

matching grant - giving every participating retail chain about EUR 80,000 to do a special promotion for organic selected stores. Although this sounded like a good “pull” measure, it ended in a failure because the farmers could not supply good quality certified organic products in sufficient quantities to satisfy the retailers’ supply chain requirements. This action was taken against the advice of the local organic sector, which pleaded to put more emphasis on supporting producers in conversion and certification, and, overall, did more bad than good. After this failure, retailers became more negative about organic products than before. Planning, time and various efforts are needed to convert the number of organic producers needed to afford a consistent supply to supermarkets. Unless there is an over-supply situation, or imports can easily be obtained (that was the case in Saudi Arabia, for example, as their import rules for organic products are more enabling), the best strategy is to combine this measure with push (production support) measures in a well-integrated and reasonable step-by-step approach. An example of such dual effort (at the private level) was when the Coop supermarket in Switzerland decided, in the end of the 90s, to increase its range of organic products, it accompanied this decision with a massive investment in campaigns addressed to farmers for promoting conversion to organic agriculture.

d. National/common logo for organic products

Political justification

Having a common logo for organic products sold in a particular market has proven to be a decisive element in fostering consumer recognition of and trust in organic products and is therefore a very efficient tool for promotion and market development. In a market where multiple organic logos (including those of certifiers and organic brands) are used alternatively on various products, consumers can easily get confused and not know which logo to trust. Although private logos should still be allowed (and can convey different messages), ideally there should be one common organic logo that is prominently placed on ALL the products sold as organic in a country: this is a demonstrated decisive factor to build consumer recognition.

Depending on the structure of the market and the organic guarantee system, which may be organized at the national or supra-national level, the common organic logo may be a national organic logo (e.g. Brazil, China, USA...) or a regional community logo (e.g. East Africa, Pacific Community, EU...).

Normally the logo is primarily aimed at fostering domestic market development. However, in some cases governments have used it also as a brand, in an attempt to promote a country’s organic exports (e.g. BioTunisia, BioBhutan). In any case, since the development and promotion of the logo are serving the collective interest of organic operators (and consumers), it is important that they are not controlled by restricted private interests. A common organic logo is, in this sense, a “public good”. This is why it makes sense for the public sector (government or community of countries) to provide support to its development and continued promotion.

Suitable contexts

Supporting the development of a common logo for organic products is a measure that is suitable to any stage of development of the organic sector. Overall it is easier to introduce a national logo in an earlier stage: at a later stage, as various organizations will have invested considerable time and resources in promoting their own logos, and it is hard for them to drop them. Also, it is more difficult to “train” consumer to recognize a new logo if there are already some prominent logos that consumers have learned to identify as the signs of organic.

It is however not suited to the context where there is no agreed upon organic guarantee system. If the government is to endorse and support a common logo, it should in parallel (if not already in place) endorse a common organic guarantee system that backs-up the logo with clear technical requirements (which standards and which control systems are considered valid in order to obtain the logo).

The development of a common (regional or national) organic logo can be relevant to all the policy rationales to develop organic, whether they be to encourage the production of societal benefits, access to healthy food, increasing self-sufficiency or earning foreign currencies. If the objective is to promote self-sufficiency, the logo may have a slightly different version for domestically produced organic products, in order to promote them better, as compared to imports. If the goal is to earn foreign currencies through export, a national logo is not essential but it may, in some cases, become a marketing advantage if the country has or can create a positive image of itself compatible with the organic image (e.g. a country with a lot of unpolluted nature or smallholders and ancient traditions).

Possible modalities of implementation

The common organic logo may not need to be necessarily linked to an organic regulation, but it should be accompanied by a certain set of criteria for which organic products are allowed to bear the logo. This means having an “official” organic guarantee system, harmonized at the national or regional level. All of that may be managed by the government with or without having a compulsory organic regulation.

This guarantee system may even be managed by the private sector, rather than by the government, but it can still be somewhat endorsed/recognized by the government as THE common system for the country/region. An example of this is the East African Community (**Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda**) in which the East African Organic Product Standard is approved by the East African Community (an intergovernmental body) and is linked to the regional East African Organic Mark, but the mark is managed by a consortium of the national organic umbrella organizations. This consortium also decides on the East African Organic Guarantee System, i.e. the criteria for granting the use of the logo. Governments can adopt similar models whereby they delegate the management of the common organic logo to the private sector

umbrella organization (in cases where this organization has full legitimacy) but they can support it either financially (especially at the stage of logo development and launch, but also later on for regular promotion of the logo) or by referencing the system in their official governmental policies.

The common organic logo can be made freely available for any operator who complies with certain conditions (is certified etc.) without a further licensing process. This is the case for the EU logo. In other cases, the common logo is licensed to operators who need to undergo a separate licensing/registration process, which may or may not include fees to be paid and various administrative requirements such as approval of artwork. For a government it can be sufficient to put the rules for use in a regulation. In the case where the common logo is managed by private bodies (like in East Africa), and not backed-up by mandatory government regulation, a licensing process might be necessary for legal reasons.

More advice on this topic can be found in the “Template Manual for the management of a national organic logo” under the Organic Regulation Toolkit published by IFOAM-Organics International and available at <http://www.ifoam.bio/en/organic-policy-guarantee/organic-regulation-toolkit> under the section “Emerging organic sector”.

Country examples

Most countries that have a mandatory organic regulation also have developed an official organic logo. The logo development is then taken care of by the government and the government has the ownership of the logo. This is the case in regulated countries such as the **US, Japan, Tunisia, China, and Brazil**. For the **EU**, the logo is a regional logo (the leaf logo) that was developed in a process managed by the EU Commission. Some governments do some promotion activities (promoting the logo towards consumers) but many times the high-impact promotion is rather left to the private sector to do while the government limits itself to a few webpages that explain the meaning behind the logo to the general interested public (e.g. in the US or EU).

