ADITI Policy on Handling of Appeals and Complaints

1	**Aims**	This procedure establishes the system for handling complaints and appeals associated with the certification system.
2	**Background**	a) As an operator, customer, worker or any third party who wants to indicate that one of ADITI's certified operators is in breach of the NOP, NPOP, COS's or any voluntary certification scheme (VCSMPP, INDGAP) requirements and responses to the quality of services rendered by ADITI, Complaint becomes evident. b) If anyone disagrees with ADITI's certification decisions, this type of appeal becomes evident.
3	**Normative framework**	For detailed policy, switch directly here. For EU normative references, jump here. **3.1 NPOP** **Chapter 4 Accreditation of Certification Bodies** 4.2.3 Quality System (iv) The Certification Body shall follow a quality management system based on the policies and procedures laid down in the form of a Quality Manual and an Operating Manual. The quality manual shall, inter alia, include the following: • the policy and procedures for dealing with complaints, appeals and disputes. **4.4 Certification** **4.4.7 Certified operators** 4.4.7.1 Information to the Operators The accredited Certification Bodies shall ensure that each certified operator shall be provided at the time of application: • An adequate description of the procedure for inspection, certification and appeals. **4.4.7.3 Complaints record** The accredited Certification Body shall have policies and procedures for dealing with complaints against its operation and against certified operators. It shall keep a record of all complaints and remedial actions relating to certification. When a complaint is resolved a documented resolution shall be made and forwarded to the complainant and the party concerned. **4.4.7.4 Appeals record** The Accredited Certification Body shall have procedures for the consideration of appeals against its decisions and shall maintain the record of all appeals. **4.5 Accreditation procedure** **4.5.13 Complaints** i) APEDA on receipt of complaints against the operator / Certification Body in respect of violation of NPOP shall investigate the complaint by obtaining relevant documents from the concerned stakeholder. ii).In course of the investigation, if major irregularities/non conformities are observed, APEDA shall issue a show cause notice to the operator / Certification Body as to why sanction should not be imposed.

iii). The operator / Certification Body shall have to respond within 15 days from the date of receipt of such Show Cause Notice.

iv). Thereafter, a final investigation report shall be prepared by APEDA and placed before the NAB for its decision.

v). If the non-conformities are confirmed against the operator / Certification Body, NAB shall impose appropriate sanctions.

3.2 COR

C.2.4.2 The CB shall issue a written notice of denial of certification to any applicant to whom it denies certification, either because operations resulting in the products included in the application are still non-compliant with requirements or simply because the applicant did not respond to the notification of noncompliance. This notice shall state the reason(s) for denial and the applicant's right to:

- file an appeal of the denial with the CB
- reapply for certification to any accredited CB, including the one who denied certification

C.2.2 Application evaluation

C.2.2.8 The CB shall file a complaint to the CVB or directly to the CFIA if the CB has evidence that another CB has approved an ineligible input. If a CB becomes aware that another CB has rejected an input that they have accepted, the first CB can also submit a complaint.

C.2.2.8.1 The CBs and CVB(s) shall come to a collective decision on the status of the input within 60 working days. The CVBs may consult technical experts with knowledge in inputs to reach an unbiased decision. Any costs/fees associated with this would be the responsibility of the complaining CB(s) if the complaint is found to be unfounded and by the CB(s) that improperly approved the input if the complaint is upheld. In case the CVBs and CBs cannot reach an agreement they can file a complaint with the CFIA.

C.4 Complaint and appeal

C.4.1 The CB shall document procedures to ensure that it deals with the complaints and appeals by the applicant, certificate holder or other party about certification following the requirements specified in ISO 17065.

C.4.2 The CB documented procedures shall deal with, as a minimum:

C.4.2.1 Appeal related to certification decisions

C.4.2.2 Complaints from holders of certificates regarding the CB's program application.

C.4.2.3 Complaints from outside persons or organizations about the CB's operation.

C 4.3 The CB shall communicate the next steps to the certificate holder in case the holder is not satisfied with the CB appeal process. The certificate holder can submit a complaint against the CB to the CVB responsible for the oversight of the CB.

COR-Appendix D:

Additional Information

Under the SFCR the CBs are required to have an appeal process in line with ISO/IEC17065 and the operator has to be informed about this process when

notified about cancellation. This process is considered compliant with the SFCR requirement for "opportunity to be heard".

3.3 NOP:

§205.681 Appeals.

(a) Certification appeals. An applicant for certification may appeal a certifying agent's notice of denial of certification, and a certified operation may appeal a certifying agent's notification of proposed suspension or revocation of certification to the Administrator, Except, That, when the applicant or certified operation is subject to an approved State organic program the appeal must be made to the State organic program which will carry out the appeal pursuant to the State organic program's appeal procedures approved by the Secretary.

