

CAUCASCERT LLC	Quality Manual	Code GC/DM/QM-10.1
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QUALITY MANUAL

Based on ISO/IEC 17065



Developed: ZN Date: 15.07.07	Revised: DB Date: 19.03.25	Approved: QM Date: 19.03.25	Non Confidential	Version 12	Pages:1 of 20
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INTRODUCTION

This Quality System is know-how and exclusive property of certification body (hereafter “CB” means any of two certification body) Caucascert LLC.

Correct interpretation and explanation of Quality System is provided by Caucascert LLC only.

Quality System (hereafter QS) is confidential and it envisages different level of access to it. All public information, which is defined by ISO 17065 as proof of transparency of CB is published and any interested Party has full access to it.

Caucascert LLC only have copyrights.

Reproduction in whole or in part of QS documentation is prohibited.

The Quality System is based on the requirements of ISO / IEC 17065:2012 “Conformity Assessment – Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services”.

This Quality Manual is public document, accessible for all bodies interested in activities of CB.

CB provides organic certification services compliant with Regulation (EU) 2018/848 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 on organic production and labelling of organic products, as well as any other market that has bilateral agreements with EU and recognition of CB for their national/regional/international markets.

(08.01.2025-11) Caucascert LLC is recognized competent to carry out controls and issue organic certificates in third countries for the purpose of imports of organic products into the Union (COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) 2024/1748 - <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R1748>)

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE USERS

This quality manual describes all services, as well as the means and mechanisms of their implementation.

This quality manual describes generally procedures of internal auditing and quality management system applied by CB, which aims at achieving of high quality for provided services.

This Quality Manual is an integral part of the Quality System (QS) operated by CB. The Procedures Manual (PM) and Document Manual (DM) form integral part of QS.

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1. JURIDICAL STATUS OF CB

Georgian Certification Body Caucascert LLC was accredited by DAP, Germany since 09 January 2008. The maintenance of accreditation has been continued by the DAP successor DAKKS, Germany. Scopes for accreditation can be found on Accreditation certificate, which is public on web sites of CB, or can be obtained upon request.

(08.01.2025-11) Caucascert LLC is recognized competent to carry out controls and issue organic certificates in third countries for the purpose of imports of organic products into the Union (COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) 2024/1748 - <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R1748>)

Caucascert Ltd is accredited by USDA NOP as organic certifying agent of USDA NOP since 2022.

1.1 Legal status of Caucascert

Legal status of Caucascert – limited liability company.

Caucascert is guided by its charter and the Georgian legislature.

Legal address of Caucascert:

Georgia, Tbilisi 0186, Jiqia street #5

Tel: (+99532) 38 05 20

E-mail: info@caucascert.ge

Web site: www.caucascert.ge

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2. THE GOAL AND POLICY OF CERTIFICATION BODY IN TERMS OF THE QUALITY

2.1 The goals of CB are the following:

- 2.1.1 Create and operate quality and certification systems in the field of organic production.
- 2.1.2 Operate internationally recognized organic certification systems and quality systems.
- 2.1.3 Recognition by a number of international markets to provide access to the markets to the certified clients.
- 2.1.4 Constant improvement of the quality management and system of CBs.
- 2.1.5 Gradually Expanding services to the new regions and countries, diversification of services.

2.2 To achieve goals, CB has established own quality system following principles of ISO-17065, as well as national and international standards and legislation.
CB has qualified staff and all necessary technical equipment. CB is financially sustainable.

2.3 A precise system of documents and procedures has been elaborated, which describes in detail all procedures and actions starting from submission of an application by an interested applicant up to the decision making on certification.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 3)

2.4 The effective and complete quality system is described in:

- Quality Manual (current document)
- Procedure Manual (PM)
- Documents Manual (DM).

2.5 All employees of are well aware of the goals/objectives of CB, as well as the methods and instruments of their professional liability.

2.6 Services provided by CB is available for all applicants without any limitation and discrimination.

2.7 The policies and procedures under which CB operate are administered in non-discriminatory manner.

2.8 CB don't provide any consultation service in organic production, processing and handling, as well as are not a designer or owner in this field.

2.9 CB confine requirements, evaluation and decision on certification to those matters specifically related to the scope of the certification being considered.

