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GUIDELINES FOR CERTIFICATION OF GROWER GROUPS

1. GENERAL

Grower Groups are organized group of farmers /producers who intend to produce organic products/engage in organic processes in accordance with the National Standards of Organic Production.

“Grower Group is an organized group of farmers who produce organic products and/or engage in organic production processes in accordance with the National Standards of Organic Production and NPOP and complies with Chapter 5 of this NPOP”

2. Requirement for Grower Group

To qualify for group certification properties must:

- a) The Grower Group shall be a registered legal entity in the form of:
 - i. A Society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 or the relevant State Societies Act/Rules,
 - ii. A Farmers Producer Organization (FPO)/Farmers Producer Company (FPC) incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013, as amended from time to time,
 - iii. A Co-operative society.
- b) The producers in the Grower Group must follow similar production systems.
- c) The land or unit, as applicable, of each member of the Grower Group shall be in geographical proximity and preferably in the same village or adjacent villages of the same district/border districts within a maximum radius of 50 Km.
- d) A Grower Group shall market its products as a single entity.
- e) A Grower Group shall consist of a minimum of 25 and maximum of 500 farmers. However, in case of aquaculture, the minimum group size shall be 10. The number of farmers in the Grower Group shall be reviewed from time to time by NAB, based 50 on performance and compliance, of the Grower Group to the NPOP requirements and may be modified by NAB as deemed fit.
- f) Individual farms with land holdings of 4 ha (10 acres) and above may be a part of the Grower Group but will have to be inspected separately every year by the Certification Body. The total area of such farms shall be less than 50% of the total area of the group.
- g) Each Grower Group shall have an Internal Control System (ICS) for implementing the requirements of certification of the Grower Group under NPOP.
- h) The ICS shall conduct 100% internal inspections of all member farmers in the Grower Group twice a year

3. Documents and Records of the Grower Group

ICS of the Grower group will maintain the following documents/records:

- a) Registration details for legal entity,
- b) Date of registration,

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- c) Organizational structure,
- d) Complete details of the members of the Grower Group, including name of the Farmer, Father's/Husband's name, geo-location of the farm, its area, date of joining the Grower Group, land details (organic, in conversion, non-organic), Farmer's unique ID as given by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW), crops grown in the farm, conversion status, yield estimates, details of collection centres, purchase centres, storage area, previous certification details etc.,
- e) Application forms of the farmers,
- f) Contract with the respective farmers,
- g) Exit forms covering reasons for exit,
- h) Updated list of farmers with date of last update,
- i) Location map of the Grower Group depicting the location of the production area/farms,
- j) ICS Manual covering detailed operating procedures,
- k) Internal standards in local language under the framework of NPOP and package of practices,
- l) Contract with Service Provider (if applicable),
- m) Farm diaries (available with the respective farmers),
- n) Internal inspection records, formats of checklist and report with date and version, o) Date of internal inspections (start and end date),
- p) Internal inspection checklist and reports with name of internal inspectors, date etc., q) Findings of internal inspections,
- r) Report of External inspection conducted by the Certification Body,
- s) Training records comprising of training schedule, dates of training, list of participants, attendance sheet, course content, training module including pictorial graphics, training videos, trainer, photographs, video etc.,
- t) Sanction Catalogue,
- u) List of sanctions imposed in case of non-compliance by farmers.

4. Registration of members

- i. The farmers desirous of becoming a member of the Grower Group shall make an application to its ICS.
- ii. The ICS manager will review the application and suitability in terms of location, farming practices, crops etc.
- iii. Upon acceptance of the application, the ICS shall register the members as a group under a single legal entity,
- iv. The grower group members will submit their complete details including name, address, location, land details, area, crops grown, conversion status, yield estimates, storage area, previous certification details etc. (with identity proof).
- v. The ICS shall enter into a contract with the farmers.
- vi. The ICS while accepting new members in the grower group including members from other ICS shall inform the accredited Certification Body promptly.

