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## Professional farmer organization — Guidelines

*Organisation professionnelle agricole — Lignes directrices*

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# Contents

Page

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>1 Scope</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Normative references</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>3 Terms and definitions</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>4 Key performance areas and characteristics of a professional farmer organization</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>5 Organization purpose and governance practices</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>6 Business management</b> .....	<b>4</b>
6.1 General.....	4
6.2 Member engagement and planning.....	5
<b>7 Human resources management</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>8 Financial management</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>9 Community and stakeholder engagement</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>10 Member services and business activities</b> .....	<b>7</b>
10.1 Service development.....	7
10.2 Active membership.....	7
10.3 Input supply.....	7
10.4 Production plan.....	7
10.5 Post-harvest handling, processing and storage.....	7
10.6 Sales and marketing.....	8
10.7 Financial services.....	8
<b>Annex A (informative) Keeping of records</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Annex B (informative) Production and quality management plan</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Annex C (informative) Workshop contributors</b> .....	<b>12</b>

## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see [www.iso.org/directives](http://www.iso.org/directives)).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see [www.iso.org/patents](http://www.iso.org/patents)).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see [www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html).

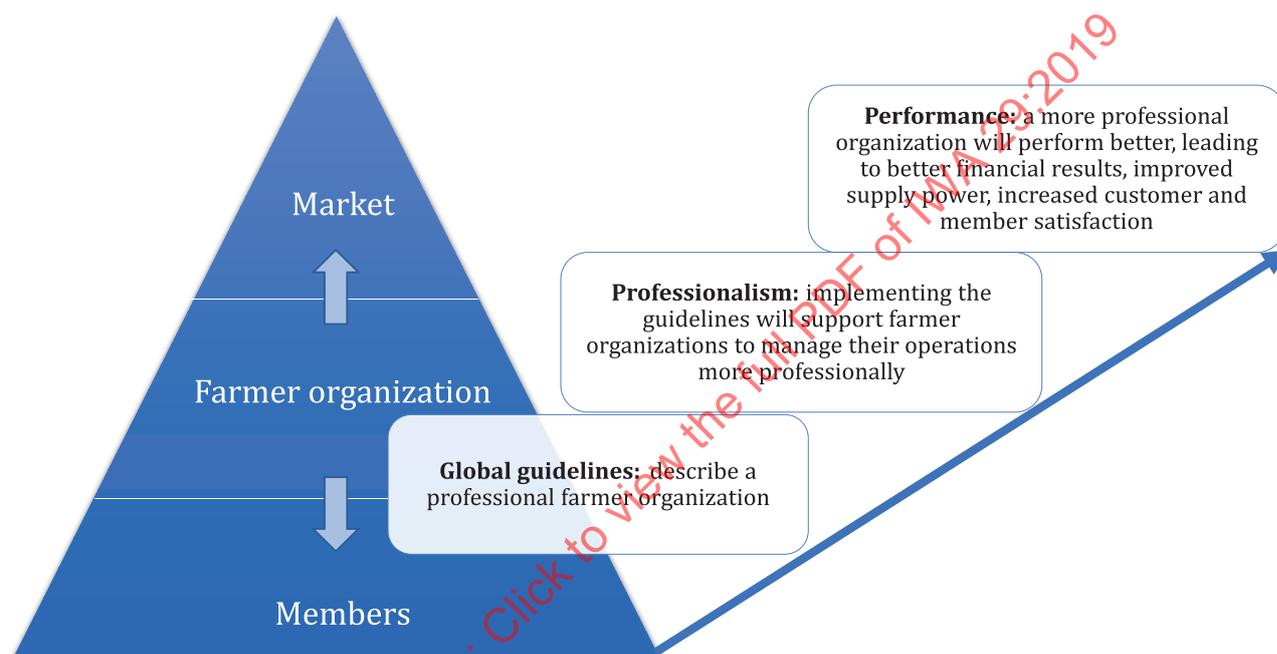
International Workshop Agreement IWA 29 was approved at a workshop hosted by the Netherlands Standardization Institute (NEN), in association with the Agribusiness Market Ecosystem Alliance (AMEA), held in Delft, Netherlands, in November 2018.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at [www.iso.org/members.html](http://www.iso.org/members.html).

