

③

WHAT ARE CRITERIA, INDICATORS & VERIFIERS?

This is one of a series of papers produced by the Natural Resource and Ethical Trade Programme (NRET) of the Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich. The papers cover key themes relevant to the implementation of codes of practice in the fresh produce industry, with a focus on developing countries. They draw on findings from a 3-year NRET research project which looked at how the impact of codes on workers and smallholders could be improved. Themes covered are: the case for national codes; developing multi-stakeholder institutions; integrated social & environmental auditing; managing codes in the smallholder sector; building awareness and support for codes; and developing criteria, indicators and verifiers. For copies of the papers, please contact NRET at the Natural Resources Institute, Chatham Maritime, Kent ME4 4TB, U.K., email: nret@gre.ac.uk, or download from the Internet at: <http://www.nri.org/NRET/nret.htm>

Who is this paper for?

Individuals in supermarkets, European code bodies and growers' associations who are responsible for developing codes and putting them into practice.

Purpose of the paper

To define and explain the need for good criteria, indicators and verifiers (CIVs).

Executive Summary

An effective code of practice needs to include a hierarchy of different elements:

Objectives: basic aims of the code of practice.

Principles: essential elements of the areas covered by the code, which help to elaborate the meaning of Objectives.

Criteria: conditions that need to be met in order to adhere to a Principle.

Indicators: measurable states which allow the assessment of whether or not associated criteria are being met.

Verifiers: information or observation that will be used to demonstrate that the required state is being realised.

A **good indicator** is one which is acceptable to all stakeholders, clearly defined, a reliable measure of the criterion, easy to measure and record, and integrative.

A **good verifier** is one which is embedded in existing monitoring systems, relevant and acceptable to all stakeholders, reliable, practical and integrative.

Why have CIVs?

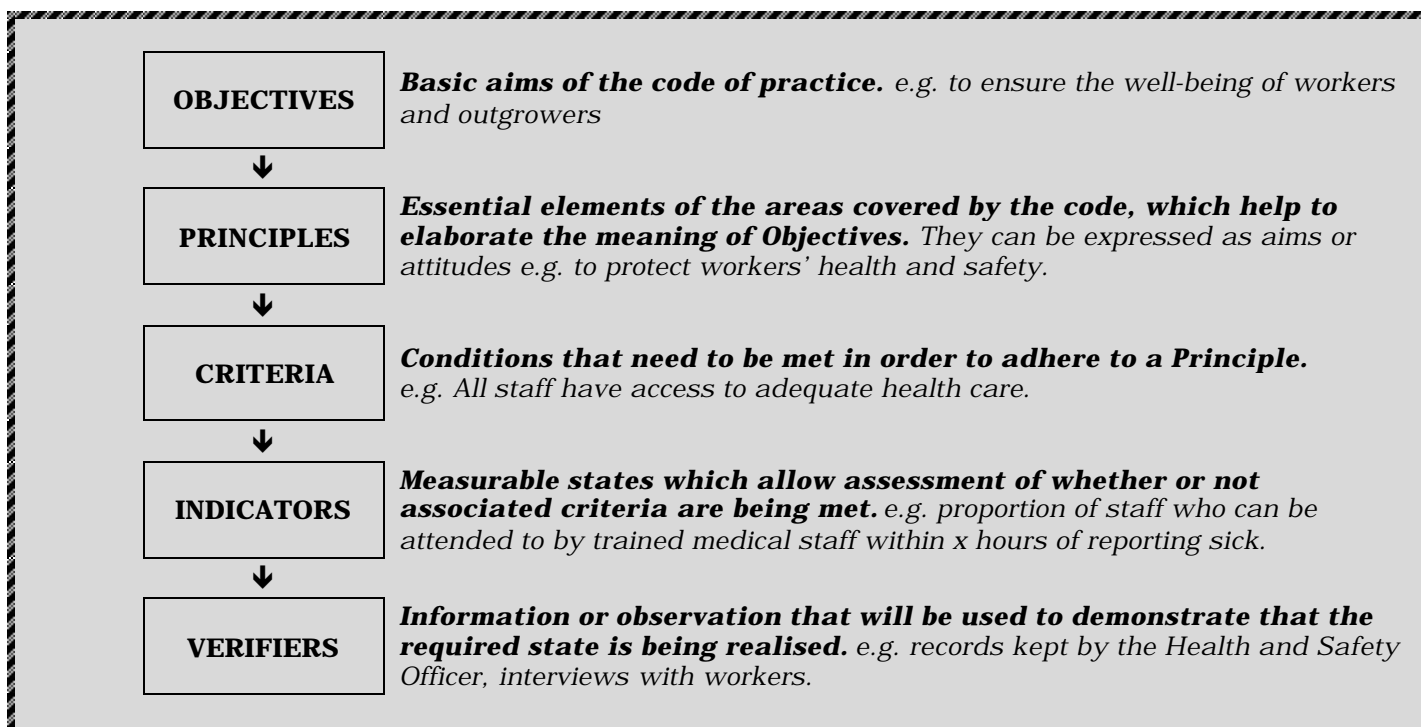
Many of the major European supermarkets are now implementing codes of practice in response to growing consumer concern about food production methods and their impact on poor people and the environment. Codes require suppliers to meet minimum standards on food safety, working conditions, and environmentally friendly production. In all parts of the world, exporters and growers supplying European supermarkets are now being asked to comply with these codes. In response to these supermarket codes, a growing number of horticultural producer associations in developing countries have also been developing their own national codes of practice (NCOPs). NCOPs have been set up as a means of ensuring that producers comply with the supermarket codes, so they reflect the standards required by supermarkets.

