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Is Covid-19 a threat to Ecocert certifications?

The lockdown imposed by most governments to reduce the quick spread of Covid-19, severely restricts the ability of certification bodies to conduct on-site audits. On-site auditing is an essential and often mandatory part of the certification process, especially for organic products: it allows our teams to verify the accuracy and the authenticity of the information collected in the field, enabling us to validate compliance with the standards.

Under these conditions, how can we ensure the continuity of the certification and thus the continuity of the supply chains?

Fortunately, in order to deal with the exceptional crisis we are experiencing, many standard holders have taken steps to temporarily ease the certification processes. Among these measures, the so-called "remote" audit allows the auditor, using technological means at their disposal (in particular video-conferencing) to carry out a series of rigorous documentary checks in order to maintain or suspend the certificate. This temporary measure compensates for the impossibility of auditing on-site, thus ensuring the continuity of certification in the current crisis context.

But, in the absence of "on-site" verification, can we consider that the certifications thus maintained are reliable?

As most accreditation bodies have specified in the special measures announced, it is up to the certification bodies to find the means of verification necessary to maintain the certificates. Ecocert, a specialist in the evaluation and promotion of good ecological and societal practices, has always considered field audits as an irreplaceable tool, inextricably linked to high quality certification. With the use of remote auditing means, the certification body agrees to adapt the terms of its evaluation and to deliver an adjusted level of guarantee, adapted to this exceptional crisis. The challenge for Certification Bodies is therefore to rely on their usual risk analysis to identify cases where the certification can be maintained based on a remote audit. As soon as the situation allows, an adjusted field audit plan will be put in place to cover the possible risks identified during the remote audit.

Is the current crisis likely to change audit practices?

Auditing practices are constantly evolving to adapt to production, processing and marketing practices. The great technological progress is providing certification bodies with powerful tools that enhance the relevance of their risk analyses and increase their level of supervision. By intelligently combining the means at their disposal, the certification bodies will deliver over time ever more reliable guarantees: not a certification frozen in time, but a "real-time" certification.

Will Covid-19 cause the on-site audits to disappear?

At Ecocert, we are convinced that on-site auditing is the key method for ensuring quality certification. Moreover, being in the field is an incomparable guarantee of credibility in the eyes of consumers and have largely contributed to the success of organic farming.

In addition to the quality of information observed, collected and verified in the field, they are also a way of maintaining a powerful human link between the certification bodies and the companies they certify. They grant a better understanding and in-depth knowledge of the production environment, the organisations and of the women and men that are part of them valuable asset, a unique link between certifier and certified.

When are Ecocert auditors back in the field?

As soon as possible! Safety conditions allowing, Ecocert will endeavour to ensure that its auditors return to meet each producer, each company we certify, anywhere in the world. We are proud to work alongside our clients several times a year and we owe them this courtesy: to acknowledge on site, their commitment to provide us with healthy products increasingly respectful of the environment!



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