## Introduction

The purpose of this document is to establish common guidelines for professional farmer organizations, in order to improve business performance. This document provides guidelines on improving the capabilities of professional farmer organizations in different areas and thereby their level of professionalism in general. More professional farmer organizations are more likely to have better business opportunities and to perform better for their members and staff, within markets and to have greater sustainability.

[Figure 1](#) illustrates how establishing common global guidelines can lead to improved business performance.



**Figure 1 — From common global guidelines to improved business performance**

This document is intended to:

- provide guidelines to improve the professionalism of farmer organizations, leading to improved performance and access to finance and markets;
- support members and staff of professional farmer organizations to supervise and hold their organization and leadership accountable;
- increase the understanding and confidence of buyers, suppliers, investors and others doing business with professional farmer organizations;
- give direction to the actions of providers of training, assessment, advisory and other organizational and business development services;
- align the vision and interventions of stakeholders in their effort to professionalize farmer organizations;
- encourage active engagement with broader stakeholders.

This document supports the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focussing on the following specific goals:

- 1. No Poverty;

## IWA 29:2019(E)

- 2. Zero Hunger;
- 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth;
- 12. Responsible Consumption and Production;
- 17. Partnerships for the Goals.

This document is not intended to replace or compete with existing or future certification standards, address every capacity or aspect of professionalism that can be of importance to a specific customer or market, or imply the need for uniformity in organizational type or structure.

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# Professional farmer organization — Guidelines

## 1 Scope

This document provides guidelines for the characteristics of a professional farmer organization. It is intended to be relevant for large and small professional farmer organizations, without regard to the specific crop or product. The implementation and interpretation of this document can be adapted for very small or nascent organizations, for specific or differentiated products, or for markets with special requirements.

## 2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

## 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

### 3.1

#### **farmer organization**

formal voluntary entity formed by farmers for business and/or other purposes, which can take any legal form and which provides services/benefits for its members, including but not limited to, production, processing and marketing of crops, livestock and animal products, forest products, fish and aquaculture products

Note 1 to entry: Farmers include landless farmworkers.

### 3.2

#### **general assembly meeting**

meeting of a representation of the members or all the members of an organization, as indicated in its *bylaws* (3.12)

### 3.3

#### **board**

group of people mandated to assume legal responsibility to manage and/or oversee the organization

### 3.4

#### **supervisory committee**

committee normally composed of three members elected by the *general assembly meeting* (3.2) to act as an internal control mechanism on the *board* (3.3) of directors and management, which can assume an advisory role towards the board and which protects the interest of the members

Note 1 to entry: In some countries, the supervisory committee is more financially oriented.

Note 2 to entry: A supervisory committee is sometimes referred to as a supervisory council, a control committee, an audit committee or a supervisory board.

**3.5**

**quorum**

minimum number or percentage of people required to be present in the meeting for votes or decisions to be taken

**3.6**

**special meeting**

meeting that happens at any given moment to deal with urgencies and that is not planned

Note 1 to entry: A special meeting is sometimes referred to as an extraordinary meeting.

**3.7**

**member business**

business transactions between a farmer and his/her *farmer organization* (3.1)

**3.8**

**member business ratio**

ratio that measures *member business* (3.7) done with the organization

**3.9**

**member equity accounts**

means to administer capital and resources invested by the members of a professional *farmer organization* (3.1)

**3.10**

**general manager**

person who acts in an official capacity to manage the day-to-day business of the organization, financial management and to carry out the organization's policies

Note 1 to entry: The manager reports to the *board* (3.3).

**3.11**

**officer**

person appointed, elected or nominated by the *board* (3.3) of directors or membership of the professional *farmer organization* (3.1) [depending on the organization's *bylaws* (3.12)], who acts in an official capacity to oversee and/or manage the day-to-day business of the organization and to carry out the organization's policies

EXAMPLE President; director; secretary; treasurer.

**3.12**

**bylaws**

rules documenting how the organization is governed and how the collective action of members is regulated

Note 1 to entry: Bylaws are sometimes referred to as a constitution or a membership agreement.

## **4 Key performance areas and characteristics of a professional farmer organization**

Professional farmer organizations should demonstrate the characteristics described in this document, which are organized by key performance areas. These characteristics are intended to be specific to the level of performance expected, but expansive enough to apply to many forms of professional farmer organizations in varying value chains and operating environments.