2.10 The CB staff notifies to the applicants the requirements of the quality system at the first meeting and assures the transparency of the whole certification process. The applicants receive the full version of the inspection report after inspection. The transparency of operation of CB is provided via the Governing Board (so-called, Mechanism for safeguarding impartiality), which is represented by interested stakeholders from different sectors, including consumers.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 1, chapter 3)

2.11 CB top management (directors, deputy directors, (20.06.2024-10) or general manager) are responsible for making sure that the quality system is applied at all stages and levels of CB operations.

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Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 2)

2.12 The top management is responsible for qualification and competence maintenance of the staff, as well as for continuous improvement of qualification and competence. Regular trainings are designed and implemented by CB.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 2)

2.13 Regular internal audits are applied for identification of deficiencies in the quality system. Deficiencies are removed based on the analysis of the internal audit reports.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 5)

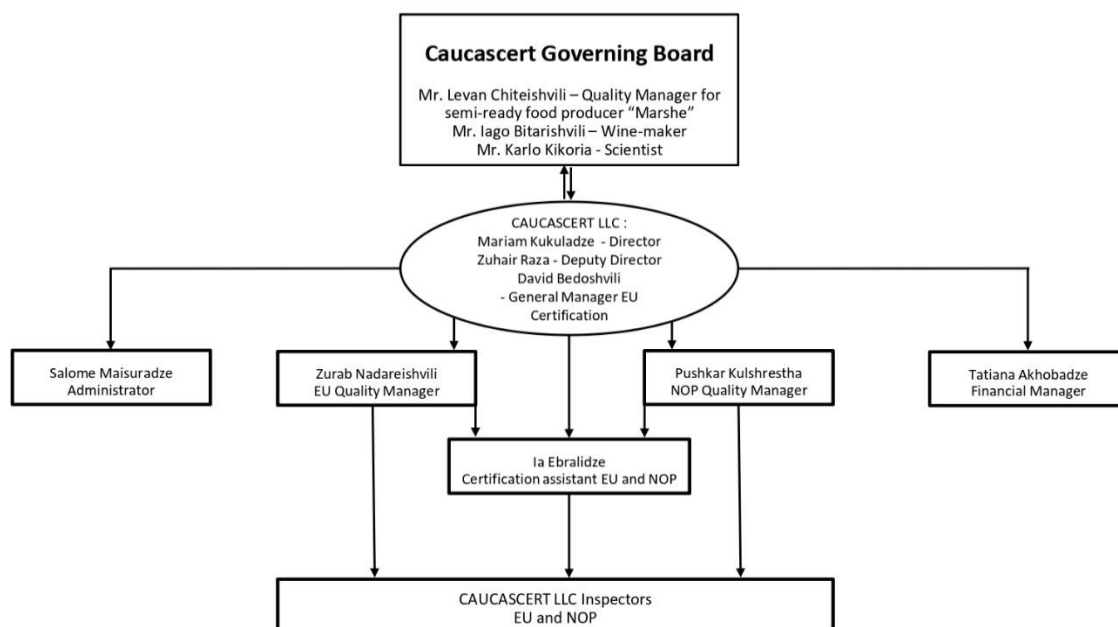
2.14 Management review is conducted by the general manager annually to analyze the previous year's results and to design and promote future strategy of CB.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter2)

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3. STRUCTURE, INTERACTIONS AND DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES AMONG THE PERSONNEL

3.1 Caucascert LLC chart



3.2 Governing Board – mechanism for safeguarding impartiality

The Governing Board has 3 members, which represent different groups of stakeholders.

The Governing Board meets at least once a year.

The Governing Board has the following authority:

- Safeguard the impartiality of activities of CB.
- Supervision of transparency of QS.
- Discussion of the annual report of CB.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 1)

3.3 Personnel and its functions

To ensure successful operation of the company, personnel is hired according to its qualification and evaluated against certain criteria. All personnel is trained to be competent in agricultural and / or organic production practices or any other specific requirements, aware of the local and international standards of organic products, any other standards and know well the quality system of CB.

