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Guidance on Regional Structures with respect to IFOAM Norms

Many certification bodies deliver their service to their clients through, or with the support of, regional offices. Some certification bodies started business from devolved farm associations and others have grown out from the centre to set up regional offices to better serve their operators. The purpose of this document is to make clear the IOAS interpretation of the IFOAM Norms with respect to the role of regional structures in certification.

IFOAM Criterion (1.2.2) and in ISO65 (12.2) there is a requirement that:

'The certification body shall not delegate authority for granting, maintaining, extending, suspending or withdrawing certification to an outside person or body'

This was not explicitly spelt out in the 1998 IFOAM Criteria but IOAS have always interpreted Criteria 1.3 in this way and that as the guidance note to the 2005 criterion 1.2.2 indicates,

'An outside person or body would normally include anybody that is a separate legal entity even if linked in some way.'

It is in circumstances where regional offices of certification bodies are indeed separate legal entities AND where part of their responsibility is making certification decisions that this criterion may be breached.

IOAS would like to clarify the following.

That regional offices are in compliance with, or have no impact on, IFOAM criteria 1.2.2 if:

1. Whether separate legal entity or not, their purpose is one of information flow, receipt of applications and coordination of inspection and they have no involvement in making the final