

A Social Approach for the Assessment of Transition Farms: Taking Steps toward Whole-System Organic Certification in Mexico

**F. Guevara-Hernández^{1*}, J. Nahed-Toral², L. Rodríguez-Larramendi^{3*}, R. Pinto-Ruiz¹,
G. Cruz-Rodríguez⁴, P. Mendoza-Nazar⁵ and H. Gómez-Castro¹**

¹*Faculty of Agronomic Sciences, Autonomous University of Chiapas Apdo. Postal 78,
Z.P.30470, Villaflores, Chiapas, México*

²*Agroecology Department at the College of the South Border (ECOSUR)-San Cristóbal de Las
Casas, Chiapas*

³*Network for Rural Development Studies. Villacorzo, Chiapas*

⁴*MCPAT Student. Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas*

⁵*Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. Autonomous University of Chiapas,
Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas*

¹*Telephone/Fax: +52 965 6521477*

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ABSTRACT This paper integrates a methodology for an assessment previous to organic certification of transition farms. The methodology was designed and applied to a farm in the municipality of Villaflores, Chiapas. Research consisted of grouping certification standards from different certification agencies into an integrated methodology for evaluating the farm prior to it being submitted to the certification process. The norms proposed by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements and the Mexican certifier of ecological products were utilized—both of these accredited by the German certification program—as well as the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture's principles of organic agriculture. The methodology was based on a systemic approach and applied using agricultural anthropology. Field research was conducted from January-May 2012, through interviews, field observations and triangulation of information. Results indicated that within the agricultural sub-system of the farm, 77% of indicators meet the norms of organic certification and within the animal subsystem only 74%. This study permits the pre-assessment of farms and the progress quantification toward organic certification. Given the cost of taking on the certification process, this pre-assessment represents an important tool to help small farmers develop their capacity to identify farm components and interactions, keep records on all farm activities and plan organic transitions.