The main personnel of CB is shown on the organigram and are responsible for control, certification, quality management and financial functions of CB.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 2)

Founders, employees and members of Governing Board of CB are not engaged in the activities that can give rise to conflicts of interests.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 4)

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3.3.1 (20.06.2024-10) General Manager

The (20.06.2024-10) General Manager is responsible for implementation of the quality system at all levels of the CB and general management of each company.

(20.06.2024-10) General Manager is responsible for proper functioning of the certification system of CB and makes decisions on certification. Other staff can be also qualified for decision making. He/she makes sure that all employees meet the requirement of the quality system. He/she is liable to guarantee the reliability and trustworthiness of the quality system for all consumers.

(20.06.2024-10) General Manager report to Governing Board. The certification activities are also transparent for internal audits.

(20.06.2024-10) General Manager prepare annual report (management review) before the annual meeting of the Governing Board.

(20.06.2024-10) General Manager appoints other staff for QS and QM purposes to take care of regular updating of competence and knowledge.

In some cases the (20.06.2024-10) Manager can carry out inspection visits. In such cases, the decision on certification is made by other competent person or by an inspector.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 2)

3.3.2 Quality System management

Quality Manager responsibilities:

To ensure proper operation of Quality Management System

To prepare internal audit plan.

To conduct internal audit.

To prepare internal audit report, to indicate nonconformities and corrective actions and to submit them to the (20.06.2024-10) General Manager.

To design and / or conduct training regarding Quality System for the staff.

To monitor implementation of the corrective actions .

To review a first step of complaints, appeals and disputes and to monitor implementation of decisions and submit the results to (20.06.2024-10) General Manager.

At the beginning of the year and according to necessity to collect comments and suggestions on the improvement of the quality system from staff reviews suggestions before internal audit.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapters 2 and 5)

3.3.3 Inspectors

Inspector knows operational organic standards and is responsible for inspections.

He/she knows Quality and Certification Systems, and is responsible for implementation of their requirements on inspection level.

The Inspector does not have any kind of conflict of interests regarding applicant whom he inspects.

He/she keeps confidentiality. The Inspector constantly cares for professional development. He/she is reporting to the (20.06.2024-10) General Manager.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 2)

3.3.4 Financial Manager

Financial Manager is responsible for smooth operation of the company financial system. He/she is responsible for improving his/her own knowledge and skills in appropriate area and is subordinated to (20.06.2024-10) Deputy Director. The CB policy recommends that Financial Manager has basic

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knowledge of the organic certification activities of the company and, if necessary, can combine his/her direct responsibilities with some administrative assistance to (20.06.2024-10) Deputy Director.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 2)

3.4 Selection of personnel, training and appraisal

3.4.1 Personnel are selected through assessment of their qualifications based on certain criteria that correspond to their responsibilities.

3.4.2 Personnel are required to keep up-to-date and improve their competence, skills and knowledge of the organic certification (and any other) standards and company quality system.

(20.06.2024-10) General Manager perform Staff Appraisal of the personnel regularly.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 2)

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4. QUALITY SYSTEM

4.1 The quality system comprises of following main documents:

- Quality Manual (QM)
- Procedures Manual (PM)
- Document Manual (PM)
- Organic standards: EU Reg 2018/848, and other by-laws, implementing and delegated acts; other organic standards.

They all contain precise and detailed information about all rules, procedures, which are used by CB during certification activities, as well as documents, which provide proper ground for efficient implementation of those rules and procedures. The internal audits provide constant improvement of the Quality System.

Ref: Standards, Quality Manual, Procedures Manual, Documents Manual.

4.2 The quality manager elaborate the documents, or otherwise they delegate and coordinate process with other colleagues (e.g. Director (20.06.2024-10) or General Manager) for elaboration of documentation based on changes of national and international legislation, as well as the conclusions of the internal audit.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 9)

4.3 Quality System ensures objectivity, impartiality and non-discriminatory principles of its organic certification activities

CB undertakes all necessary measures to prevent conflict of interests at all levels of its operations.

CB doesn't supply, design or market products of the type it certifies,

CB doesn't give advice or provide consultancy services to own applicants on organic production.

CB doesn't provide any other products or services which could compromise the objectivity or impartiality of its certification process and decisions.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 4)

4.4 CB has a special policy to ensure its independence and impartiality: none of the clients can be provider of more than 10% of the company income.