(1) If the Administrator or State organic program sustains a certification applicant's or certified operation's appeal of a certifying agent's decision, the applicant will be issued organic certification, or a certified operation will continue its certification, as applicable to the operation. The act of sustaining the appeal shall not be an adverse action subject to appeal by the affected certifying agent.

(2) If the Administrator or State organic program denies an appeal, a formal administrative proceeding will be initiated to deny, suspend, or revoke the certification. Such proceeding shall be conducted pursuant to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Uniform Rules of Practice, 7 CFR part 1, subpart H, or the State organic program's rules of procedure.

3.4 BioSuisse

2.6.1 Appeals
Appeals against rulings based on the Bio Suisse Standards will be considered by Bio Suisse's Independent Appeals Office. Appeals against sanctions must be addressed to the body that imposed the sanction (as per the instructions about the right to appeal). Appeals against decisions made by the certification body must be addressed to the certification body.

D. Breaches of contract; right of appeal
14. Consequences of breaches of contract
Any breach of the licence contract, particularly any violation of the Standards or improper use of the Bud trademark, any unauthorised change to licensed products, the non-compliance with the fee schedule, and the non-disclosure of reportable information will be punished as per the provisions of the Bio Suisse Catalogue of Serious violations may result in the reimbursement to Bio Suisse of any unjustly obtained proceeds from Bud products, a marketing ban, the withdrawal of the Bud products from the market or the termination of the licence contract without notice, and the payment of a contractual penalty. The profitability of the operation will be taken into account when the contractual penalty is determined.
Bio Suisse reserves the right to assert further damages.
The licensee concerned may submit a written appeal against sanction decisions to the appropriate appeals panel. Appeals will be dealt with in accordance with the

Bio Suisse statutes.

Appendix 1 to Part I, Chapter 2: Terms and conditions of the Bio Suisse Bud production contract.

12. Reporting third-party complaints

Farming operations must report any third-party complaints (e.g. by cantonal authorities) to Bio Suisse without undue delay, particularly complaints related to legislation governing the protection of food quality, animal welfare, water quality or those related to the Organic Farming Ordinance. The farming operation authorises Bio Suisse to investigate third-party complaints that are lodged with their inspection and certification body.

3.5 EU 2017/625 Article 138, and EU 2017/625 Article 7

Right of appeal

The decisions taken by Aditi in accordance with Article 55, Article 66(3) and (6), Article 67, point (b) of Article 137(3), and Article 138(1) and (2), concerning natural or legal persons shall be subject to such persons' right of appeal.

The right of appeal shall not affect the obligation of Aditi to take prompt action to elininate or contain the risks to human, animal or plant health, to animal welfare or, as regards GMOs and plant protection products, also to the environment, in accordance with this Regulation.

Aditi provides the operator concerned, or its representative, with:

(b) information on any right of appeal against such decisions and on the applicable procedure and time limits with respect to such right of appeal through its certification procedures and website.

3.6. INDGAP: Section 5

a) The CB shall have a process to handle appeals by the organization / person against any CB decision.

b) Any complaints or appeals against CBs follow the CB's own complaints and appeals procedure, which each CB shall have and communicate to its clients. In case the CB does not respond adequately, the complaint can be addressed to the IndG.A.P. Secretariat.

c) The CB may increase the frequency of surveillances with duly recorded justification for reasons like investigation of complaints, any doubts about continuing adherence to standards prescribed etc

d) The CB shall make publicly available its process for handling appeals and complaints.

3.7. VCSMPP: Section 9

3.7. Complaints

a) The entire system has provisions for entertaining complaints from any stakeholder against any component of the Scheme – the manufacturing units certified under the Scheme, the Certification Bodies approved under the Scheme, the laboratories utilized under the Scheme, and the accreditation

