

Introduction

The Greener Fields Project was initiated to intensify the dialogue between eco-labeling initiatives, evaluate programs and policies that support these efforts, and build further capacity and leadership in the sustainable agriculture labeling community.

This phase of this work grows directly out of our collaborative research project, which was summarized in the report *Greener Fields: Signposts for Successful Eco-labels*. This report concluded with the following set of recommendations, which were developed directly from surveys, interviews, roundtables and focus groups of ecological labelers, and a broad-range of extended stakeholders.

Organize a network to serve this diverse and growing community to:

- Continue the development and refinement of a clear roadmap for successful eco-labels
- Build stronger relationships with retailers
- Cooperatively develop common messages, principles and codes of conduct
- Foster cooperative relationship among all eco-labels
- Build farmer, worker and buyer incentives through the marketplace for participating in eco-labels
- Encourage public policies that reward farmers for environmental and social stewardship

The thrust of the new phase of this work is to seek ways to progressively address and resolve the challenges and opportunities summarized in that report. This forum is one in a series of forums designed to help facilitate greater common understandings between legitimate organic and ecological labeling claims and their stakeholders.

The following proceedings reflect discussions held in St. Louis on October 22–24th, 2001. We recognize and appreciate the challenges that these proceedings presents for the non-participant’s understanding, but we have deliberately refrained from synthesizing these meeting notes to ensure transparency and to provide the full-range of comments.

The next forum in this series is set for May 21–24, 2002 with the express purpose of moving forward on the suggestions identified in these proceedings.

The following draft St. Louis Accord will serve as our launch to further discuss guiding principles and common elements of successful eco labeling. The draft is currently circulating to a broad group of stakeholders for comments which will be discussed in May, 2002.

—Michael Sligh

We would like to thank the Lawson Valentine Foundation and an anonymous foundation for their generous support of this forum.

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St. Louis Accord: DRAFT

Organic and other eco-label certifiers assembled in St. Louis on October 22–24, 2001 agreed that the following labeling scenarios are emerging in the green market place:

- The traditional continuum from conventional to IPM to transitional organic to organic.
- Organic with additional social and other claims.
- Place- and scaled -based and/or socio-economic claims, which are not organic.

We share the understanding that with the “green share of the marketplace” expanding, better relationships can best foster and protect the equitable expansion and integrity of the green market place.

We further recognize the importance of establishing mutual understanding of what constitutes quality certification.

We seek

- Industry-wide eco-label and organic certification agreement on the following draft commonalities between organic and other eco-labels to better facilitate expansion of the “green share of the marketplace”.
- Agreement to develop organic and other eco-label common messaging, principles, criteria for label legitimacy and cooperative relationships to each other in the marketplace.
- Use of these commonalities to create synergistic verification mechanisms to enhance, preserve, and define organic and agricultural stewardship labeling. Consumer confidence must be maintained and consumer confusion and deception must be prevented.

Therefore:

- Organic and other eco-labels should be complimentary to each other; at the least they should be neutral in messaging about each other. Negative messaging, where deemed appropriate, should be reserved for marketing comparisons to non-”green” market segments, not toward each other.
- Cooperative mechanisms to proactively resolve external marketplace messaging problems should be developed.
- Sound eco-labels should be based on competency, transparency, and constant improvement. Standards such as those used by Consumers Union should be the common basis for eco-label legitimacy. These should include, at least, the following components:
 - Independent third-party certification, accreditation, and verification based on established principles, criteria, and measurable standards.
 - Real enforcement with equitably and appropriately defined roles for

Comments on this draft are being solicited and the document will be discussed at the next forum on May 21-24, 2002.

farmers, farmworkers, NGO, industry, and, where appropriate, government sectors.

- Truthful / transparent claims that ensure consumer confidence,
- Farmer / worker rewards that are cooperatively determined, institutionalized, and transparent.
- A participatory stakeholder process with a special recognition of the key role that farmers, farmworkers, and consumers have played and need to continue to play in the development and progressive evolution of standards.

Major deviations from these criterion should be cooperatively considered and resolved.

Additionally, such eco-labels should:

- Not include GMOs.
- Support independent family farms.
- Strive for ethnic and cultural inclusivity.
- Work together to define strategy for protecting and enhancing “local” claims.
- Where livestock labels are involved, develop mutually cooperative and transparent humane meat standards.

Further,

Such labels should also

- Actively collaborate on development of common principles, common terms, and glossaries of these terms in order to reduce consumer confusion and avoid misrepresentations in the marketplace.
- Develop protocols for claims protection and establish transparent audit trails.
- And cooperate on standards for farmer, farmworker, and retailer rights.

And finally,

A common code of conduct should be developed among retailers of these products, with cooperative strategies to prevent greenwashing and false or misleading claims.

Labels should actively explore joint opportunities such as inspection/inspectors, accreditation, certification, materials review, research and education, training, joint market strategies, and policy.

Synergy and reinforcement between policy and marketplace rewards must be coupled with timely, farmer-led, proactive, and supportive research and with continuous education and cooperation to expand and grow the “green marketplace” together.

The undersigned labels agree to work cooperatively to pursue, in good faith, the above goals.