



Frequently Asked Questions

ISO/IWA 29: Professional farmer organizations -- Guidelines

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Questions and Answers

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1. What is an International Workshop Agreement (IWA)?

An International Workshop Agreement (IWA) is a type of ISO standard that goes through a fast-track development process (one year) and can be seen as a preliminary ISO standard.

The IWA is a formal process developed outside the normal ISO committee system to enable market players to negotiate in an “open workshop” environment. Market players and other stakeholders directly participate in developing an IWA and do not have to go through a national ISO delegation. It involves the main players from the target sector (public or private) and allows the sector to develop clear rules on an issue.

Find more information about the IWA process [here](#).

2. What is ISO?

ISO is the [International Organization for Standardization](#), based in Geneva, Switzerland. ISO is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of [165 members](#). Through its members, it brings together experts to share knowledge and develop voluntary, consensus-based, market-relevant International Standards that support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges.

An ISO standard is an international agreement between stakeholders, based on consensus. In order to achieve this, it is developed through a transparent process with all parties concerned. Because of this process, ISO standards are often the leading practice within a field.

3. What is AMEA?

The Agribusiness Market Ecosystem Alliance (AMEA) is a global network of organizations dedicated to accelerating the development of professional farmer organizations (FOs).

In 2017, AMEA initiated the development of the ISO/IWA global guidelines for professional farmer organizations. It is the result of AMEA’s commitment to develop a common language and shared understanding of the required capacities of professional farmer organizations, which provides all stakeholders in the agricultural sector with guidelines on how to increase the effectiveness of support to farmer organizations to improve their professional capacity.

For more information about AMEA, visit the [website](#).

4. What is the mission, vision, and approach of AMEA?

AMEA’s mission is to transform the systems that support farmers organizations and agri-SMEs to create value for farmers and themselves.

AMEA’s vision is where farmers receive a living income for fair working conditions that inspires the next generation to invest in sustainable farming as a business.

AMEA’s approach is to provide a platform that enables stakeholders to learn, innovate and scale up the most effective ecosystem approaches for supporting farmers.

5. What are the purpose and goal of the global guidelines for professional farmer organizations?

The purpose in initiating the IWA process was to establish common guidelines for professional farmer organizations, in order to improve business performance. The guideline outlines a commonly understood and accepted international language for professional farmer business organizations that 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.

The ultimate goal was to reach a global consensus on the capabilities of a professional farmer organization. The goal of implementing the guidelines in a farmer organization should be a combination of improved performance, financial results, and customer and member confidence and satisfaction.

The purpose of the guideline is **not** to:

- Certify the performance of farmer organizations
- 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
- Imply the need for uniformity in organizational type or structure

The IWA is not intended for certification of farmer organizations (see question 10) and the guidelines are aimed primarily for farmer organizations in emerging markets and developing economies.

6. What is a farmer organization?

For the purposes of these global guidelines, a farmer organization is understood as a 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. Farmers include landless farmworkers.

7. How were farmers represented in the IWA process?

Over the year-long process, AMEA reached out to farmer organizations' representatives around the globe and invited them to take a leading role in the development of the global guidelines in various forms. AMEA members organized eight regional workshops for consulting local stakeholders, including farmer umbrella organizations in Addis Ababa, Abidjan, Bangkok, Kampala, Lima, Tegucigalpa, and Quito.

8. How do farmers benefit?

The global guidelines will make the capacity building support systems for farmers more efficient and aligned. Therefore, farmers will have more clarity on what professional core capacities are needed to close deals with buyers, and financial and other service providers.

9. Why did AMEA initiate the development of one global guideline for professional farmer organizations?

A global guideline for professional farmer organizations provide a common language for farmer organizations, market actors, capacity builders, donors, commodity certification schemes and regulators around required capacities of professional farmer organizations. This common language will guide interactions between farmer organizations and other stakeholders. It will lead to more

effective and sustainable development of professional farmer organizations who are able to find access to markets and maintain market relations.

A common understanding around professional farmer organizations has benefits for the sector and for the farmer organizations themselves. The guidelines document answers farmer organizations' needs for access to market opportunities and for better alignment between parties they work with. Higher levels of efficiency, sustainable income levels for farmers, and improved food security are the intended results.

10. Can I get certified for this?

No. It is not possible to use the ISO/IWA 29 for certification.

The IWA 29 is used to benchmark AMEA's activities. AMEA and other stakeholders can use the IWA for reference and for a common understanding of what it means to be a professional farmer organization.