		bodies, NABCB/NABL, are all required to have a complaints system in place as per standards applicable to them. Anyone having a complaint is encouraged to utilise the available mechanisms. b) Any complaint received directly by the National Medicinal Plant Board shall be referred to QCI who in turn will make a reference to the appropriate body against which the complaint is made and monitor it till it is decided upon. c) Any complaint received by QCI shall be similarly handled. d) A statement on complaints as received above with their status shall be reported to the SC in each meeting. 3.7.2 APPEALS a) There are provisions for entertaining appeals from the manufacturing units certified/desirous of certification under the Scheme, the Certification Bodies approved under the Scheme, and the laboratories utilized under the Scheme, which shall invariably be utilized. b) In case anyone aggrieved by the decision of the TC/CC appeals, it shall be handled by the SC. c) In case anyone aggrieved by the decision of SC appeals, the Chairperson, SC shall appoint an independent appeals panel to look into the appeal and recommend action to him/her. d) In handling appeals, the broad principle that the appeal is handled independently of the personnel involved in the decision appealed against shall be maintained. e) A statement of appeals received by the NMPB/QCI shall be placed before the SC in each meeting
4	**Terms**	In order to ensure objectivity and to guarantee examination of all relevant information with regard to any complaint or appeal taken, members that were not involved in the case are opted to resolve them. The decision resolving the complaint or appeal shall be made by, or reviewed and approved by, person(s) not involved in the certification activities related to the complaint or appeal. Moreover, ensuring confidentiality in every case and protection of identities of the personnel involved are also necessary.
5	**Policy**	*For all certification schemes, including EU 2018/848 and its delegated acts.*
	5.1 Procedure on handling of appeals against decisions of ADITI: Appeal is a request by a client for reconsidering of any adverse decision made by ADITI related to its desired certification status. • Appeal can be filed by any person or organisation on the following reasons: 1. Refusal to accept an application. 2. Decisions to denial of certification. 3. Decision on cancellation a certification. 4. Certification Decisions like, but not limited to reduction of scope, suspension, etc. • Any person or organization can file an appeal against the decision of ADITI to the	

Certification Manager. The appeal must be filed in writing within thirty (30) days of the decision of the ADITI along with all the necessary documents in support of the appeal.

- Appointed-

  When appeal is received, Management representative (MR) is appointed by the top management to handle the appeal request. The Quality manager or Certification manager will be chosen as the Management Representative. The management representative should be the one impartial towards the client.

  Once appointed, MR verify the request through verification of the documents for completeness and may ask for additional documentary support if necessary. Once documents are complete, the Management representative acknowledges the receipt of the appeal, and then it shall be registered in the appeal register. The Management representative has the right to either disallow the appeal or address it or to consult the Advisory Board (AB) based on the merit of the contents of the appeal.

  In cases where the certification decision is based on clear and well-defined requirements, the appeal may be deemed invalid. Such cases may include, but are not limited to:

  - **Indisputable evidence** of failure to adhere to the conditions applicable to suspended status.
  - **Indisputable evidence** of failure to provide a non-conformance (NC) response by the agreed due dates.
  - **Indisputable evidence** of providing falsified documentation or information to Aditi.

- Once appeal is accepted, top management appoint the appeal committee which is same as the Advisory Board. At least 3 members of advisory board shall be there, and this is confirmed by the operator that they have no objection with the appeal committee through email and before commencing the appeal process.
- Operator may object for any appeal member based on the justifiable grounds and for the reasons which may be a conflict of interest.
- Appeal committee/ advisory board may ask any of the Certification staff for the facts to help in discharging the appeal based on facts.
- Appeal committee/ advisory board's Recommendation is final to address the appeal. In general, the correction and corrective action shall be taken accordingly.
- Top management is responsible to communicate the appeal decision to all the parties involved including client, certification team, auditors, etc.
- The progress of the investigation and the outcome shall be informed to the appellant to the extent required. A formal notice of the completion of the appeal handling process with results shall be sent to the appellant immediately. In case the appellant is not satisfied with the ADITI appeal process, he/she can submit a complaint against the ADITI to the accreditation body responsible for the oversight of the ADITI.
- During the appeal process it is ensured that the submission, investigation and decision on appeals shall not result in any discriminatory actions against the appellant.
- Management representative will follow each appeal to a conclusion and initiate possible

preventive actions if any. The effectiveness of such actions would be assessed and reported in the Management review meetings.

- If the result is to agree with the objection made through appeal, then the nonconformity is dropped, and the previous actions are reversed. For example, it may result into, but not limited to:
  - Dropping the non-conformity
  - Uplifting the suspension, and/ or re-instating the certificate.
  - Aditi's procedure and timelines for uplifting and re-instating the certification shall be followed in these cases as in work instruction WI 4.2.15.1.
- If appeal committee / advisory board disagrees with the appellant objection and upholds the nonconformity, then the appellant/ operator is notified of this decision. At that point, the operator:
  - Submits corrective action documentation (either within the original timeframe given earlier by Aditi for correction action submission or,
  - if that time period has elapsed, within 14 working days) that shows complete resolution of the cited nonconformity; or
  - the corrective action documentation is reviewed through the normal process.
- Whenever an appeal is upheld:
  - The Quality Manager along with the top management determine whether the initial decision was overturned as a result of a failing on the part of the Aditi.
  - If that is determined to be the case, the QM shall decide upon appropriate corrective actions.
  - The implementation of corrective actions shall be done in a timely manner.
  - The implementation of such corrective actions shall be checked during the course of internal audits or management reviews.

5.2 Procedure on handling of complaints:

Complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, other than appeal, by any person or organization, to ADITI relating to its activities where a response is expected.

