

CERTIFICATION OF ORGANIC PALM OIL

DAABON, COLOMBIA

Following recent articles in the press concerning palm oil and the Colombian firm Daabon, alleging that it produces organic palm oil which contributes to deforestation and also forces farmers from their land, Ecocert wishes to clarify its role as certifier, the nature of organic palm oil, and pass on information gathered during the audit it carried out in Colombia.

Conventional palm oil farming has come under harsh criticism for its detrimental effect on biodiversity and the part it plays in global deforestation. However, regulated, controlled organic palm oil farming cannot be compared with the way palm oil is traditionally grown. It is also worth pointing out that organic palm oil accounts for only 0.2% of total worldwide production of palm oil.

CERTIFICATION OF ORGANIC PALM OIL BY ECOCERT

Ecocert is an accredited certification body approved by public authorities. As such, it is subject to the requirements laid down by the European Commission in the European Council Regulation on organic farming and the labelling of organic products (EC) No 834/2007.

In and of itself, deforestation is not a criterion for refusal of Organic certification under the terms of the EU regulation. However, **article 5 of Council Regulation CE 834/2007 does state the following principle:** “taking account of the local or regional ecological balance when taking production decisions”.

Pursuant to the EU Regulation, Ecocert has set itself the guiding principle of not certifying production liable either to be detrimental to human dignity or to be a direct cause of deforestation.

During our regular audits on site, we have been able to observe that as regards our operators, **no deforestation had taken place** in order to plant palm trees. We are only involved with organic palm oil to a minimal extent: to date, only five organic palm oil producers have been certified by Ecocert.

However, since Ecocert is aware of the ethical and environmental issues relating to palm oil in general, it has asked the European Commission to clarify its position regarding the production of organic palm oil. In the current state of affairs, it is important to refer to the competent European bodies and consult the appropriate stakeholders in order for EU regulations to be clarified and for solutions applicable to all to be proposed.

At the same time, Ecocert wishes to emphasise that it encourages operators to implement **approaches which complement organic farming by applying its ‘Ecocert Fair Trade’ standards** which link organic farming and fair trade, as well as incorporating strict requirements in terms of respect for biodiversity and human dignity.

CERTIFICATION OF DAABON ORGANIC PALM OIL BY ECOCERT

Ecocert certifies organic palm oil produced by Daabon in Colombia in accordance with international reference guidelines on organic farming. Since implementation of this certification in 1995, the practices of Daabon have been examined in depth; scores of analyses and hundreds of hours of auditing have been carried out on its farms and facilities, involving its staff, suppliers and associates.

While some minor discrepancies may have sometimes been noted, these have never been of a nature liable to call the certification into question.

- **The 'Las Pavas' farm - outside the scope of Ecocert certification**

Daabon has recently been accused of bad environmental and social management with regard to its purchase of the 'Las Pavas' farm, dedicated to **traditional palm oil farming**. **Although this farm is outside the scope of Ecocert certification**, these allegations were serious enough to call the certification of areas devoted to organic farming into question. Consequently, at its own expense, Ecocert commissioned a detailed audit of the farms it has certified, extended to include 'Las Pavas', although this is not certified by Ecocert.

- **Ecocert's mission, conducted from April 4-11, 2010**

Every measure was taken to ensure the independence and impartiality of this mission. Inspections were carried out by two experienced international auditors who are perfectly familiar with the country, including an auditor from outside Ecocert who is an expert in the field of organic farming. It should be emphasised that unlike many of the accusers, Ecocert travelled to the site to carry out in-depth investigations. All stakeholders were interviewed, including farmers and their families.

During the course of the inspection, no information received or observation made by the auditors gave them any grounds for believing that the accusations were in any way justified.

Firstly, in the light of information gathered, the legality of the purchase of the 'Las Pavas' farm by Daabon is beyond question. Secondly, no confirmation of the alleged violence perpetrated by Daabon against farmers could be found. Thirdly, our auditors did not observe any deforestation of primary forest in order to plant palm trees, but did observe fresh plantation on farmland, carried out following an environmental impact study performed by Daabon.

- **Ecocert maintains its certification of Daabon organic palm oil**

Despite a definite confrontational atmosphere, the conclusions of Ecocert's mission offer no grounds for calling into question existing certifications. **Consequently, Ecocert is maintaining its certification of organic palm oil produced by Daabon.**