4. Documents to be provided by the ICS to the members of the Grower Group Each member of the Grower Group shall be provided with docket in local languages, which will contain the following:

- i. Internal standards document in local language. Details and description of the various steps required for the process flow right from cultivation to harvest and sales of the products (Each member / staff shall be

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communicated when there is revision in the standards.)

- ii. Prevailing farming system and package of practices available for the area
- iii. Farm Diary which should indicate the main crops cultivated, use of inputs, last use of prohibited inputs, farm crop area details, seed and planting materials, crop management practices, contamination control, production, and harvested quantities etc.
- iv. Schedule of the training programmes.

6. Operating Document – ICS Manual

The ICS manager shall prepare the operating document to be followed by all the members of the group in the form of an ICS manual.

The ICS manual shall contain the following:

- i. Location: An overview map (village or community map) showing the location of each member's production unit. The map should indicate the crops cultivated in rotation and also mark any farm in an area that could be identified as high risk due to drift from non-conventional farms.
- ii. Member details: Farmer's list with code and name of the farmer, location, total area, area under crop (or number of plants), date of registration with the group, date of last use of prohibited products, date of internal inspection, name of internal inspector, result of internal inspection (separate lists for in-conversion farmers), previous certification details etc.
- iii. Organizational Structure with roles and responsibilities of its personnel.
- iv. Procedures for inclusion of members in the group and exit from the group, agreement of the members with the ICS.
- v. Procedures for internal inspections, internal inspection checklist, sanction procedures, management of parallel and split production, prevention of comingling of produce of organic and non-compliant farmers.
- vi. Procedure for risk assessment. The risk assessment shall be carried out by the ICS manager for the grower group annually. The ICS will take all measures to minimize the identified relevant risks.
- vii. ICS shall develop a sanction catalogue defining major and minor non compliances and appropriate sanctions thereof.
- viii. List of sanctions imposed on the members of the group along with details of non-compliances and duration of the sanction.
- ix. Procedure for reinstatement of the farmers upon whom the sanctions have been imposed.

7. Critical control points for risk assessment

The following shall be considered as critical control points for risk assessment:

- i. Measures taken by the farmers to deal with part conversion (if farmers still grow some non-organic crops).
- ii. Conversion period.
- iii. Production rules for the whole production unit, e.g., seeds, fertilization and soil management, pest management, approved inputs, prevention of drifts, animal husbandry.
- iv. Harvest and post-harvest procedures.
- v. Procurement and handling procedures.

8. Internal Inspections

- i. At least two inspections of the group (one in growing season of each crop) in the calendar year/scope cycle shall be carried out by the internal inspector and will be documented.

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- ii. For initial application, one internal inspection shall be carried out before external inspection by the certification body.
- iii. The inspection will be carried out in the presence of the member or his authorized representative and must include a visit of the whole farm, storage of inputs, harvested products, post-harvest handling and animal husbandry.
- iv. The internal inspector will also verify if the internal standards have been followed and whether the conditions of the previous internal inspection have been fulfilled.
- v. v. The visit of the internal inspector will be documented in the farm inspection checklist duly signed by the inspector and counter-signed by the member or his representative.
- vi. In case of serious non-conformity, the results will be reported immediately to the ICS manager and all measures will be taken according to the internal sanction procedures prescribed herein at Model ICS Manual in Model Documents.

9. Internal Approvals

- i. The ICS will have a defined procedure for approval or imposition of sanctions on the farmers in the Grower Group. All internal farm checklists shall be reviewed by the approval manager /committee with special focus on the critical control points of risk/difficult cases.
- ii. The approval committee for providing internal certification status will check the assessment of the internal inspector. If necessary, conditions will be set out for achieving compliance with the NPOP.
- iii. Based on the recommendation of the approval manager/committee, sanctions as per sanction catalogue (prescribed in the ICS Manual) shall be imposed on the members for the non-compliances reported in the internal inspection.