4.5 All documents are codified and stored appropriately in QS.

Any changes in the documents or in the rule of their use are implemented through a respective procedure and documented appropriately (document control).

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 9)

4.6 The CB defines and ensures access at all documentary and operational levels.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 9)

4.7 CB has a professional liability insurance, which covers liabilities arising during the inspection and certification processes (personnel damages, damages at the inspection sites and damages from decision-making), which provides for its impartiality, independence and financial stability.

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5. SERVICES

5.1 CB offers the following main services to its customers:

- Inspection and certification of (organic) farm production.
- Inspection and certification of (organic) food and nonfood processing.
- Inspection and certification of organic trade.

At the request of applicant, the organic certification services based on existing competence of standards (organic, any other voluntary or non-mandatory) can be done.

In such cases if professional competence of CB allows such certification can be conducted, but the applicant shall be clearly informed about markets where the certification and certificate are valid.

5.2 CB guarantees impartiality and objectivity for all certification process and prevents any conflict of interests of its employees during realization of their responsibilities.

5.3 Other Activities

For the reasons of financial stability CB can extend business activities in other spheres, which do not cause any conflict of interests with the organic certification activities.

CB services are paid. The fees are calculated based on the approved realistic rates/ tariffs. Tariffs are available through publications, including web sites of companies.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 3)

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6. CERTIFICATION SYSTEM

6.1 The certification process consists of several operations. It starts with submission of an application and ends with the decision on certification, which is followed by further monitoring (inspections). The whole process is transparent and based on the respective procedures and documents.

6.2 The following is carried out to achieve the transparency of the process:

- The applicant is provided by information about the CB quality system and services.
- The applicant must complete the application form and submit the comprehensive information and confirmed data on his/her production unit.
- CB provides certification services after acceptance of application and signing an agreement with the applicant.
- Signing of an agreement can coincide with the application time or during the preparation to evaluation (preliminary evaluation) after the positive self-assessment of CB on capabilities to perform evaluation.
- During the application and/or preparation for evaluation:
 - a) the requirements for certification are clearly defined, documented and understood;
 - b) any difference in understanding between the certification body and the applicant is resolved;
 - c) certification body is competent and has the capacity to perform the certification service.

6.3 Evaluation (inspection)

- Inspector reviews the available documentation and conducts an inspection.
- While inspecting and preparing report, the inspector assesses compliance of applicant with the (organic) standards.
- Inspection is accomplished with the preparation of inspection report. As essential part of the inspection report the non-compliances/nonconformities/deficiencies/findings (hereafter “NC”) identified along with corrective measures for implementation by the applicant.
- Based on the inspection report the certifier, (20.06.2024-10) General Manager, or other authorized staff makes a decision on certification. Decisions can be positive (to certify), negative (to deny) or conditional (to certify after correction of NCs).
- Cases of violations of (organic) standards are regulated by Catalogue of Measures (so-called Sanctions Catalogue), which is a public document and can be obtained upon request.
- (20.06.2024-10)General Manager or other authorized staff member is responsible to decide on and undertake “Sanctions”/”measures” in cases of violations.
- Inspection report and Certification decision are provided to applicant in whole.
- The scope of certification defined under the agreement between CB and the applicant. Applicant agrees for regular inspections, at least once a year and any additional inspections, if defined by CB.
- Validity of organic certificate is 1 year, as usual.

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The only criteria against which the products of an applicant or certified operator are evaluated/inspected are those outlined in agreement between CB and applicant.

All above-listed actions are based on respective procedures and are documented correspondingly.

6.4 Complaints to suppliers (applicants)

CB requires the applicant/supplier of certified products to:

- a) keep a record of all complaints made known to the applicant/supplier relating to its products;
- b) take appropriate action with respect to such complaints;
- c) document the actions taken;
- d) disclose all complaints during inspection or upon request by CB.

Provide full access to CB on issues related to complaints and items indicated in a), b), c) and d) above.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 3)

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7. INTERNAL AUDIT AND CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

7.1 CB carry out regular internal audits to ensure perfection and smooth operation of the quality and certification systems.

