

Press release, June 2019

Austria Bio Garantie and bio.inspecta come together under the roof of EASY-CERT group

Sub.: Austria's and Switzerland's leading organic inspection bodies leverage synergies through holding company in a bid to safeguard service quality and market leadership

Austria Bio Garantie and bio.inspecta, the two leading organic inspection bodies in Austria and Switzerland respectively, came under one roof in organisational terms as of 7 June 2019. The two companies' owners fully integrated the companies into the new **EASY-CERT group AG** of which they are now joint owners with equal rights. In their home countries, Austria Bio Garantie and bio.inspecta will continue to operate as autonomous organisations.

For many years now the two companies have maintained close cooperation. From their beginnings as organic inspection bodies, both have grown into comprehensive service providers over the past 25 years. Among much other collaboration they jointly developed the www.easy-cert.com certificate platform. In order to offer clients the broadest possible range of services, joint services were offered in Austria, Switzerland and beyond. Moreover, both companies held reciprocal ownership interests.

Not least with a view to the dynamic development of the organic marketplace in recent years, the cooperation between the two companies has proven to be a foresighted decision that proved its worth in all areas. «Given the rising importance of organic agriculture and the associated organic marketing, we must leverage additional synergies in order to continue to meet the growing demands in a most exacting manner. The merger is designed to sustainably safeguard our high quality of service provision and our companies' market leadership», says Hans Matzenberger, the managing director of Austria Bio Garantie.

«For some time now our clients have already been benefiting from a comprehensive one-stop service. In addition to organic inspection and certification, the range of services we offer includes many private labels, statutory instruments and standards in the areas of fair trade and sustainability. The merger between Austria Bio Garantie and bio.inspecta will allow us to work even more efficiently from now on», explains Ueli Steiner, CEO of bio.inspecta.

The merger of the two companies also serves to safeguard the organic ethos which is deeply ingrained in the two companies' corporate culture. «The aim is to keep the companies in «organic hands» in the long term and to continue to work for the benefit of the organic farming sector. This step is also designed to leverage synergies between Austria Bio Garantie and bio.inspecta and to jointly advance organic certification. » says Peter Jossen, the newly elected President of the Board of Management.

The new umbrella organisation's governing body (Board of Management) is composed of the following individuals:

Peter Jossen (CH) – President – lawyer, notary and former National Councillor
Michael Stelzl (AT) – Vice president – Managing Director of the Institut Hygienicum laboratory in Graz
Urs Niggli (CH) – Director of the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL)
Christina Ritter (AT) – Organic farmer and representative of Bio Austria Tyrol
Susanna Küffer Heer (CH) – Long-standing board member of Demeter International
Robert Holzer (AT) – Organic farmer, entrepreneur and board member of Bio Austria Lower Austria and Vienna
Ueli Steiner (CH) – CEO of bio.inspecta
Hans Matzenberger (AT) – Managing Director of Austria Bio Garantie

Hans Matzenberger and Ueli Steiner serve as managing directors of the new umbrella organisation.

Key metrics of the newly established group:

With their 260 employees and 160 freelance staff, Austria Bio Garantie and bio.inspecta together complete some 38,000 audits per year in Austria, Switzerland and internationally. Together they serve 21,000 clients in the organic agriculture sector and 4000 clients in the areas of processing, trade and imports. The group's joint turnover is approximately CHF 24 million.

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Company history:

Austria Bio Garantie (ABG) and bio.inspecta were established as organic inspection bodies in 1993 and Austria and 1998 in Switzerland respectively. To the founders it was important that while bio.inspecta was to be under the remit of organic associations and other stakeholders as part of the organic sector, as an inspection body it could act autonomously and independently.

The previous owners of ABG include Bio Austria regional associations, ORBI – Förderungsgemeinschaft für gesundes Bauerntum, Biolandwirtschaft Ennstal, Demeter Austria, Ökokreislauf Moorheilbad Harbach, Institut Hygienicum laboratory in Graz, and bio.inspecta AG Switzerland.

The previous owners of bio.inspecta AG include the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), Demeter Switzerland, SQS, organic farmers, processors and traders, individuals dedicated to organic farming, and Austria Bio Garantie.