

HAFL Master's Thesis Abstract

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English Title:

Development of a process-oriented certification strategy in RISE. A further step in acknowledging and supporting sustainable practice in agricultural production.

English Summary:

In the context of sustainability certification in agricultural production and the challenge of food security, this thesis focuses on the development of a possible certification strategy for the farm assessment tool RISE (Response Inducing Sustainability Certification). As a reaction to the increased demand for holistic approaches to sustainability and the increasing importance of certification practices on the global agro-food market, the compatibility of RISE as a holism-based program, and a certification system with on-market effects, is examined. Besides a geographical focus on organic dairy production at the dairy "Naturmælk" in Denmark, a tripartite methodological approach, consisting of literature research, a focus group discussion and semi-structured expert interviews, was used. Literature research on existing certification systems allowed a lessons learned approach, by referring to the examples of the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme EMAS, to certification according to ISO standards (International Organisation for Standardisation) and to the Dairy Sustainability Framework DSF. A further focus lay on stakeholder theory and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as implementation practices for successful sustainability certification. Several main conclusions were drawn. The lessons learned approach revealed, that successful sustainability certification is characterised by a detailed and transparent certification process, a strong focus on stakeholder engagement and independency among the bodies involved in the certification process. The provision of information and the support of consumers in their purchase decision as the main goals of a certification, depend on consumer trust, transparency and credibility. As RISE follows a holistic understanding of sustainability, by considering ecological, economic and social aspects and as it further builds on voluntary commitment, the program meets the current needs on the global market and it matches an increasing number of holistic certification initiatives, dealing with sustainable agricultural production. Theoretically, it is a good time for RISE to invest in a certification strategy. Nevertheless, in the concrete, examined case, obstacles were revealed. The main obstacles for a future RISE certification lie within (1) the development of a suitable measurement technique for the on-farm development process initiated through the work with RISE, (2) the generation of added value, which is a central goal of the certification, (3) the discussion on distinguishing between organic and conventional farming and finally (4) the communication of sustainability from a holistic perspective towards consumers. The

challenges to address in the future as well as the potentials and resources to consider, are revealed and open questions are defined in the discussion. By considering the contributions from the interviews and the results from literature research, it was possible to present a first theoretical model for a future certification strategy for RISE.

Keywords: Certification, sustainable agriculture, sustainable development, food security, cooperative marketing

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