

# Agricultural Justice Project



## **Considerations for Certification Agencies Determining Feasibility of Offering Food Justice Certification**

### **What is FJC?**

The Agriculture Justice Project (AJP) created Food Justice Certified (FJC) program as a domestic fair trade label for farms and food businesses in North America. As the evaluations from the Domestic Fair Trade Association show, there is no other fair trade label with the same high level of integrity (see <http://fairfacts.thedfta.org/>). Many people who buy from organic farms assume that these farms also trade fairly and pay living wages. Unfortunately, this faith is undermined by the realities of the cheap food system. This project provides a label and a process that allows people to identify organic farms that have high bar labor policies as well as food businesses that have high bar labor policies for employees and that also pay farmers fair prices that cover the full costs of production. This label allows ethical farms and food businesses to differentiate themselves in the marketplace.

In developing Food Justice Certified, AJP has followed international norms for standards creation, including stakeholder involvement, public comment periods and the careful consideration of public comments in revising the standards. Rather than becoming a certification agency itself, AJP trains the existing network of not-for-profit organic certification agencies to conduct Food Justice inspections and certification. AJP functions as the standards developer and provides oversight and guidance to certifiers through an approval process that will grow into full-scale accreditation. AJP also provides technical assistance to entities seeking certification and has an active recruitment program to encourage additional farms and businesses to get certified. The program also engages in public education and marketing to grow consumer demand for ethically produced food.

### **Is Food Justice Certification keeping with the certification agency's Mission Statement?**

The Agricultural Justice Project (AJP) is a collaborative, non-profit initiative to create fairness and equity in our food system through the development and implementation of social justice standards for organic and sustainable agriculture. AJP promotes a market-based food label for social justice and economic equity.

AJP represents a collaboration of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI - USA), *Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas*/Farmworker Support Committee (CATA), Northeast Organic Farming Association, and Florida Organic Growers/Quality Certification Services (FOG/QCS).

## **Is there a need for Food Justice Certification?**

Prices paid to family-scale organic and sustainable farmers have not been high enough to enable them to pay themselves living wages while providing living wage jobs with decent benefits. There are many consequences. One serious consequence is that this has prevented the development of a professional, non-migratory farm labor force, which in turn prevents the improvement of farm businesses. If properly remunerated, farm work could be a respectable and satisfying career path. A way must be found to reduce the continual, ever-increasing pressure on farmers to cut expenses. Wages to workers on organic and sustainable farms make up a substantial portion of farm expenses--20% of total revenues go to labor expenses according to the 2008 Organic Census, a higher percentage than on all farms. On organic produce farms, the labor portion of the budget can be over 50%. All too often, farmers pay the lowest wages they can get away with and few provide benefits beyond minimal legal requirements. Legal protections for farmworkers are less than for other workers in the US and those that do exist are poorly enforced. Most farmers themselves earn only modest livings from their work and many depend on off-farm employment.

To make possible a professional, well-trained and motivated supply of skilled workers for organic farms and improve the quality of farm work, more farmers need to prioritize the human relations aspects of their farming. The technical assistance provided by this project and the recognition in the marketplace that results from this label will help organic farms improve conditions for farm workers while strengthening the economic viability of their farms. And that is what the Agricultural Justice Project is all about--a set of tools to help build value chains, changing relationships to bring into practical everyday life the Principle of Fairness that is basic to organic agriculture all over the world.

There has been a rise in shoppers' concern for the conditions of food workers. Shoppers are asking more questions and major food buyers are starting to seek ways to accommodate this new awareness, especially since these are the shoppers who are buying imported fair trade products. "Between 2005 and 2008 the number of ethical products brought to the market grew by 88%. The U.S. market for ethical products will approach \$62 billion in 2014, up from \$38 billion in 2009" (Packaged Facts 2009). National Marketing Institute data from 2007 indicate that the two highest ranking areas for consumers who are interested in corporate social responsibility are environmental programs (82%), followed closely by workforce (including worker rights) (80%). And a April 2014 Consumer Union survey on labels found that 79 percent of shoppers are willing to pay more for produce harvested by workers who are paid a living wage. More than a third of consumers said they were willing to pay 50 cents or more per pound extra for such food.