There is a good deal of overlap in the kinds of issues covered by the different supermarket and national codes. However, there are big differences in the level of detail to which the issues or principles are spelt out. In many cases, statements are made at the level of vague aspirations and left at that. Yet, if a code is to have any "teeth", all the principles and values it aspires to need to be

backed up by details of *what* exactly is required, and *how* the principles and values are going to be achieved or met. For example, one of the principles in the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) Base Code states that producers should ensure that “working conditions are safe and hygienic”. No-one is going to quibble with that, but what does it mean in practice? How does a producer know whether his/her workplace is “up to scratch”? How does a consumer or supermarket compare one producer against another? For this to happen, social, environmental or food safety principles need to be fleshed out into specific **criteria**, and measurable **indicators** of performance. You also need to work out how you are going to measure your indicators i.e. you need to find means of verification – or **verifiers**.

Definition of CIVs

An effective code of practice needs to include a hierarchy of different elements, namely: objectives, principles, criteria, indicators and verifiers. These are defined in the diagram below:



A code of practice – i.e. the policy document itself – normally refers to a number of objectives, with associated principles, and sometimes criteria. Indicators and verifiers are generally not referred to in the actual code. They are referred to variously in accompanying code implementation guidelines for producers, in guidance notes for auditors, and/or in self-assessment questionnaires for producers.

In practice, for some issues there can be a blurring of lines between objectives and principles, and between principles and criteria. For example, you can sometimes find that a principle is clear and specific enough by itself, without the need to elaborate it further through specific criteria. Some “blurring” between objectives, principles and criteria is not too much of a problem. However, indicators and verifiers need to be distinct and clearly defined. All indicators must be expressed in a way that minimises ambiguity and allows proper measurement. Verifiers – or means of verification – also need to be as specific and practical as possible. You need good quality indicators and verifiers, otherwise it is difficult for a producer or an auditor to know whether or not criteria or being met. The next section therefore goes into more detail about what makes for good indicators and verifiers.

What makes for good indicators and verifiers?

There are similarities between the characteristics of a good indicator and a good verifier. However, since they perform different functions, it is useful to look at the two separately.

What makes for a good indicator?

A good indicator is one which is:

- **Relevant and acceptable to all stakeholders** (e.g. if it is about worker welfare, workers should agree that the indicator is a good measure and encapsulate the essence of the criterion, and managers should also accept it and be willing for it to be measured).
- **Clearly defined** (unambiguous and easy to understand)
- **A reliable measure of the criterion** – it is clearly linked to the criterion, and will always be a good measure of whether or not the criterion is being met.
- **Easy to measure and record** – the information is easily available and practical to measure (cost-wise and time-wise)
- And if possible...**integrative** i.e. it measures progress against more than one criterion, therefore saving time and resources (e.g. compliance with the indicator “implementation of a 3-year crop rotation programme” demonstrates partial compliance with both sustainable soil management and also integrated pest management criteria).

What makes for a good verifier?

A good verifier is one which is:

- **Embedded:** i.e. it uses available records which are already being kept. If records aren't being kept, be creative and make use of visual and verbal verifiers if possible, rather than creating an unnecessary paper trail;
- **Relevant and acceptable to all stakeholders** (e.g. if it is about worker welfare, workers should agree that the verifier provides the critical information necessary to measure the indicator, and managers should also accept it and be willing for it to be used).
- **Reliable** – it is a reliable source of information. When it comes to choosing verifiers for social indicators, it can be particularly difficult to identify an “objective” source of information. In such a case, you need to make sure you have at least 2 verifiers for each indicator i.e. you need to triangulate. If the 2 verifiers give you conflicting information, you need to look for a third or even fourth verifier.
- **Practical** – it is not too time-consuming or expensive to use (e.g. on a farm employing 2,000 workers, it will be too time-consuming to ask every single worker what they earn as a means of checking up on weekly earnings. Instead, you may consider checking the payroll records, plus interviewing a sample of workers to cross-check the records).
- And if possible...**integrative**.

For further information...

For practical guidance on how to develop CIVs, please see **Theme Paper 4: Developing Criteria, Indicators & Verifiers**.

For further information on other related issues, please see **Theme Paper 8: Where to Find Further Information**.

The information contained in this paper is distilled from a 3-year study managed by the Natural Resources and Ethical Trade Programme (NRET), in collaboration with Agro Eco Consultancy of the Netherlands and the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) of the University of Zimbabwe. The study involved in-depth research in Ghana and Zimbabwe and the U.K, and was conducted in close collaboration with key players involved in the supply of fresh horticultural produce to European markets, from farm workers to supermarket buyers. For more detailed information about the findings from the study, please contact NRET (contact details are on the front page). The individual researchers involved in the study were Man-Kwun Chan (Project Leader), Geoffrey Bockett, Mick Blowfield, Stephanie Gallat, Seth Gogoe, Richard Tweneboah-Kodua (NRI); Rufaro Madakadze, Elias Madzudzo, Diana Auret, Edward Mbizo (CASS); and Bo van Elzakker (Agro Eco Consultancy).

This publication is an output from a research project (R7468, *Crop Post-Harvest Programme*) funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.