

History

In 1999, disappointed that the U.S. National Organic Program's standards did not address the people involved in organic agriculture, Michael Sligh of the [Rural Advancement Foundation International \(RAFI – USA\)](#), Richard Mandelbaum of [Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas/Farmworker Support Committee \(CATA\)](#), Oscar Mendieta, [RENACE](#), Bolivia, and Elizabeth Henderson of [Peacework Organic Farm](#) began a stakeholder process to develop standards for the fair and just treatment of the people involved in organic and sustainable agriculture.

While their experience was in North America, they set out to create standards that could be adapted for use anywhere in the world. They began with a review of existing social standards and then assembled a first draft of what became “Toward Social Justice and Economic Equity in the Food System: A Call for Social Stewardship Standards in Sustainable and Organic Agriculture.”

They circulated this draft to organic farmers and organic farming associations, non-profits, certification programs, eco-labeling experts, and labor and farm labor organizations. CATA also engaged in an internal process through which the organization's farmworker members provided input to the worker standards. For two years, AJP circulated successive drafts of their standards to stakeholders in the US and abroad and received comments from around the world. To make the document accessible to a wider audience, they arranged for translations into Spanish and French. With each major revision of the document they circulated the new draft to those who had commented on previous drafts, as well as to people new to the project.

In February 2002, the group convened a meeting in Washington, DC that included representatives of several US-based sustainable agriculture non-profits, US-based and international farm labor unions and producer groups, and an international social justice standards initiative. Meeting participants agreed that engaging with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) should be a high priority. The AJP team committed to designing a pilot project to test the standards and their practicality in the U.S. marketplace.

Later that year, the AJP facilitated a day and a half-long session on social standards as a prelude to the IFOAM World Assembly in Victoria, Canada. Fifty people from forty countries attended, including members of the IFOAM staff and World Board, and

representatives from every continent. The meeting's participants agreed to send a resolution to the IFOAM conference emphasizing the importance of social standards for organic agriculture. They also set ambitious goals for further development of social standards, and for increasing collaboration and discussion among groups around the globe working on these issues.

In the fall of 2003, the AJP convened a three-day stakeholder meeting at the IFOAM Organic Trade Conference in Bangkok, Thailand. The 39 attendees came from all corners of the globe: Africa, Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, Australia, and North and South America. As the meeting proceeded, a clear consensus emerged to advance the social justice agenda in organic agriculture, and to build cooperation between the organic and fair trade movements. Strengthening the voice and participation of indigenous peoples was as an urgent theme.

In early 2005, AJP partnered with the Latin American office of the IUF—International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations, known in Spanish as UITA—to convene a stakeholder meeting in Montevideo, Uruguay. The meeting was attended by a diversity of farmers and farmers' cooperatives, representatives of indigenous agricultural communities from Bolivia, agricultural workers' unions, and NGOs from around the Americas, including Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Columbia, Mexico, and the United States. During the meeting, participants reviewed and commented on AJP standards, built consensus between farmworkers and small-scale producers, and developed strategies to advance the social agenda in organic and sustainable agriculture.

In the fall of 2005, the Agricultural Justice Project team convened its most recent international stakeholder meeting in Adelaide, Australia, once again prior to the IFOAM World Congress. Twenty-seven people from six continents attended, representing consumers, fair trade importers, farmers, farmworkers, and certifiers. The all-day meeting included presentations by AJP, the Soil Association of the U.K., and JOAA, the Japanese Organic Agriculture Association. Participants had in-depth discussions on standards, IFOAM's Chapter 8 on Social Justice, and the role of community-based organizations in social certification programs. A consensus statement was also prepared, expressing support of IFOAM's Chapter 8 but also concern about its slow rate of implementation, and urging all member organizations of IFOAM "to integrate social justice into their work."