Developing a common organic logo is however not necessarily linked to a mandatory organic regulation. It is sufficient that the country (or group of countries) has an official organic guarantee system with clear criteria on which products (certified to which standard and under which control system) can be allowed to use the common organic logo (while other general “organic” claims may still be unregulated). There are a few examples of countries or group of countries that have adopted a common organic logo without a mandatory organic regulation. Examples include Bhutan and India. In **Bhutan** the National Organic Program managed by the government has developed and launched the “Bhutan Organic” logo, to go with an innovative type of local organic assurance system. **India** has had an organic regulation since 2000 and an accompanying government-managed India organic logo since 2002. However, up to 2016, the regulation remained voluntary for the domestic sector. Organic operators could choose to use the India Organic Logo for the domestic market or not (the organic claim per se was not regulated), but if they did, they would have to comply with the regulation.

In a few countries, such as Norway, Switzerland and Sweden, there are private organic logos that are so strong in the market place that they act as *de facto* national logos.

[Best practice example\(s\)](#)

Best Practice Example: The German Bio-Siegel

Germany is the largest national market for organic products in the EU and the second largest in the world after the US market. The German Bio-Siegel (national “Bio” organic logo) was introduced in September 2001 by the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection. The Bio-Siegel is the property of the Ministry and is protected with the German Patent and Trademark Office. It conveys the clear message that the standards of the EU organic regulation are met. The Bio-Siegel is available for use on all organic products sold in Germany, whether they are produced inside or outside of Germany or even of the EU, and whether they are produced according to the EU organic regulation or an approved equivalent standard.

Operators may use the Bio-Siegel voluntarily and free of charge. The procedures to access the logo are simple: operators register and submit their label designs, which can be done online. In case of misuse of the Bio-Siegel, the German Eco Labeling Law of January 2009 provides rules regarding fines and sanctions.

The Ministry not only administers the Bio-Siegel but also promotes it. In the first three years following the introduction of the Bio-Siegel, the German government spent EUR 15 million in promoting the label through magazines, posters, TV spots and other media. Additionally, some of the German states conducted their own promotion campaigns, showcasing the local origin of their organic products. All those promotion efforts were a key aspect of the success of the Bio-Siegel: they provided real marketing value and therefore the uptake was high, despite the fact that it is a voluntary label. After 2004, the promotion budget was included in the budget of the BÖLN, the Federal Organic Farming Support Scheme.

As a result of those promotion efforts, the number of companies that have registered their use of the Bio-Siegel continued to increase in the decade following its introduction. In 2011, more than 62,000 products on the market were bearing the Bio-Siegel. In 2013, the Bio-Siegel was recognized by over 90% of the consumers in Germany. More than 50% of consumers trusted its message and among them, 70% were willing to buy food bearing the Bio-Siegel¹²⁰.

A decade after the introduction of the Bio-Siegel, and given its success, the German government advocated for the EU Commission to follow the German model and introduce an EU organic logo, which it did in 2010. With the growing recognition of the EU organic logo, the Bio-Siegel is likely to ultimately disappear, but a long transition period with the use of both logos was planned in order to help transfer the high level of consumer recognition from the Bio-Siegel to the EU organic logo. The German Ministry therefore extended the trademark protection of the Bio-Siegel until 2021.

¹²⁰ Study by the University of Göttingen, “Anforderungen an eine nachhaltige Land- und Ernährungswirtschaft: Die Rolle der Konsumenten”, by Marie von Meyer Höfer, Achim Spiller.

Pitfalls and challenges

One of the main challenges when embarking on the development of a common organic logo is to identify the best territorial level at which it should be developed. Sometimes, several options exist: for example, the country can develop a national organic logo, or cooperate with neighboring countries to develop a regional organic logo. The development of the logo in itself is not a big investment, but it can take years and substantial efforts to promote uptake of the logo on products (unless it is compulsory) and to create an understanding and trust among consumers of what the logo means. If these efforts are made at the wrong level e.g. a national organic logo, which will then be overtaken by a regional organic logo within a few years, resources will be lost and consumers will be confused. Likewise, if there is an existing regional organic logo used and promoted by a community of countries, it is counterproductive for one of the countries to embark on developing and promoting its own national organic logo. The appropriate territorial scope of the logo depends very much on the territorial scope of the organic guarantee system. Usually, when a group of countries have agreed on one common standard and one unified organic control system, there should be a single organic logo corresponding to these. However, if regional harmonization happens after the countries already have well-established national organic logos in place with high consumer recognition, abruptly abandoning the national logos will be harmful to the sector, and a multi-year transition period with use of both the national and regional logos will be necessary (as in the EU case). In Denmark and Sweden, the national logos still have much higher market recognition than the EU logo.

Some countries had the idea that their organic logo should be used as a tool for export marketing. There are however to date no examples of that being successful on a significant scale. One reason is that most exported products, especially from commodity exporting nations, are re-packaged in the importing countries or are ingredients in processed products in the importing country. Another reason is that the communication of several foreign organic logos is undermining the communication of the national logo, which means that most actors (e.g. supermarkets) will not gladly participate in such promotion.

Extra costs or complicated procedures to get access to the logo will impede its uptake, and therefore its use and recognition. This is also the case for how the logo is used for imports. If there are limitations for its use on legitimate imported organic products, there is a risk that a substantial proportion of the organic products in the market will not carry the logo, which undermines its general recognition and value. It is therefore important that the requirements for access to the logo be low-cost and easy, including for imported products that are produced according to other standards recognized as equivalent.