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Note on Certification in the Agri-Food Sector

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Introduction

This document presents a review about the certification systems in the agri-food sector, showing some elements of reflection that show what it means that the producers of raw materials, mainly small producers, have to face in order to access a differentiated market niche where find certified products. Without being exhaustive, only some elements are presented.

Certification in the Agri-Food Sector

The evolution of agricultural markets is constant and growing, the reasons are the demand for products of animal or vegetable origin as the main food and the quality required by consumers to be consumed as safe; presenting a growing tendency to increase the purchase of certified products and a slight tendency to decrease the premium. Talking about quality in the agri-food sector is quite a complex issue, because it is defined based on consumer preferences and can sometimes be related to food safety, sustainability, the environment, animal welfare or values nutrition, among other things. Today consumers are more aware of and interested in the environmental and social problems surrounding the production and trade of the agricultural products they consume [1]. The need to control all stages of the food production process gave rise to certifications, which verify and control inputs, processes, outputs and critical points during the production, processing, transformation and transfer of a food product. Currently it is possible to certify the quality of products, services, people or production systems; In the agri-food sector, quality assurance systems oriented towards the certification of products or production systems and their processes are becoming more common [2] Among the certifications that are opening doors in the most demanding markets are: Global Gap, Rainforest Alliance Certified, USDA Organic, Kosher, SQF Certification, BRC , GFSI (Global Food Safety Certification) , IFS and ISO22000.

Table 1: Types of certifications for agriculture and aspects that control.

	Social	Environmental	Quality
PROCESS	Fair Trade		
		Organic	
SYSTEM	SA 8000		
		ISO14000	
			ISO9000
			ISO22000
			Origin Certification
PRODUCT		Bird Friendly	
		UTZ Kapeh	
		EUREP GAP or GLOBAL GAP	

The need to certify production processes or their products stems from the concern of three different areas. From the offer, where producers concerned about the impacts of production systems have developed sustainable practices, which have evolved into seals and labels. From the demand, consumers express concern about the impacts generated by production systems both environmentally and socially. And from the citizens, concerned about the effects of the productive systems on both the environment and health, they have promoted initiatives through the government. As a result of the above, various types of certifications have been developed that producers have adopted voluntarily to take advantage of opportunities to access market niches with better prices. In general, the certifications seek to encourage the demand and supply of products that cause the least negative impact on the environment and consequently on health state that certification systems are based on market demands, encouraging the production of healthy and environmentally beneficial goods. In the agricultural sector, one of the most common certifications is the certification of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) aimed at ensuring the sanitary quality (safety) of fresh food from the production area to the consumer, which involves caring for the environment and the search for the safety and health of workers, for which the FAO established a reference framework in 2003, emphasizing safety considering the environmental and social sustainability of agricultural production. Currently, governments regulate agriculture and food production in a less expensive way, in such a way that it has allowed the strengthening of certification systems where non-state actors and NGOs have taken a more active role in the regulation. Elaboration of norms. In Mexico, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2017) [3] affirms that the certifications provide security to the consumer that the agri-food products that reach their table are free of contaminants. For agri-food products, there are certifications that provide the consumer with security that the products he consumes are free of agents that can harm health; in short, it is a seal of quality and safety. Some types of certifications that exist in Mexico are the following: Organic SAGARPA Mexico (guarantees production under natural processes without the use of external inputs); the Federal Inspection Type Certification (TIF) (aimed at producers of food of animal origin for human consumption and destined for export because it guarantees the sanitary quality with which the product was made); Certification



of good livestock practices and Mexico Supreme Quality (which guarantees the quality of Mexican products) granting confidence to customers in the domestic and foreign markets, protecting the consumer [3]. The first and basic certification is that of Good Agricultural Practices, although the requirements are different for each country, there are very specific certifications required by the countries, which take into account the impact of production processes on the environment. It must be taken into account that not all international certifications are necessary for all countries, so it is necessary to ensure the destination of the production before starting certification processes. Due to consumer demands, countries that produce raw materials require certification of their processes or products in order to be able to export them (some examples are presented in (Table 2).

Table 2: Example of the most common certifications required to export.

Certification	Importance	Certification	Importance
Good Practices (BPA)	National	kosher	United States, Israel and Europe
¹³ Good Manufacturing Practices (BPM[1])	International	UTZ Kapeh	European Union and Japan
Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP)	United States and Members of the European Union	IFS Food	Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands
Global GAP	European Union	USDA Organic	USA
Fairtrade	Germany, Ausralia, Austria, Canada, Spain, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, among others.		

To manage the implementation and putting into practice of the different aspects of certification coverage, an organizational development is required, which constitutes an intra- and inter-organizational challenge, on the one hand, due to the organization's effort to document its production processes. And on the other, for the costs that must be incurred. Producers must make a balance in terms of income, ensure that the certification of their production system or product effectively provides access to specialized market niches and that it covers the costs incurred to encourage producers to continue with these certification systems. Additionally, certifications have an impact on the competitiveness of companies, which allows products to be produced more efficiently and making them more valuable to consumers, recognizing that caring for the environment is an integral part of product quality. The foregoing is inserted within a new paradigm of global competitiveness which requires the ability to innovate rapidly, promoting innovation, offsetting improvements with increased productivity to achieve better competitiveness, with higher profits and a better position in the market [4-6]. Chain, without ruling out the possibility of inclusion/exclusion of the participation of small producers in value chains with certification and facing the challenge of sustainability in the market. This new paradigm that has its focus on world markets for products with a wide range of intrinsic and extrinsic quality attributes poses great challenges for small producer organizations that represent a great challenge to access higher value markets. Finally, it is important to note that standards are very important in the agri-food industry, which are driven by the growing demand of customers for safety and quality, where security control systems, standards and private certification programs respond to the high requirements of consumers whose tastes and preferences have been directed towards more sustainable and healthier origin and production goods. Today more than ever, certification systems have a great future, on the one hand derived from the growing food crisis and on the other, due to the need to guarantee foods free of contaminants that are totally safe for humans and even more so in the context of the pandemic ensuring food safety represents

an essential requirement for the marketing of food products [7].

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