## **5 Organization purpose and governance practices**

A mission or purpose statement of the professional farmer organization should be documented. This is used to provide guidelines for organizational planning, priorities and decision-making.

The professional farmer organization should be a formal, legal or registered entity. The organization should have written bylaws/statutes/rules and a written policy to change/amend these bylaws/statutes/rules.

All members of a professional farmer organization should acknowledge, agree to and respect these bylaws and amendments.

Information on the following should be included in the bylaws:

- a) purpose/mission of organization;
- b) location/headquarters;
- c) qualifications of members;
- d) capital structure and process for allocation of reserves;
- e) responsibilities of members;
- f) rights of members;
- g) dismissal and sanctions of members and officers;
- h) election of directors and officers (if elections are held);
- i) member meetings (when, notice, special meetings, required activities at meetings);
- j) responsibilities of directors and officers;
- k) conflict resolution;
- l) amendment of constitution/bylaws;
- m) formation and composition of committees.

The board members and officers of the professional farmer organization should oversee the fulfilment of the commitment to comply with regulatory and legal requirements, including maintenance of required documents, licenses and bylaws.

Becoming a member of the professional farmer organization should be voluntary (not compulsory).

The member eligibility criteria, requirements, rights, shareholding mechanisms and process for termination should be documented, with proof of compliance. These should be reviewed periodically and updated as needed (see [Annex A](#)).

The duties of members, board members, committees (or nationally-relevant committees or councils), officers and any defined positions should be documented with evidence of compliance (see [Annex A](#)).

A regular election process for leadership (e.g. board members and supervisory committee members) should be in place. The elections should be competitive, be based on a description of eligibility and desired qualifications and aim for full representation of the farmer organization's membership. Elections should include measures to promote underrepresented groups (e.g. women and youth) in leadership positions. The election process can include the following:

- nomination and selection process;
- voting process;
- term limits and termination process;
- staggered terms to facilitate continuity.

Requirement of meetings of board and committee(s) should be documented and followed. The requirements should include the following:

- notice;
- quorum;
- special meetings;
- election of officers;
- officer terms;
- director terms;
- removal of officers or directors;
- committees;
- minutes.

The general assembly meeting protocols should be documented and followed. The election of members of the board and supervisory committee should be held regularly and at least every two to three years, with notice to members. The general assembly meeting requirements should include the following:

- notice;
- quorum;
- required topics.

The farmer organization should have a mechanism in place to ensure ethical behaviour and to prevent and/or address conflicts of interest, corruption, discrimination, etc. among directors, leadership, management, employees and members. This mechanism can be a standalone code of conduct or part of policy manuals, bylaws, etc.

## **6 Business management**

### **6.1 General**

The management of the organization prepares a business plan with a medium term (three to five years) and a detailed annual plan, key performance indicators (KPIs) (e.g. economic, social and environmental KPIs) and challenges, risks and opportunities in consultation with its members, in accordance with operating policies. Preparation of business plans should be clear and easy for members to understand. Actual performance should be compared to the plan, monitored regularly by management and board and communicated to members.

Processes for quality management and continuous improvement should be in place, e.g. post-season reviews that inform annual planning. Planning includes assessment and management of social/ecological/cultural/environmental risks, as well as financial management.

The management of the professional farmer organization should ensure that the organization is adequately staffed to achieve its business obligations, i.e. that there is an appropriate ratio between business operations and staff costs that ensures that critical management, financial and governance functions are performed. This should include a competent general manager, with relevant experience who is responsible for day-to-day operations. Depending on the size of the farmer organization, the hiring of a competent financial manager or accountant can be required. Additional management team and/or key staff and qualifications should reflect the size and plans of the professional farmer organization.

The professional farmer organization should have a system of internal controls and adhere to written policies and procedures, as well as maintain a list of required records and forms (see [Annex A](#)) for business operations, accounting, recordkeeping, financial management, human resource management and risk management (internal and external risks). Adherence to policies and procedures, as well as record maintenance, should be monitored. Policies and procedures should be developed over time on a prioritized basis.

The professional farmer organization should fulfil its business obligations and commitments in a timely fashion (e.g. it meets contractual commitments, loan agreements, payroll and taxes). The professional farmer organization should only enter into business obligations and commitments that it knows it will be able to honour.