7.2 The plan of internal audits is prepared at the end of the preceding year. The plan allows for comprehensive checking of all documents during the next year.

7.3 The internal audit of the quality system and certification system is carried out by the CB quality manager.

7.4 Based on the report of the internal audit, respective corrective actions are taken and deficiencies removed.

7.5 Quality manager monitors implementation of the corrective actions.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 5)

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8. SUBCONTRACTORS

8.1 CB selects the subcontractor/-s and signs contracts with them for delegating those specific tasks to them, which are beyond the expertise of CB (e.g. lab tests for soil, water and plant residues, any other sub-contracting activity).

8.2 The applicant agrees with certification body to use services of subcontractors.

8.3 CB ensures the quality of service provided by its subcontractor.

8.4 CB ensures that:

- The subcontracted laboratory is competent and ISO 17025 accredited.
- Conflict of interests doesn't exist and confidentiality of service is protected.
- The applicant covers the cost of the service provided by the subcontractor.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 8)

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9. CONFIDENTIALITY

9.1 CB assures the confidentiality of the information obtained in the course of its certification activities on all the levels of its organization, including part-time or hired personnel, subcontractors, Governing Board, founders, shareholders, other.

9.2 CB recognizes the rights of applicants/certified operator to require from the certification agency to keep confidentiality of information obtained during the certification process and assures that this information (written, verbal or visual) won't be passed to the third party without consent of the applicant/certified operator.

9.3 Therefore, CB requires its personnel and subcontractors to sign a document stating the promise of confidentiality, or otherwise makes sure that third party gets codified information on client (e.g. codified samples for testing)

9.4 Information about the applicant can be disclosed by CB only in the case of a requirement of the law, as well as to accreditation agency and relevant market authorities.

The contract between CB and the applicant regulates disclosure of information under the law requirement. In such cases CB notifies applicants without delays, in a possible short term.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 6)

9.5 CB has document control system which guaranties that documents with codification "confidential" are available only to the persons who have access to them according the respective procedure.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 9)

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10. APPELLATION, COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTES

CB has special procedures for handling appellations, complaints and disputes.

10.1 Appellation on Certification Decisions

10.1.1 If the applicant doesn't agree with the decision of CB, he/she has the right for appellation.

10.1.2 Consideration of appellations is responsibility of quality manager.

10.1.3 Quality manager carries out an assessment and presents results to the (20.06.2024-10) General Manager.

10.1.4 The applicant is officially informed about the decision on the appellation.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 7)

10.2 Complaints and Disputes

10.2.1 All complaints and disputes brought to CB by its clients, (sub)contractors, stakeholders, public and other organizations and persons are registered and handled according to the special procedure.

10.2.2 The complaints and disputes are handled by quality manager. QM carries out an assessment and presents results to the (20.06.2024-10) General Manager. All necessary clarifications to applicant and suggestions for corrections, if necessary, are taken and documented.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 7)

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11. PUBLICATIONS

CB has information package – publications for applicants and interested individuals. It includes:

- Quality Manual
- (Organic) Standards
- Accreditation certificate/-s
- Certification service price list /tariffs
- Register of subcontractors
- Register of the certified and decertified operators
- Application forms
- Catalogue of Measures (Sanctions catalogue)

The documents subject for publication are available in the CB offices and on company web-sites and are accessible to all the employees and public.

Ref: Procedures Manual (chapter 10)

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12. REFERENCES

12.1

ISO / IEC 17065:2012 “Conformity Assessment – Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services”.

12.2 ISO 10011-1:1990, “Guidelines for the quality system audit. Part 1. Audit”.

12.3 ISO/IEC Guidelines 17025:2017, General requirements for assessing the competence of the testing laboratories.

12.4 Regulation (EU) 2018/848 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 on organic production and labelling of organic products. Recognitions by Swiss and Great Britain market.

12.5 Codex Alimentarius “Guidelines for the Production, Processing, Labeling and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods”.

12.6 Procedures Manual Caucascert LLC.

12.7 Documents Manual Caucascert LLC.

12.8 USDA NOP 7CFR 205.

12.9 Georgian National Organic Standards , mandatory and voluntary.

12.10 Private standards (non-mandatory, if relevant).

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