



European Quality Assurance System for Education in Organic Retail

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Project title:

Production and dissemination of a Quality Assurance System for Education in Organic Retail

Project number:

DE/07/LLP-LdV/TO1/147068

Project duration:

October 24, 2007 - October 24, 2009

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Ecozept (France)
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Project outcome

E(co)-Qualify is a comprehensive European Quality assurance system for further education in the organic products retail, and includes certification standards and accreditation rules.

Project outcomes will be available with the completion of the project in October 2009:

E(co)-Qualify Quality Assurance System for Education in Organic Retail

Language: German, English, Dutch, Italian, Czech

Main output of the project is a comprehensive European Quality assurance system (QAS) for further education in the organic products retail which also includes certification standards and accreditation rules.

The **E(co)-Qualify** QAS is based on qualification standards focussing on the technical of education. The qualification standards define the operational and the management level of a retailer with regard to the necessary skills in the areas of product knowledge, store operations and marketing. They offer a basis for meaningful assessment and certification systems and contribute to the alignment of the different training and evaluation systems. In order to develop a comprehensive quality assurance system, further indicators and criteria for the implementation of training measures have been included such as: transparency of offers, counselling and mentoring, qualifications of teachers, room setup and equipment of providers, learning and success controls, survey of participants, certificates and proofs, conditions of participation and contracts and complaint management.

E(co)-Qualify Quality Assurance System is available in above mentioned languages on a CD or in printed version. Besides, it could be downloaded from various web pages, including ORA, project partners and national partner associations.

Quality Handbook

Language: German, English, Dutch, Italian, Czech

The Quality Handbook (QHB) includes all aspects and steps necessary for creating and implementing the **E(co)-Qualify** QAS. It is also the central document and groundwork for the certification process. QHB describes the necessary quality depending processes of educational organisations, technical qualification standards, checklists for the certification process and a Appendix with practical examples.

The Quality Handbook is also available in all project partner languages in CD or print version, or can be downloaded from partners' websites.

E(co)-Qualify web page

Language: German, English

On the **E(co)-Qualify** web page you can find not only the QAS and Quality Handbook, but also topical information about the project. The web also functions as an exchange forum for information and experience.

The web page address is:

www.ecoquality.o-r-a.org

Impressum

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Print: Tiskdruck Velimský, Brno

Cologne, Germany, October 2009

Abstract

The organic market is growing year by year. As important in marketing as the quality of the products is the quality of the trade. Shop management competence in selling is more and more the focus in developing the business. For further expansion of the market, the organic food retail qualifications of the managers and employees become increasingly more important.

Vocational training and further education is, however, confused by a multitude of offers and activities on varying levels and of varying qualities from different organisations, with currently no quality assurance measures or systems.

It is vital to ensure that further education measures in the various states of the European Union will be carried out at the same high level of quality. A comprehensive system of quality assurance and certification, with internationally comparable criteria as an obligatory and controllable framework, needs to be installed.

The intention of **E(co)-Qualify** is to present a comprehensive European quality assurance system for further education in the organic foods trade. Based on qualification standards focussing the technical content a European quality assurance system is derived and developed. The qualification standards

define the operational and the management level of a company with regard to the necessary skills in the areas of product, operating and market. They offer a basis for meaningful assessment and certification systems, and contribute to the alignment of the different training and evaluation systems. In order to develop a comprehensive quality assurance system, further indicators and criteria for the implementation of training measures have been included such as: transparency of offers, counselling and mentoring, qualifications of teachers, room setup and equipment of providers, learning and success controls, survey of participants, certificates and proofs, conditions of participation and contracts, complaint management.

Target groups and users are the providers of qualification and training, professional associations, businesses, entrepreneurs and employees and other stakeholders in the vocational training of this branch. Training institutions and stakeholders in professional education in the participating countries learn the quality assurance system and how to implement it in their daily training and education practice.

The E(co)-Qualify II project "Creation and dissemination of a Quality Assurance System for education in organic retail" has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Project outcome and dissemination



High quality of further education will reinforce organic products retailers



As part of the initiative **E(co)-Qualify** 20 partners from 10 countries have developed and disseminated basics of quality assurance for training in organic retailing. In the first phase, in the project **E(co)-Qualify I**, technical standards for the qualification of employees and managers were defined. In the second project phase, in **E(co)-Qualify II**, a comprehensive system of quality assurance for continuing education and further training in organic retail in Europe was developed. Partners from professional associations and educational institutions have created a binding and controllable framework with internationally comparable criteria and principles of certification.

