

How we set standards

Introduction

The Soil Association is one of the foremost organic standards setting organisations in the world and the largest such body in the UK. With the rising importance of organic food and farming, we recognise that our standards deliver a public service. The standards put the Soil Association's principles into practice and are therefore at the heart of what we do.

We describe here how we set them and who does it. This changed considerably as a result of the governance and accountability review, carried out in 2007. We are open and transparent so everyone can play their part in this process.

Principles

- 2.1 The Council delegates the primary responsibility for developing the organic standards to the Standards Board, but reserves the right to make the final decision.
- 2.2 Our standards are dynamic and we continue to improve them to put our principles better into practice. However we aim to do this in a structured, strategic and transparent way.
- 2.3 We make sure they are practical and we consult widely to achieve this. We appreciate the many people who help us with our standards development work.
- 2.4 Our standards meet legal requirements as a minimum.
- 2.5 Sometimes the Standards Board has to decide quickly, but will always consult at least the relevant standards committee.
- 2.6 Only the Council can change how we work and therefore must approve changes to this document.

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- 3.1 Each year we will invite our committees and wider stakeholders to identify issues we should be addressing.
- 3.2 We will then publish a draft work plan of the specific areas of the standards we are proposing to review and will call for comments on this. The intention is to cover all areas over time.

- 3.3 We will publish the final work plan, once agreed, and will call for proposals for changes to the standards within the areas identified in the work plan.
- 3.4 Anyone can propose a change to the standards, though we ask that they provide good justification. We will log each proposal and include it in the general review of that standards area. However, we may postpone consideration of it in order to fit in with the published work plan.
- 3.5 We will work through the relevant standards committee to draw up recommendations to amend the standards. The committee may set up specialist working groups or call experts to assist in this task.
- 3.6 The standards committee will approve recommendations for consultation and agree a consultation plan, including who we should contact proactively to seek views on the proposals.
- 3.7 We will put proposed amendments on our website and, as a matter of course, we will notify:
- all licensees through *Certification News*, and
 - all Soil Association members through *Living Earth* magazine
- 3.8 We will screen all responses and will:
- submit them to the Standards Board and recommend any amendments arising from the consultation
 - take them back to the standards committee if the responses reveal deficiencies in the amendment that need further work.
- 3.9 The Standards Board will consider the amendment, the responses and any further recommendations and may:
- approve the amendment
 - amend it further and then approve it
 - send it back for further review
 - ask for more information or research
 - reject it.
- 3.10 We will submit the approved amendment to the Council.
- With a unanimous decision of the Standards Board we will only notify the Council:
 - no objections means that Council approves it
 - if a member of the Council raises an objection it goes for discussion at the next Council meeting.
 - With a non-unanimous decision of the Standards Board we will submit the amendment to the Council for discussion and final decision at its next meeting.