11. Why did AMEA choose the IWA process?

AMEA chose the IWA process because it is credible, comprehensive, and yet only takes one year. The process is credible because it is run by ISO, is independently chaired, and is globally accepted. ISO standards are accepted by governments and international institutions and anyone could participate in the process.

The IWA process was facilitated by [NEN](#), the Netherlands Standardization Institute – the Dutch ISO member body.

12. How was the credibility and legitimacy of the process guaranteed?

The AMEA ISO/IWA process covered the credibility and legitimacy question in two main ways.

First, the IWA process was global. This means that once the proposal was ready to circulate, a notification was circulated to all ISO members. ISO member bodies could then circulate the proposal as widely as possible in order to publicize it to potentially interested parties. A three-month (90 days) advance notice was required before holding the official IWA workshop in Delft, the Netherlands (November 2018). This gave national stakeholders plenty of time to react to the call for participation. Eventually, 221 registrants from 51 countries participated by providing feedback and inputs to the proposal. The official two-day IWA workshop then took place and a few rounds of feedback happened until the Independent IWA Chair believed that the best possible consensus had been obtained.

A second way to ensure credibility and legitimacy was through the AMEA-organized workshops on the IWA process. Those were not official ISO/IWA workshops but were meant to engage as many regional stakeholders as possible to increase the legitimacy of the process and the relevance of feedback received.

Eight regional workshops were organized by AMEA members, attracting over 250 participants in Addis Ababa, Abidjan, Bangkok, Kampala, Lima, London, Tegucigalpa and Washington D.C.

13. Who could participate as a stakeholder to the process?

Any organization or company or individual was allowed to attend, as long as they became a stakeholder by registering with NEN.

Organizations, companies, and individuals experienced in capacity building and in the development of professional farmer organizations were especially encouraged to participate.

14. Did stakeholders have to pay to participate in the process?

No. There was no fee to participate in the process.

However, to join the IWA meeting in the Netherlands, or other public workshops, stakeholders had to cover their own travel and accommodation costs.

15. Do I have to pay to access the final ISO/IWA document?

Common ISO practice is for each national standardization institute member of ISO to decide upon the price they will put on access to the ISO standard. This means that access to the guidelines resulting from the IWA process comes at a monetary cost at the discretion of each ISO member, varying across countries.

You can check the price of the document at the [ISO website](#), or at the website of the standardization bureau in your country.

16. How does my organization benefit from the ISO/IWA guidelines?

If your organization is a farmer organization:

Regardless of the agricultural products you produce and the local context your organization is part of, using the global guidelines will offer you a better grasp of what market actors are looking for when they search professional farmer organizations to partner with. You can use the document as reference for your own capacity building and business strategy.

If your organization is a capacity builder:

You will have a clear reference to what market actors are looking for when they search for farmer organizations as reliable partners. By using the global guidelines as a guidance, your organization can better couple your capacity building efforts to the specific needs of the farmer organizations you work with, so that they can access markets more easily.

If your organization is a buyer or input supplier:

The global guidelines will create a common understanding between your organization – as a buyer or an input supplier – and capacity builders working with professional farmer organizations. Even with different (market) interests, there will be a common aim: to achieve the development of professional farmer organizations to become reliable partners and meet contract requirements.

For the relationship with farmer organizations, the global guidelines will be a valuable reference to communicate what is expected of each other, as professional businesses. Additionally, you will find it easier to connect farmer organizations you work with to financial institutions prepared to lend the capital your suppliers need to further invest in their businesses.

If your organization is a microfinance/financial institution:

By creating the references for farmer organizations to be professional according to what the market players expect them to be, the global guidelines will also provide your organization with a less risky ecosystem. This will help farmer organizations better understand and build the capacities that will make them reliable, profitable business partners – better preparing them for your due diligence processes. This means that (micro)financial institutions, like yours, will notice that more farmer organizations have become reliable customers.

17. How does this relate to available commodity certification schemes such as Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance certification?

While the global guideline is not meant for certification, it will be an overarching definition creating a common language on professional farmer organizations. Many of the available commodity certification schemes include criteria on the core business management capacities, which made them

valuable participants in the process. Commodity certification schemes were thus encouraged to participate in the development process, and some did. Even with the publication of the global guidelines, commodity certification schemes will still have their own reasons to maintain additional criteria on top of the global guidelines.