After several phases of testing in the participating countries the Quality Assurance System was introduced in spring 2009 to the professional public, e.g. at the trade fair BioFach. Since then, educational institutions and actors in the branch in the partner countries have been informed about the system and supported to implement it in an appropriate and consistent manner.

The organic market is growing year by year. For successful expansion of the organic food retailing sector the quality of marketing is as important as the quality of the products. Shop management competence in selling is more and more the focus in developing the business. For further expansion of the market, the organic food retail qualifications of the managers and employees become increasingly more important. Thus, for sustainable development of the organic food retail market the qualifications of the managers and employees are getting increasingly vital for the profile of the shops and improvement of their market position.

The vocational training and further education of managers and employees in the European organic food retail market is not standardized. Qualifications and certificates have no significance because they are not comparable on the EU level. Human resource managers therefore either have to test the qualifications of all applicants or provide training to them, which is cost and time intensive.

With the newly developed Quality Assurance System, a transparent assessment and evaluation system is offered. It contributes to the harmonisation of differing

national educational and training activities in professional education. The intention of the introduction of a European Quality Assurance System is to offer education on the same high level with international comparable criteria and a controllable framework in the EU member states.

Qualification Standards as technical bases

The starting point for the **E(co)-Qualify** initiative was the realization that the situation in training in organic retail is very confusing and the quality of offers very mixed. In Germany, for example, broad offer of training opportunities is available, starting with educational seminars offered by the trade participants themselves, over long-term training courses from specialized training providers up to retraining in the context of labour market actions by external providers. In other European countries is this "education market" growing increasingly. But the content and skills educated in the trainings are often inadequate or not at the requirements and market needs of the target groups.

Therefore, in the **E(co)-Qualify I** project, qualification standards for the training in the retail of organic foods were developed. They are the substantive core of the

Quality Assurance System and they include defined qualification standards for both operational and management level of a business. Basic skills and necessary abilities and knowledge were formulated in the areas of product knowledge, business operations and marketing. These qualification standards have now found their way into many curricula in German training institutions, whether for planning of a seminar or as a base for a curriculum for retraining.

Education key to sustainable future

Today, the specialised retailers have to offer the same "shopping experience" as their supermarket competitors in order to survive. And that is on top of cleverly selected assortment, great customer service and unique market positioning. These attributes are highly individual and unique and can be the base for developing long term relationships with their satisfied customers, thus offering the organic retailers chance to flourish on the perspective organic products market.

These attributes can be achieved and offered only with highly educated, knowledgeable and committed personal. Thus the key factor in successful future of organic retailers is excellent people management, team building and education of employees.

The vocational training for managers and employees on the European organic food retail market is not standardized. Qualifications and certificates have no significance because they are not comparable on the EU level. Human resource managers therefore either have to test the qualifications of all applicants or provide training to them, which is cost and time intensive. In various EU countries exist different needs for education; also the level of education varies significantly.

Qualification standards are divided into the operational level and the level of management.

Operational level

The operational level includes all everyday activities related to the sale of goods. It contains the following qualifications:

Basic knowledge

This should include a knowledge of organic farming, fair trade, hygiene, care of goods, goods storage, and environmental protection. Other important aspects to be included are communication skills and computer expertise.

Knowledge of goods

Qualifications are necessary in the following product groups: Fruit and vegetables, bread and bakery products, cheese, dairy products and eggs, soya products, cereals and cereal products, dry fruit, muesli, seeds for sprouting and sprouts, oil, fat and nuts, spreads and spices, beverages, stimulants (sweets, coffee, tea, and cocoa), and baby food

Additional qualifications

Additional qualifications are desirable with regard to the following product groups and topics: Meat and meat products, natural products and natural cosmetic products, frozen products, semi-finished products, delicatessen, herbs and curatives, fish, essential oils, nutritional supplements, detergents and washing agents, snacks, household utensils and cereal grinders, nutritional science, nutrition-related diseases.