## 6.2 Member engagement and planning

The professional farmer organization should develop and implement an annual membership plan that links to the organization's production and/or business plans and that supports operating at scale with a goal for the member business ratio. The membership plan should include communications, engagement, training, services, recruiting and retention. The plan should include continuous training for its members, so that they can be prepared to assume leadership positions. It can also include measures to ensure equitable engagement of all membership.

Membership fees or another form of equity participation can be introduced to ensure commitment and ownership of the farmer organization.

A professional farmer organization should have a structure and mechanisms to involve and/or communicate with its members in operational planning and to obtain their approval. In larger organizations, this can mean that committee leaders represent members at operational planning meetings.

The professional farmer organization should be transparent in operational planning.

Professional farmer organizations should ensure that members have adequate knowledge of good agricultural practices for relevant crops/products and post-harvest handling and farm business management.

## 7 Human resources management

Leadership, management and staff should have job descriptions, annual plans, performance evaluations and the opportunity for professional development. Annual plans, processes and procedures for recruitment, performance evaluations and professional development should be linked to the professional farmer organization's annual plan and be integrated with a commitment to transparency and feedback.

The professional farmer organization should have policies, procedures and accountability mechanisms that clearly communicate in a local language the roles, responsibilities and authorities vested in the professional farmer organization, including benefits.

Professional farmer organizations should be able to attract and retain competent, professional and business-oriented staff.

## 8 Financial management

The professional farmer organization should document and follow financial management policies that ensure accountability, proper use of resources and support good financial performance.

The professional farmer organization should produce periodic (quarterly, but monthly preferred) financial statements, including operating statement, balance sheet and statement of cash flows. Financial statements can be prepared in-house or by hired professionals.

The professional farmer organization should have a bank account or similar traceable account in the professional farmer organization's name. Signatories for different transactions and procedures to use and handle the traceable account should be well identified in the bylaws and/or financial manual/procedures.

The professional farmer organization should have an annual external audit or financial review that is overseen by a board or supervisory committee and shared with the members. External audits should be carried out by companies or professionals duly accredited and certified by the national authorities.

The professional farmer organization should conduct long-term financial planning of three to five years, which includes use of assets, asset replacement plan, capitalization requirements/strategy, reserves, distribution of dividends and scenario planning.

Member equity accounts should be maintained and equity should be proportional to the use of professional farmer organization services and/or shareholding.

Staff should be able to perform cost analysis and breakeven analysis for the different products and services sold by the organization.

Staff should actively manage risk by proper insurance coverage, when available, and with a risk management plan.

The professional farmer organization should have a capital plan and ensure adequate capitalization to support business operations and planned growth. The decision on whether or not to acquire external capital should be taken by the leaders of the professional farmer organization, based on the business model, as well as on respective financial projections, economic viability and management capacity. It should be supported by the membership.

The professional farmer organization's bookkeeping and data systems should produce relevant and accurate financial information to monitor operations and track business performance.

The professional farmer organization should use this financial information and set key performance indicators to adequately, analyse, manage and monitor the business operations.

The professional farmer organization should be able to demonstrate good financial performance (e.g. as indicated by gross profit, positive cash flow, return on assets, member business ratio) and should have a financial capital balance to be able to attract external finance.

The professional farmer organization should have the capacity to adequately handle tax aspects and/or other regulatory requirements.

## 9 Community and stakeholder engagement

The farmer organization should actively engage with its surrounding community. It should aim to establish itself as a reliable partner for broader stakeholders through its activities and in line with its objectives.

**NOTE** The broader stakeholders include, but are not limited to, the local community, government, business partners, unions, associations, NGOs, universities and research institutes.

The professional farmer organization should engage with similar organizations through associations or unions to share best practices, to share representation within a sector, or to pursue other common needs.

The professional farmer organization should operate and make decisions independently, not being dictated by stakeholders from outside and based on its governance processes outlined in its bylaws.

## 10 Member services and business activities

### 10.1 Service development

The professional farmer organization should actively seek to add value for members based on participative needs assessment and customers. This can include added business services and/or opportunities, negotiation of more beneficial contract terms, as well as member support services (e.g. input supply, record keeping, financial services, post-harvest handling, storage, quality management, capacity building) and income generating activities, literacy programs, training, child care or youth engagement.

The professional farmer organization should carefully evaluate opportunities before investing, carry out risk management and obtain member approval. Overall, the service offer from the farmer organization should be financially sustainable.

