

Organic standards go global

June 24 2014, by Stephanie Callahan

In the past, international trade of organic products between the U.S. and other countries has been difficult because of the wide variations in international organic standards and certification requirements. However, according to a June 22nd panel discussion at the 2014 Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) Annual Meeting & Food Expo in New Orleans, tremendous strides have been made in the development of organic trade agreements with other countries.

Currently, the U.S. has "equivalency agreements" with Canada, the European Union, and Japan. The agreement establishes that the [countries](#) involved agree that the objective of each other's organic regulations and control systems are equal. This means that products can be sold as "organic" in either market, without further certification or documentation; products may carry the organic seal of both countries; and accredited certifiers are mutually recognized. Such agreements are important in light of President Obama's National Export Initiative, which projects a doubling of U.S. agriculture exports by 2015. Negotiations can sometimes take a decade or more, but according to Laura Batcha, Executive Director & CEO of the Organic Trade Association, three international organic trade arrangements have been developed in the last five years alone.

In Israel, India and New Zealand, the U.S. is formally recognized as a "competent authority" to accredit certification bodies to inspect and certify organic food products. According to Bob Anderson, Senior Trade Advisor Sustainable Strategies, Organic Trade Association, "These agreements have eliminated the majority of the existing trade issues and

have opened up new opportunities."

The USDA Foreign Agriculture Service, National Organic Program, and the Organic Trade Association (OTA) are in the process of negotiating trade agreements and resolving trade issues with several other countries, including Korea, Switzerland, India, China, and Latin America. The OTA offers assistance to food companies seeking help in establishing international trade in the organic market with these countries.

www.GlobalOrganicTrade.com

According to Jake Lewin, President of California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) Certification Services, "China, Mexico, Korea, and Brazil are "non-equivalent" countries that currently require re-certification all the way back to the farm."

"Things are improving," he says, "but we must continue to work with governments and certifiers to find pathways that meet the needs of U.S. businesses."

Provided by Institute of Food Technologists

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