

QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM – SYSTEM AND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

A quality management system (QMS) is the organizational structure, procedures, processes, and resources used by an Option 2 producer group to implement quality management. It covers a central, internal control system, central facilities where product handling (packing, storage, labeling, etc.) for the producer group members takes place, and the facilities of each producer group member (production sites, product handling units, etc.). Producer group members delegate the management of the QMS to the producer organization (producer group) which implements the processes necessary for each producer group member to meet the certification requirements of the respective standard or add-on.

It is the task of the QMS manager to standardize the processes, as well as the specifications for and quality of the products among all the companies/members of the Option 2 producer group as if it were a single company with many workers. Standardization is a strategy that helps to optimize the processes and make them sustainable. The producer group members do not have to prepare for a certification body (CB) audit alone. Furthermore, it is the QMS manager's task to implement these processes at farm level to ensure compliance with the requirements of the respective standard or add-on and ensure that internal QMS and farm audits are conducted.

A producer group's internal QMS audit is conducted against the certification requirements of the respective standard or add-on by a trained individual within the organization or by an external third party. The internal QMS auditor(s) shall be independent from the members/sites and comply with the respective standard or add-on's qualification requirements for internal QMS auditors. An internal QMS audit of each producer group member is conducted annually by the producer organization's (producer group's) internal QMS auditor(s) to ensure the continuous compliance of the producer group members.

The efficacy of the QMS is measured during the CB audits both at QMS and producer group member level, by auditing them against the respective standard or add-on's requirements and by comparing the CB audit reports with the internal audit reports.

In a cooperative (producer group), internal audits shall not cause any conflict of interest between the cooperative (producer group) and the members, as they share ownership. Each producer group member is therefore invested in the scope of certification and in the producer group as a whole achieving full compliance, because each producer group member will benefit from the resulting economic benefits.

Economic benefits for small farms

The economic benefits for the members of an Option 2 producer group are even greater than for Option 1 individual producers, because the costs of certification and technical assistance are collective, divided among all the producer group members. The more members a producer group has, the cheaper certification becomes for each member.

The Option 2 structure helps small farms to enter the market. Most small-scale farmers cannot produce amounts that allow them to appear on the market, nor can they afford to pay the costs of certification on their own.

They also benefit from savings through the simplification of the administrative and bureaucratic processes that are required to implement the respective standard or add-on. Access to the producer group's QMS means that they do not need to train and employ their own staff to manage these processes.