At present, it is difficult for consumers to identify and support those farms that have practices that are dedicated to social, economic, as well as environmental sustainability. As an add-on to the organic label, the Food Justice Certified label allows shoppers to make the connection between improving the quality of local food and improving the quality of food service jobs. Through a fair trade label, organic farmers can find additional ways to differentiate their products, and preserve their market share and economic return, while highlighting the environmental benefits of organic farms. The label allows a more transparent approach to social equity, which is essential for improved quality of life of farmers, farmworkers, interns, and rural

communities. There will never be a truly sustainable food system without fair and just trade based on respectful treatment of all who labor from farm to table.

Furthermore, at a time when organic certifiers are under increasing regulatory pressures and find themselves locked in intense competition with larger, for-profit certifiers, this label provides a market advantage, enabling them to offer new services to organic farms and businesses. For farms and businesses, there are significant savings by having one certifier provide multiple certifications. An additional benefit comes from the FJC verification process that requires inspection by a team of two -- an organic certifier in partnership with a farmworker or other worker organization. Certifiers' farmer clients will benefit by establishing new relationships of trust with worker organizations that can provide safety training for workers and, if the workers are immigrants, resources in dealing with immigration authorities.

### **What would the agency need to do to be able to offer AJP certification?**

**STAFF TRAINING.** In addition to a general orientation to FJC for all staff members, at least two staff members must take and pass FJC inspector training to be able to conduct inspections, review files and train other staff internally. (For a full description of the training and certifier requirements, see Policy Manual, Section 4 or the Certifier section of AJP website.)

**ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIP WITH FARMWORKER OR OTHER WORKER ORGANIZATION.** The AJP Policy Manual describes how the certifier and the farmworker/worker organization work together to conduct the inspection and review. AJP staff can advise on possible cooperative organizations.

**APPLY FOR AJP APPROVAL/ ACCREDITATION.** The AJP Policy Manual fully describes the process, fees and requirements for initial and continuing approval/accreditation.

**DETERMINE FEES TO CHARGE FOR AJP CERTIFICATION.** The following description of the Food Justice Certification process as compared to the organic certification process is provided to give indications of how much staff time may be involved.

1. Prospective client requests and receives information and application. This is similar to the process by which prospective clients inquire about organic certification. With certification, applicants may be referred to AJP for technical assistance to help them prepare for applying for Food Justice Certification.

2. The application and required fees are received from the applicant (including FJC licensing fees which are later transferred to AJP). The certifier informs AJP of the name and address of the applicant for posting on the AJP website for solicitation of public comment. Staff time is slightly more than application review time of an organic certification file. However, once cross trained, the same reviewer could do both the organic and the FJC initial review and thus save time.

3. An initial review, similar to that conducted on an application for organic certification, is conducted and a communication is sent which outlines any questions that arose as a result of the review and any additional information that needs to be provided before or at inspection. Staff time for this work is similar to organic certification initial review.

4. The file is prepared for inspection, taking into consideration any comments or complaints that may have been submitted to AJP after the website posting. An inspection time is arranged with the operator and the worker organization representative, who is also provided all the file information with time to review it before the inspection. Staff time for this is slightly more than with organic inspection coordination.

5. The inspection is conducted and the certification inspector writes a report with input from the worker organization inspector. Because of the need for interviews and the fact that there are at least two inspectors, FJC inspections are more costly than organic inspections, so this would need to be communicated to potential clients and included in fees charged to clients.

6. The final reviewer, a different individual than the inspector, reads the inspection report, reviews the file, and determines any non-compliances. This may require additional information or responses from the operator and determination of timeframes within which non-compliances are to be corrected. Staff time for final review of file is similar to that of organic certification.

7. Final reviewer communicates draft non-compliances regarding labor with worker organizations and gives them adequate time to respond. Final review notes this and some dialogue may be necessary with the worker representative if there is a difference of opinion on non-compliances. This is an extra step that is not required in organic.

8. If no major non-compliances prevent certification or must be corrected prior to certification, the final reviewer finalizes the list of any minor non-compliances and continuing improvement points and issues the certificate.

