grower and consumer is missing, standards, regulations, certificates, labels, brands, and laboratory analyses are the key attributes to establish trust from farm to fork.

Since organic products sell for higher prices than conventional ones, their business potential attracts fraudsters to sell non-organic products as organic, charging higher prices for less valuable products. These criminal activities, as well as any other intentional or unintentional contamination, commingling or mishandling, risk the reputation of organic products, their wholeness, their completeness, their credibility, their trustworthiness – their organic integrity.

National and international organic regulations as well as private organic standards are designed to counter this risk, and certification bodies are responsible to check conformity with these rules throughout the food chain on a regular basis. Maintaining and improving the integrity, i.e., **the trustworthiness of organic products and its production, processing, and handling practices, including inputs and substances used**, is a prerequisite and the responsibility of supply chain actors for the organic sector to flourish sustainably.

4 What does organic supply chain integrity mean?

Supply chains can be short or long, simple, or complex, local, or international – in the end, they are all designed to deliver products and services. The longer, the more complex and the more international they are, the higher the risk that they are infiltrated by corruption and fraud. Consequently, their trustworthiness – their organic integrity – is threatened. Organic supply chain integrity is characterised by honesty, compliance with private organic standards, national and international organic regulations and appropriate auditing proving its reliability and truthfulness.

5 What is needed for organic supply chain integrity?

Unveiled fraudulent actions, however, such as mislabelling, substitution, dilution, or concealment by one member of a supply chain can damage the reputation of many others and destroy entire market segments. While there are, as mentioned above, manifold ways to commit food fraud, the major organic fraud scandals of the recent past are based on commodity fraud. To counter such fraud, it is important to know the certification status and the quantities of product produced on farm and traded along the supply chain. It is a simple truth that only such product can be sold that was produced. However, establishing transparency along diverse organic supply chains is not as simple when various actors are involved. It needs accessibility to data.

Therefore, datahub should be created for transparency of relevant certification and product data that need to travel along the supply chain and be accessible for those who need them, even if relevant actors are numerous, e.g., various certifiers, producers, traders, etc.

Apart from commodity fraud, the use of unallowed inputs and substances and the contamination of products with such substances is another main challenge for maintaining the organic integrity and supply chains. For this as well, certification data related to product data is essential for relevant actors.

Key for the accessibility of data is that they are available in digitalised form. Comprehensive tools and platforms can help to increase transparency and facilitate data exchange and collaboration, allowing every relevant actor to gain a level of insight that allows for the establishment of trustful business relations. Such transparency however needs to protect proprietary business information provided it is not jeopardizing organic integrity.