GLOBALG.A.P. Chain of Custody: Guardian of Food Safety, Sustainability & Social Responsibility Claims

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With nearly 200,000 certified producers in more than 125 countries, GLOBALG.A.P. is the most widely accepted private sector food safety certification in the world. Its Chain of Custody Standard, applicable post-farm in the aquaculture, crops and livestock supply chains, was released in 2015. Following the announcement that GLOBALG.A.P. has launched a focus group to update the standard and plans to release a new version in the beginning of 2019, we spoke to Miodrag Mitic - Head of Traceability Solutions and Senior Expert Chain of Custody at GLOBALG.A.P.

What is Chain of Custody (CoC)?

Miodrag Mitic: CoC provides the ability to identify the supply chain actors that take legal ownership or physical control over a certified product in order to prove the traceability between a final product with the certification status claim and the certified farm of origin. What matters is that supply chain actors are able to account for the origin of products claimed as certified by means of a mass balance calculation, systematically verify the certification status of trade partners during the goods receiving process, correctly identify certified products both physically and in trade documents, ensure segregation of certified and non-certified products, and have a functioning traceability system.

What is the difference between Traceability and CoC?

Miodrag Mitic: A certified product can be perfectly traceable but will fail to meet CoC requirements if it is not segregated from non-certified products. While traceability supports multiple claims about product content or production process attributes, CoC is limited to supporting a product's certification claim and mitigating the risk of certification fraud. They are defined separately and used to meet different business objectives. Traceability provides the ability to follow a product and its characteristics through all stages of production, processing, packing, trading and distribution. CoC provides the ability to verify the traceability between the certification status claim about a final product and the certified farm of origin. Traceability is always a pre-condition for CoC certification.

Which organizations have to be CoC certified?

Miodrag Mitic: In the first place CoC is a requirement for IFA certified producers that engage in parallel ownership or production of both certified and non-certified products. Thereafter the CoC Standard applies to anyone that buys and sells certified products, for example the traders or brokers. Lastly, it applies to bulk storage warehouses, processors, packers, distributors and service providers. The new version of the CoC Standard will also apply to wholesale, retail and restaurant chain sites that sell certified products in bulk with the GGN Label claim.

Why is CoC certification important for GLOBALG.A.P.?

Miodrag Mitic: CoC certification is the only independent assurance that consumers and business buyers have that the products purchased as certified originate from certified producers. Without certification as evidence of value to consumers, no credible food safety, sustainability and social or ethical claim can exist for product attributes. Businesses that are purchasing products claimed as certified from supply chain partners that are not CoC certified run the risk of receiving non-certified products instead. Products that come from certified farms can now be labelled with the new GGN consumer label. The new version of the CoC Standard aims to ensure that these products have the highest degree of integrity in terms of traceability and certification fraud risk mitigation.

What are the benefits of CoC certification?

Miodrag Mitic: The key benefit is that it enables the most important part of food marketing, which is telling a credible story about a product. Certification is an indispensable part of any marketing effort for product content attributes that are impossible to be measured without specialized testing equipment (e.g. food safety) or for production process attributes that are difficult to detect by buyers (e.g. sustainability). The only way to verify the existence of these attributes is through a CoC record that establishes their creation at the farm and preservation throughout the supply chain. With CoC certification the traders, processors, packers and distributors can credibly claim that they are selling certified products and become visible to business buyers in the GLOBALG.A.P. Database.

What role does the GLOBALG.A.P. Database have in CoC certification?

Miodrag Mitic: It is a critical tool that indexes all certified organizations worldwide including all their relevant product and certification information. The database functions by assigning globally unique identification numbers. The GLOBALG.A.P. Number (GGN) is assigned to each registered primary producer organization and the GLOBALG.A.P. Chain of Custody Number (CoC) to each registered supply chain organization. Businesses access the GLOBALG.A.P. Database to verify the certification status of a product and date until which the certificate is valid. They can also verify the validity of CoC certificates claimed by their supply chain partners.

What is the role of CoC in combating food fraud?

Miodrag Mitic: The larger the demand is for certified products, the greater is the risk of fraud by substitution or dilution of certified products with non-certified products. CoC certification serves the purpose of detecting and deterring eventual fraud in certified product supply chains. The new version of the CoC Standard is designed to mitigate the risk of accidental or deliberate misidentification of non-certified products as certified. By systematically verifying the certification status claim at each transaction point in the supply chain, buyers can be assured that the products they purchase as certified originate from certified farms.

What happens when the verification of a certification claim fails to confirm the authenticity or validity of the certificate?

Miodrag Mitic: The GLOBALG.A.P. Integrity Team investigates every complaint received about a product or supplier with a certification claim that fails the authentication or validity verification in the GLOBALG.A.P. Database, or when product testing or other credible information challenges the product's conformance with the certification claim.

How does the development process of the new version of the CoC Standard look like?

Miodrag Mitic: We are drafting it with a team composed of subject matter experts representing retail, wholesale, agriculture, seafood, flowers and plants businesses. GLOBALG.A.P. voluntary members as well as non-members may apply for participation in the Chain of Custody Focus Group. The draft will undergo two rounds of public reviews and field trials before it is submitted to the GLOBALG.A.P. Board for adoption. The new version is expected to improve the current standard based on the implementation feedback received over the last few years.

More information on GLOBALG.A.P. Chain of Custody here.

About GLOBALG.A.P.

GLOBALG.A.P. is a leading global certification program whose mission is to bring farmers and retailers together to produce and market safe food in order to protect scarce resources and build a sustainable future. The global number of fruit and vegetable growers under GLOBALG.A.P. certification increased by 8% to 182,157 growers and GRASP assessments more than doubled in 2017, now reaching more than 60% of all GLOBALG.A.P. certified fruit and vegetable producers.

www.globalgap.org

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