

Introduction

There is a rapid increase in market shares of agricultural products produced in compliance with voluntary standard systems. Yet many producer organizations and agribusinesses lack access to generic management skills, and find it increasingly difficult to comply with standard requirements.

Another key trend relates to the increasing interest of processors, traders and retailers to develop direct trade relations with small scale producers. Certification is an important element here too. But a precondition is that producers are well-organized and able to run a professional operation. This creates a growing demand for high quality and well-structured capacity building materials and tools.

To a varying degree, the sustainability initiatives have built their own, isolated compliance programs and support structures related to the content of their standards. These programs however are geared towards compliance, not business development. In a process initiated by ISEAL the different sustainability initiatives agreed to collaborate on capacity building in order to facilitate producer access.

Proposed is to initiate a shared resource center to facilitate access to the preconditions for sustainability standards systems and their markets.

Services of the resource center

The proposed resource center consists of an internet platform with the following services:

1. A one-stop-shop library, containing practical and copyright free tools like training materials, templates for quality management and internal control systems, management tools;
2. A moderated community rating / review scheme of available documents mentioned under 1;
3. A Community of Practice (CoP) portal for knowledge exchange and (moderated) discussion of relevant issues ;
4. A Yellow Pages find & to be found place for providers and clients of capacity building services;
5. An upload service for newly developed tools, that may complement the documents under 1 after positive community review;
6. An interactive calendar for workshops and trainings;
7. Links to existing websites like the ISEAL library, the ITC standards map, e-learning resources etc.

One-stop-shop

The library will be a one-stop-shop, facilitating access to already available materials in the public domain. Materials will be indexed to allow for easy searching. Before publishing, there will be a quality check through a (moderated) user community. It is not expected that the resource center will publish own material, unless topics are missing.

Yellow pages

Yellow pages on which trainers, consultants, certifiers can offer their services, will follow the same indexing and quality control as the library. Only participants with a proven track record, confirmed by a (moderated) user community will be able to offer services.

Content

Tools will not only facilitate standard compliance, but also address the following topics:

- good agricultural practices;
- good manufacturing practices;
- quality management;
- business planning;
- value chain facilitation.

Quality Management

Systematic management and business development at producer organizations and agribusinesses is a pre-condition to success, regardless of the choice of voluntary standard system.

The groundwork of the resource center will therefore be built on an approach to strengthen organization and business management, see Figure 1.

Standard compliance

Tools for standard compliance will be in line with the quality management approach. In doing so compliance is made an integrated part of organization development. See Figure 1.

Target groups and continual improvement

The resource center focuses on sustainable agricultural production, and agribusiness enterprises in developing countries and emerging economies.

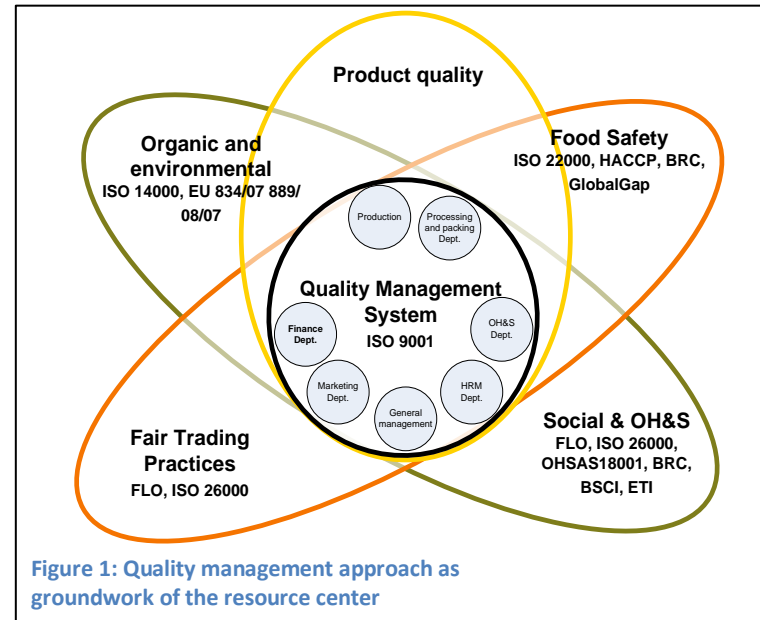
Organisations in different development stages vary in needs. The resource center will offer applied concepts and tools, based on the quality management approach, adjusted to various levels of organizational development (from low entry groups to advanced agribusinesses).

User community

As farmers and emerging producer organizations and enterprises will not be able to access or use the resources on their own, the direct users of the resource center will be local service providers such as business development services (BDS),

trainers, consultants and NGOs facilitating the development and up-scaling of value chains.

The intention is to develop a community of practice that safeguards a minimum quality of tools, trainers and workshops. Possibly a system of train the trainers will have to be developed, or be integrated with one or more existing trainer accreditation schemes.



Planning

Dependent on interest and finance, the initiators aim to launch the initial site in the first half of 2012.

A practical approach will be followed, starting with the library and yellow pages functionality. In the initial phase a central moderation will be applied, allowing for a quick build up, and reaching a critical mass of interesting content.

It is likely that the coffee sector will take a head start, looking at the interests of the bigger initiatives like 4C Association, Utz and IDH.

Collaboration with existing initiatives

Collaboration is sought with existing (online) initiatives. Available resources and expertise at local and international level will feed into the resource center.

Ownership, moderation and hosting

The implementing organization needs to be neutral concerning the different voluntary standards, and familiar with sustainable agriculture and trade, experienced in capacity building, and cost-effective. A group of suitable technical experts shall advise the implementing agency in setting up the resource centre.

Finance

Setup and first year of hosting and moderation will be financed with public money. The aim is to make the resource center self-supporting after the first year.

Feasibility

The initiators have set out an online questionnaire to measure interest and receive ideas. Please be invited to complete this questionnaire at <http://www.fa2q.nl/questionnaire>.

The questions are spread over 11 (short) pages, and will take you between 10 and 20 minutes for complete.

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