If working with certification schemes, the farmer organization should be able to manage relevant requirements, including training, recordkeeping, product traceability and monitoring for compliance with standards.

The farmer organization should manage the distribution of in-kind premiums transparently and be able to document the monetary value of the goods concerned or profit-sharing payments.

NOTE 1 Risk management can include, but is not limited to, market risk management (see [10.6](#)).

NOTE 2 Not all professional farmer organizations offer the same member services. This clause presents some of the services/activities that are offered most commonly.

### 10.2 Active membership

The professional farmer organization should enable and/or train membership to be active, informed owners. Member engagement can be demonstrated through metrics, such as the percentage of member produce channelled via the farmer organization, the degree to which members invest (e.g. time, money) in the professional farmer organization and participation in meetings and other farmer organization activities.

The professional farmer organization should consider its members as internal clients. Mechanisms to terminate inactive memberships should be in place (see [Clause 5](#)).

### 10.3 Input supply

The professional farmer organization should ensure safe storage and handling. The professional farmer organization should support members to use inputs properly and handle them safely. The professional farmer organization should maintain records of products sold and it should be able to collect from members if products are provided on credit. The professional farmer organization should ensure quality input supply, avoiding counterfeit products, etc.

### 10.4 Production plan

The professional farmer organization should prepare a production and quality management plan, which can include a seasonal or crop-cycle plan, as well as a long-term plan. See [Annex B](#) for examples of what a production and quality management plan can include.

### 10.5 Post-harvest handling, processing and storage

The professional farmer organization should take all the required steps to ensure the safe handling and secure storage of products and it should apply measures to enhance the quality of the product (e.g. grading, segregation, sampling).

The professional farmer organization should meet product quality and all relevant requirements for processed products. The professional farmer organization should meet hygienic and safety standards and it should maintain records (including traceability).

The management of the professional farmer organization should follow proper grading and quality management practices to meet market demand and address market needs. The professional farmer organization should understand and respond to buyers' requirements.

The professional farmer organization should have adequate logistics and storage facilities catering for the logistical and storage needs of the products. The professional farmer organization should maintain and use the storage efficiently, following quality standards.

### **10.6 Sales and marketing**

The professional farmer organization should create and implement a sales and marketing plan, which can include market analysis, promotion and branding, price-setting terms and conditions and/or sales channels.

The professional farmer organization should develop communication and negotiation skills, maintain market awareness and mitigate market risks. The professional farmer organization should consistently fulfil its commitment to meet its contract requirements and maintain good relationships with buyers.

### **10.7 Financial services**

The professional farmer organization can facilitate access to finance both for the organization and its members. It can engage with financial institutions and/or other value chain actors to obtain investment or working capital.

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## Annex A (informative)

### Keeping of records

In order to be able to demonstrate performance in accordance with the guidelines, the professional farmer organization should keep the following records:

- evidence of registration/incorporation;
- business license(s);
- tax number;
- articles of association or constitution;
- written bylaws;
- member registry, including name, contact information, year joined, land in cultivation and production/marketing history;
- member training plan, if applicable;
- employee records including job descriptions, performance evaluations and training plans;
- asset registry, including name of asset, when acquired, life of the asset and salvage value;
- member equity register;
- internal capitalization strategy;
- strategic, annual and/or operational plans;
- business plan with financial and cash flow pro formas;
- tax records;
- audits and finance statements from prior years;
- contracts and loan agreements;
- bank statements;
- governance policies;
- operations and management policies;
- human resource manual;
- insurance documents;
- meeting minutes and reports;
- accounts receivables with aging;
- accounts payable with aging;
- stock and inventory records;
- record of member loans/credit;

- evidence of conformity assessment, if applicable.

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## Annex B (informative)

### Production and quality management plan

The production and quality management plan can include the following:

- expected hectares or livestock or fish population;
- required inputs;
- expected yields or production;
- volumes sold to or through the farmer organization;
- sources of technical advice.

The long-term plan can consider aspects such as the following:

- new crops/breeds/products, crop rotation, breed/herd improvement and diversification of crops/products;
- agroveter services, new breeds;
- staying abreast of new technologies and best practices;
- innovation capacities;
- market projections;
- risk management, including climate change mitigation and adaptation.

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## Annex C (informative)

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