10. Buying Procedures

The ICS will follow the following minimum requirements while procuring the produce from the farmers:

- i. The status of the farmer in the group from whom the produce is being procured should be checked.
- ii. The supplied amount should be compared with the harvested amount and estimated yield. In case of any doubt, the produce shall be kept separately until clarified by the ICS manager.
- iii. The delivered quantity of the product shall be registered in the purchase record.
- iv. A duly signed receipt shall be issued to each farmer upon procurement of his produce by the purchase officer stating the quantities of the product delivered with date.
- v. All documents shall indicate the status of the certified product (organic or in-conversion).
- vi. All bags containing organic certified products must be clearly labelled as 'organic' or as 'in-conversion'.

11. Storage And Handling Procedures

The purchase or the warehouse manager during the handling of produce shall check the document to ensure the compliance with the NPOP standards. The following are the minimum requirements that shall be followed during storage and handling:

- i. Identification of the product at all stages of product flow during transition.
- ii. Segregation of organic products from in-conversion products.
- iii. The location in the warehouse during storage must be labelled as 'organic' or 'in-conversion'.
- iv. Fumigation of containers, irradiation/ionization, etc. are prohibited.

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12. Procedure for Change of Service Provider

- i. The service provider is an external body (e.g., Self-Help Groups / NGOs / Private Agency /Govt. Agency cooperative society) that may be engaged by Grower Groups, if required, for a specified period of time, on payment of mutually agreed service charges and who shall perform all duties and responsibilities of the Internal Control System(ICS) of the grower group, under the NPOP and all provisions applicable to a grower group under the NPOP, including sanctions, shall mutatis mutandis apply to such service provider.
- ii. In cases wherein a grower group wants to change its service provider or the Service provider does not want to run the ICS of the group, such an engagement can be terminated by either party, by giving one month's notice to the other party, under intimation to its Certification body. In case of grower groups, written representation by at least 50% or more of its members will be treated as a valid notice.
- iii. The Certification body shall ensure that dues, if any, attributable either to the Grower group or to the Service provider shall be remitted to the concerned party, during the notice period.
- iv. Two (2) weeks after the completion of the notice period (counted from the date of its receipt by the Certification Body), the Certification Body shall block the access of the existing ICS Manager/Service provider to the grower group account.
- v. If either party is not satisfied by the decision of the Certification body, which for clarity is limited to the issue of settlement of dues between the parties, then the party/parties within a period of two weeks of completion of the notice period of one month, may approach APEDA for decision on the matter.
- vi. APEDA shall place such case to the sub-committee constituted by the NAB for this purpose, for final decision.
- vii. The Certification Body shall then block the access of the existing ICS Manager/Service provider to the grower group account.
- viii. The grower group will identify another Service provider or designate a person from within the group to act as the service provider. The representative of the group for ICS Manager should be selected by the members by more than 50% majority.
- ix. The same shall be intimated to the Certification Body who shall update the contact details and provide the login credentials to the new ICS Manager.
- x. In case of a new service provider, the grower group will provide the new contract.

The Certification body shall update the new contract and details of the new service provider.

13 SAMPLING PLAN

The **SSPL** shall undertake inspections of the ICS after ensuring that 100% internal inspections by the ICS have been undertaken at least twice for all the registered members of the grower group.

The sampling plan for inspection shall be based on the inspector's perception of risk based on the following factors:

- a. Size of holding
- b. Number of the members in the group
- c. Degree of similarity between the production system and crop system
- d. Inter-mingling
- e. contamination
- f. Parallel production

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- g. Split production
- h. Local hazards
- i. Change in the production plan
- j. Joining of new members in the group
- k. Past Certification History and sanctions

14 RISK ASSESSMENT

A minimum sample (square root of the number of members registered in the grower group) size of the members in the grower group shall be inspected by CB. Based on the risk assessment made by the CB prior to the inspection visit, the number of sample inspections shall be planned.

Risk based criteria for farmer sample are as follow:

- a- **High risk:** 2 X square root of number of farmers
- b- **Medium risk:** 1.5 x square root of number of farmers
- c- **Low risk:** Square root of number of farmers

A mini of 20 farmers shall be inspected during external inspections