SUFACHAIN
Sustainable Forest and Agroforestry Value Chains

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Policy Brief

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Promoting Organic Certification and Market Development in Central Asia through Group Certification and Digital ICS Management Tools

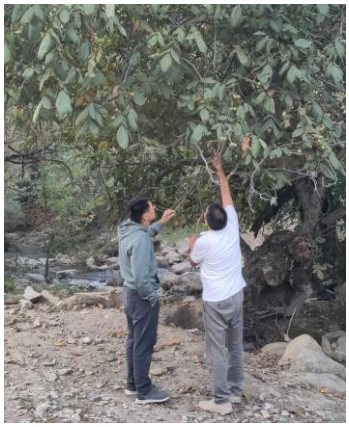
Gerald A. Herrmann, Almanbet Nurlan uulu

Key message

Group certification, supported by modern digital ICS management tools like Group Integrity, represents a crucial building block for the successful development of the organic sector in Central Asia. It provides small producers with access to organic certification and attractive markets and strengthens the credibility and integrity of organic products. Through targeted policy measures for the recognition, promotion, and support for the implementation of these approaches, governments, authorities, and private organizations in Central Asia can significantly contribute to strengthening the rural economy, improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, and positioning their organic products at national and international levels. As generic tool Group Integrity can support other certification system for value added products like Geographic Indications, fair etc.

What is the issue?

Many agricultural holdings in Central Asia are characterized by small-scale structures. For individual small producers, the costs and administrative burden of individual organic certification can be prohibitively high. Group certification offers a proven solution here. In group certification, several producers join and share the costs and effort of the certification process. An internal control system (ICS) within the group monitors compliance with organic standards by individual members, while the external certification body verifies the proper functioning of the ICS. This model effectively reduces costs per producer and facilitates small producers' access to organic certification and thus to organic markets. The certification of products from wild collection, which plays an important role in Central Asian countries, can also be done through group certification, as organic regulations contain corresponding provisions.



Wild walnut tree in Jalal Abad region – begin of collection period.

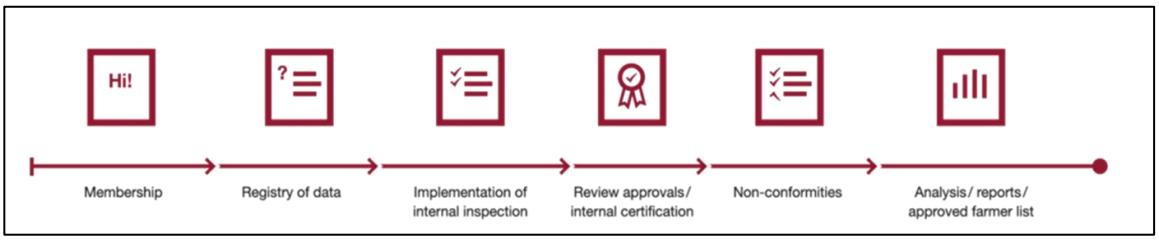
Research approach

An efficient and reliable ICS is crucial for the success of group certification. Managing the necessary data and processes can be complex and labor-intensive, especially for larger groups. Digital management tools offer significant advantages here. The Group Integrity software (www.group-integrity.com) was specifically developed to support producer groups and companies with contract production in professionalizing their ICS. The SUFACHAIN project aimed at implementing group certification through Group Integrity. The software was implemented with ISHKER KG, Jalal Abad, a cooperative of smallholders wild-collecting walnuts and other products. Group Integrity was translated into Russian and implemented by Mr. Nurlan uulu who was trained as inspector for this purpose.

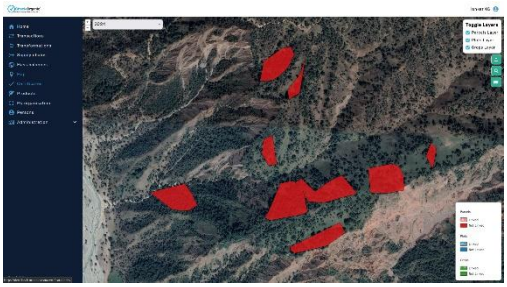
Key findings

Group Integrity enables the digitization and optimization of central ICS processes.

- **Digital Farm and Member Management:**
  Recording and managing data on farmers, fields, crops, and products in a central database.
- **Efficient Planning and Execution of Internal Controls:**
  Support for planning inspections, providing digital checklists, and documenting inspection results as well as deviations and corrective actions.



- **Improved Data Quality and Transparency:**
  Ensuring the completeness and timeliness of data, easy creation of reports for internal purposes and the external certification body.



- **Integration of Geographical Data:**

Linking with geographic information and supply chain systems (GIS), such as Check Organic-GIS, enables the mapping of cultivated and collection areas and linking them with relevant farm and control data, which increases transparency and facilitates mass balancing.

- **Support for Traceability and Fraud Prevention:**
  By recording product flows and enabling mass balancing, the software contributes to strengthening integrity along the supply chain.

Policy recommendations

- **Recognition and Promotion of Group Certification:** Integrate group certification as a valid approach in national organic legislation.
- **Provision of Information and Training:** Develop and implement programs to inform and train small producers, cooperatives, and other relevant organizations about the benefits and requirements of group certification and the use of digital ICS management tools.
- **Promote the use of digital technologies like Group Integrity:** Support the introduction and use of suitable software tools for ICS management and strengthening traceability in organic supply chains, e.g., through co-financing or creating access to such technologies.
- **Facilitate Data Flow:** Examine possibilities for integration or data exchange between digital ICS, relevant national databases e.g., geographic information systems (GIS) and the integration with supply chain management solutions to create synergies and transparency.
- **Support Market Access:** Implement accompanying measures to support organic-certified groups and companies in accessing national and international markets e.g., through trade promotion and participation at international trade fairs.

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