Basic knowledge of business administration

Qualifications are required in the area of organisation, specifically the following: labelling and declaration, goods management, business working procedures, protection of work safety and accounting.

Market related knowledge

Qualifications in the sphere of communication are necessary for marketing, particularly concerning the following topics: display of goods, layout of selling space, advisory and sales communication, claims management, nutritional science, nutrition-related diseases, the use of marketing tools, particularly with regard to retail structure, price policy, and the range of goods.

Level of management

Business management is responsible for the business as a whole. Here, knowledge in the operational area covers everything shown under 'basic knowledge'.

Basic knowledge

The ability to formulate business philosophy, knowledge of computing equipment, communications competence, and time management.

Extended knowledge of business administration

The following organisational qualifications are necessary: goods management, goods purchasing, work organization, quality management, personnel management, problem solving, controlling 1, labour law, protection of work safety, the legislative basics of retail, ecological management, project management, and the organisation of training in the business. Accounting qualifications (focused on management), should cover the following topics: accounting, investments and financing, controlling 2, and management of resources.

Marketing knowledge

The marketing qualifications, in the area of market survey, should include: customer oriented market surveys, competitor oriented market surveys and the qualifications in the sphere of marketing tools should include advertising and promotion and public relations work.

From Qualification Standards to a Quality Assurance System

Based on the **E(co)-Qualify** qualification standards focussing on technical content of the organic retail, the **E(co)-Qualify II** project develops European quality assurance system for educators. In order to develop a comprehensive Quality Assurance System, various indicators and criteria for the implementation of training measures have been included such as: transparency of offers, counselling and mentoring, qualifications of teachers, classroom setup and equipment of learning providers, learning and evaluation controls, participants surveys, certificates and validations, conditions of participation and contracts and procedures of complaint management.

The central document and working base of the **E(co)-Qualify** Quality Assurance System is the Quality Handbook (QHB) divided into three parts:

Part 1: Quality Handbook describes the necessary quality depending processes of each educational institute. The technical content, with the **E(co)-Qualify** Qualification standards as a central component of the Quality assurance system, is presented in this part of the handbook.

Part 2: Checklist for guidance through all processes during certification and/or audits. This checklist guides either the auditor/certifier or the institute's Quality Manager (QM) through the certification and audit process. During the certification process all checklists have to be counter signed. In case of disagreement the Checklist provides a standardised procedure for solution finding.

Part 3: The Appendix acts as a reference list of processes and practical examples (for instance, a sample of a Lecture

Handbook). It is not an obligatory part of the internal quality system and could be changed without QM process documentation. It is possible to add documents to this list.

Accreditation and Certification

E(co)-Qualify is designed as a "pull" system, not as a "push" system. As a market-oriented tool, it is based on voluntary participation of education providers and industry stakeholders, which need to be persuaded of its relevance and benefits.

The validation and controlling of the quality assurance system will be guaranteed by Organic Retailer Association (ORA) and various national associations. ORA will supervise the design and control of the system and promote the adaptation into national systems. The implementation at the national level is the task of the national associations and organisations, which represent the business, or the authorised bodies.

Which are the advantages of E(co)-Qualify?

Target groups and users of the **E(co)-Qualify** Quality Assurance System for education in organic products retailing are the providers of qualification and training, professional associations, businesses, entrepreneurs and employees and other stakeholders in the vocational training of this branch. Training institutions and stakeholders in professional education in the participating countries have become acquainted with the Quality Assurance System and how to implement it in their daily training and education practice.

Great opportunity for educational institutions

Benefits of the **E(co)-Qualify** QAS:

For Educational institutes:

- Standardised quality of education for growing market
- Certification with recognisable and trustworthy logo (ORA/IFOAM)
- Adaptability for specific national conditions and needs

For organic food and farming:

- Further development of organic farming through educated retailers

For the retailers:

- Better chance for market success with highly educated staff
- Improved adaptability of organic retailers to changing market conditions
- Improved ability of organic retailers to serve more sophisticated customer base

For the labour market:

- Improvement of the labour market - better chance of employment for educated people
- Enhanced (international) mobility of the work force

Potential customers for educational institutes adopting E(co)-Qualify QAS:

- Specialised organic products retailers and their staff
- Conventional retailers offering organic products and their staff
- Caterers of organic food
- Entrepreneur start-ups
- Unemployed people