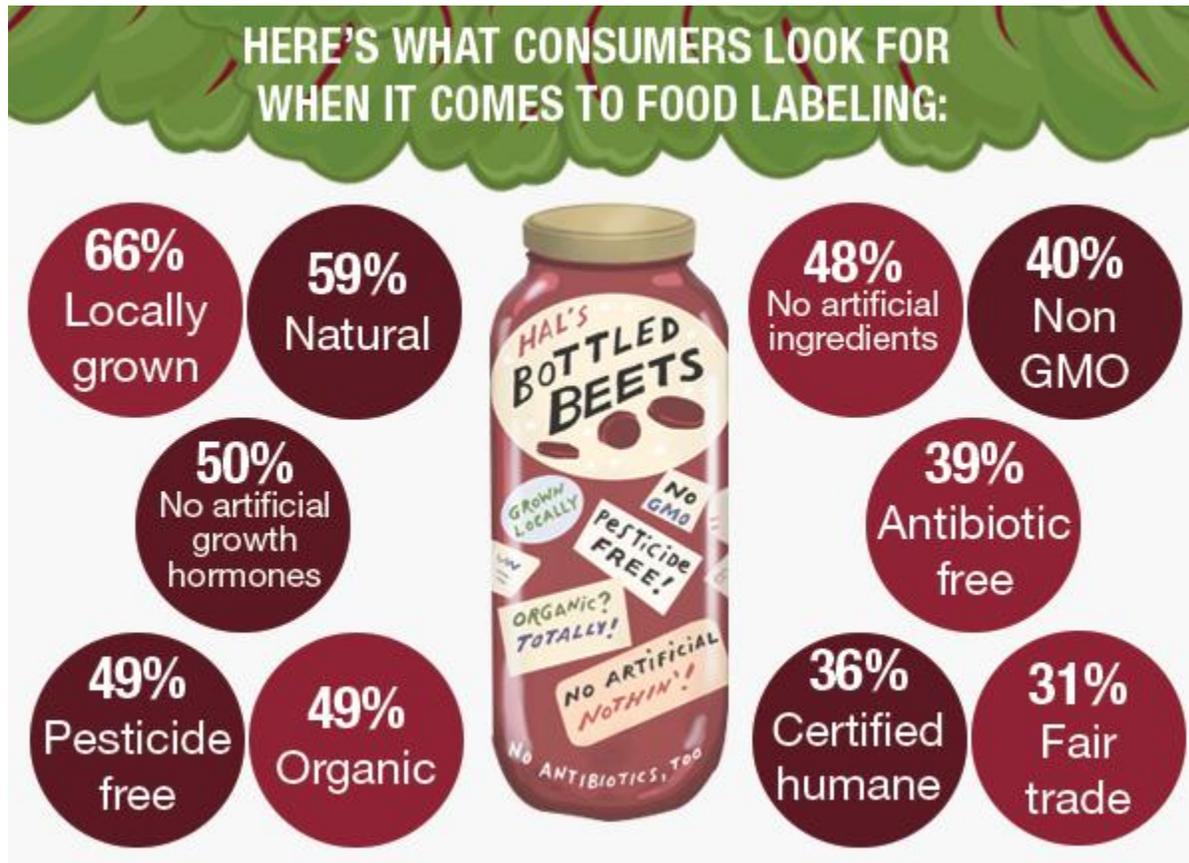
9. Certifier ensures annual renewal and inspection of each client, like organic certification. Tracking and quality management system requirements are similar to organic.

## RESOURCES AND FORMS

- a. Promotional materials – available from AJP
- b. Application form – template available from AJP
- c. Check lists for reviewers and inspectors – templates available from AJP
- d. Certification – certifiers use own certificate.
- e. Confidentiality forms for reviewers and inspectors – templates available from AJP

f. Annual report to AJP – outline available from AJP

g. AJP has a Social Justice Fund to subsidize the certification fees of farms that qualify for the Food Justice Certification but have limited finances. Farms are welcome to apply to AJP for this subsidy.



Here is the result of the 2014 Consumer Reports' survey on how food is produced. The great news, "most are even willing to pay more for food to ensure that it was produced in fair working conditions".