

## Short introduction: Steps to Organic Certification for Producer Groups with Internal Control Systems (ICS)

*(This summary applies to all the organic certification programmes CERES works with, and which allow group certification. In some cases, additional requirements are defined in specific documents for the respective programme)*

\*Steps marked with an asterisk are applicable only in the indicated cases!

	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Applicant or client</b>	<b>CERES</b>
1	<b>Request</b>	Commonly, applicants present a first general request, asking about requirements, procedures, prices for certification	The applicant receives from CERES a first package of information, by e-mail, mail, or fax often combined with individual additional information by phone. This package is composed of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• this present document,</li> <li>• a brief information concerning requirements of group certification and crop production (most producer groups apply for certification of crop production, but there may be cases where information on livestock or beekeeping is required)</li> <li>• an application form.</li> </ul>
2	<b>Formal application</b>	Client completes application form	CERES reviews application. If we can offer the requested service, the application is approved.
3	<b>Offer</b>		Based on our daily fees and the size of the unit to be certified, we calculate the certification fees. We submit the applicant a written offer. Normally this is a flat fee, meaning that the applicant knows definitively how much the procedure will cost, independently from how long the inspector stays on the holding. As per NOP requirements, we also provide an approximate estimate of travel expenses. For other certification programs, costs for travelling and accommodation are usually not included in the offer. Together with the offer, we submit a certification contract.
4	<b>Contract</b>	Once the applicant and CERES have agreed on the fees, the applicant signs the contract. By doing so, he/she is committed to fulfil the applicable standards.	CERES sends a counter-signed copy of the contract and the invoice to the client
5	<b>Pre-payment</b>	The client deposits the agreed advance payment.	CERES submits to the client a second package of information and forms related to the affected standards, including, among others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relevant CERES policies,</li> <li>• relevant standards,</li> <li>• standard inspection program(s)</li> <li>• the organic management plan.</li> </ul>

	Procedure	Applicant or client	CERES
6	<b>Farmer training</b>	Participating farmers need to be trained concerning organic production methods and basic rules	
7	<b>Setting up an Internal Control System (ICS)</b>	This involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishment of an internal regulation,</li> <li>• working out forms for internal inspections and for other procedures,</li> <li>• selection and training of internal inspectors.</li> <li>• in case of larger projects, with more than one internal inspector: an ICS responsible must be identified, who supervises the internal inspectors.</li> </ul>	
8	<b>Farmer registration</b>	All farmers need to be registered, with their names, addresses, fields, potential yield. A contract must be signed between the certificate holder (e.g. cooperative or processing company) and each farmer.	
9	<b>Internal inspections</b>	The internal inspectors inspect 100% of farms each year, verifying compliance with the organic standard(s). Where necessary, they agree on necessary corrective actions with the member farmers.	
10	<b>Evaluation of internal reports, follow-up</b>	The ICS responsible evaluates internal reports, making sure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a provisionally approved farmers list is set up, including all members who comply with the rules</li> <li>• follow-up is given to the implementation of corrective actions, within a suitable timeframe</li> <li>• internal inspectors whose reports do not show the requested quality, receive additional training, or are replaced, in case they do not have the necessary skills.</li> </ul>	
11	<b>Working out the organic management plan</b>	The client fills in the organic management plan (OMP). Going through the OMP is also helpful for identification of any noncompliance and correcting it. Clients, who have been certified by other certifiers before, are obliged to submit, together with their OMP, any Notice of noncompliance or Denial from the previous certifier, and evidence of correcting the non-conformities.	
12	<b>OMP Review</b>		CERES reviews the OMP (organic management plan) and informs the client about the result of this review. This step is essential for NOP certification, not for other organic certification programs.
13	<b>Corrective actions</b>	*If non-conformities are detected during the process of working out and reviewing the OMP, these should be corrected even before the first inspection takes place.	CERES checks the corrected management plan

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		Example: Improvement of the internal control system.	
14	<b>Scheduling inspection</b>	Inspector and client schedule a date for the inspection	
15	<b>Inspection</b>	Responsible staff, including internal inspectors, must be present, records must be prepared. After inspection the inspection report is signed by the client or responsible person.	The CERES inspector evaluates the functioning of the ICS. A sample of farmers is re-inspected, internal inspectors' performance is assessed, all post-harvest facilities are visited.
16	<b>Inspection report</b>		Immediately after the inspection, the inspector finishes his/her report and submits it to the CERES headquarter.
17	<b>Evaluation</b>	The client receives a copy of the inspection report.	The report is reviewed by the responsible certification officer. *Often, additional questions must be clarified with the inspector.
18	<b>Final invoice</b>	Payment of the remaining fees according to offer, plus travel cost.	Issues the invoice
19	<b>Certification decision</b>		<b>CERES makes the certification decision, normally within 4 weeks after the inspection, maximum 6 weeks. There are basically three possibilities:</b>
			a) Client complies with the standard → Certificate is issued and sent to client
		Client corrects non-conformities and sends evidence to CERES	b) Client has non-conformities, which need to be corrected. This may include missing documents, or more substantial things. → CERES issues Notice of Noncompliance. Certificate is issued once CERES has evidence of correction of non-conformities (in some cases, this may involve an additional inspection).
		c) Client has major non-conformities which cannot be corrected in the short term → CERES issues a Denial of Certification letter.	


**Please be reminded that, in addition to this routine procedure, CERES may conduct unannounced inspections at any time. Clients for unannounced inspections may be selected risk based, or randomly. Since conducting such unannounced inspections is compulsory for CERES, the costs is charged to the client.**

This whole procedure is apparently very long and complicated. Nevertheless, many steps, which are presented here one after the other, often take place at the same time. Clients can contribute to **acceleration** by:

- paying on time
- immediately filling in and thoroughly the necessary forms, contracts etc.
- immediately implementing necessary corrective actions.

Concerning special requirements of **JAS** certification (for the Japanese organic market) or **NOP** (for the US organic market) please refer to our documents "Brief Info JAS" (3.2.11), and "Brief Info NOP" (3.2.10).

Please be aware that companies **outside the European Union**, after issuing the certificate, must obtain a transaction certificate (also called "certificate of inspection") for each shipment of organic products to the EU organic market. This is issued by CERES (Please refer to our "Brief Info Import", 3.2.8)

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During the entire process from application through certification and the annual renewal process, the client has the right to file complaints or appeals to CERES. They will be handled according to CERES internal rules and the respective standard and the client will be informed of the outcome of the complaint assessment.