- Complaints can be made by any person or organization against the following, but not limited to:

1. ADITI's operation and/or procedure.
2. The auditor, expert, Certification Committee, or staff of ADITI.
3. Process of auditing by the auditor
4. Misuse of certification status either in the scope or in the logo.
5. OFIS irregularities notifications for EU (should be handled through OFIS-INTC portal wherever necessary)

- The complaint must be made in writing to ADITI with complete details of the complainant (Name, Address, Organisation, etc.) and description of the problem. Managing Director/

Senior Manager -Operations will acknowledge the accreditation body complaint within a working day. Other complaints received by the administrative team is forwarded to the Quality Manager. He/she will acknowledge the complaint within a working day, if it has been directed via the ADITI website or to the complaining person/company/organization

- If the complaint has no details of the complainant or the description is not adequate, ADITI shall reserve the right to detail the complaint as deemed unfit.
- On receipt of the complaint ADITI will examine whether the complaint relates to its certification activity. If ADITI is responsible for the complaint, then it shall register it in the complaint record and shall deal with it appropriately. Depending on the nature of the complaint a time frame will be decided between ADITI and the complainant. This will be recorded in the complaint register.
- The Quality Manager initiates a detailed investigation. A Complaint committee, an independent review team composed of the Quality Manager, the Assistant Quality Manager for proceedings, and all the Heads of Inspection, Evaluation & Certification who/whose team members have been involved in the project are assigned to conduct the investigation.
- The investigation shall include the following, all these steps shall be included and concluded in the relevant report format:

A. Investigation:

1) Which control authority(-ies) and/or control body(-ies) are/were in charge of the investigation?

2) Describe cooperation between the different operators and competent authority(-ies) or, where appropriate, control authority(-ies) and/or control body(-ies) involved, in the different countries involved (if any).

3) Which investigation methods/procedures have been used?

- For instance, have the operators concerned been submitted to a specific control? And also have the operator conducted and submitted the internal investigation report?
- Unannounced inspection to the concerned unit/operation to investigate the matter (if need arises)
- Have samples been taken and analysed?

4) What is the outcome of the investigation?

- What are the results of the inspections: and analyses (if any)?
- Has the origin of the non-compliance/suspicion of non-compliance/other problem raised been cleared up?
- What is your assessment of the seriousness of the non-compliance/suspicion of non-compliance/other problems raised?
- Recording the outcomes.

5) Has the origin of the contamination/non-compliance/suspicion of non-compliance/other

problem raised and the responsibility of the actors been clearly identified and established?

- Comment on the origin of the contamination/non-compliance/other problem raised and the responsibility of the actors, for example, but not limited to:

  - Does the investigation confirm the identification of un-authorized products by Aditi'? What is the origin of contamination? Does it confirm that it was done at the certified location your certified operator? If not, what is the origin (supplier/ transport/ packaging, etc.), and how is it communicated to the relevant CB of the source of contamination is under the control of another certification body? Was it accidental or intentional? What actions are taken by Aditi for the same? *

*These are just a few examples; similar approach shall be taken for all kind of complaints.

6) Have the operators identified been involved in other non-compliance/suspicion of non-compliance/other problem raised cases in the last 3 years?

- Comment on the operators identified in other non-compliance 'suspicion of non-compliance/other problems in the last 3 years:

B. Measures taken:

1) What preventive and corrective measures have been taken (e.g. as regards the distribution/circulation of the product on the Union market and third-country markets)?

2) What actions in case of non-compliance/suspicion of non-compliance/other problem raised were taken on the operators and or the products concerned? (1)

- Mode of actions (written form, warning, etc.)?
- Was the certification of the producer/processor limited, suspended or withdrawn?
- Date of entry into force of the actions (if any) (DD/MM/YYYY)
- Duration of the actions (if any) (in months)
- Control authority and/or control body which adopted and applied the actions (if any)

3) Are additional inspections planned at the operators concerned?

4) What other measures are the control authority or control body planning to prevent the occurrence of similar cases?

C. Other information / Additional measure.

- ADITI shall provide the outcome of the investigation done on the complaint and ensure the complainant’s satisfaction on the closing of the complaint.
- If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of ADITI‘s complaints handling process, the complainant may refer the complaint to the Accreditation Body (AB). Complaints that are not closed out within a timeframe documented and agreed with the complainant shall be escalated to the Top Management of ADITI to ensure that the complaint receives the appropriate priority.

		• All complaints shall be closed within 20 working days from the date of receipt of the complaint, based on the complexity this may extend to 30 working days in rare circumstances. • In general, the correction and corrective action shall be taken accordingly. • The quality manager will follow each complaint to a conclusion and initiate possible preventive actions if any. The effectiveness of such actions would be assessed and reported in the Management review meetings. • When the nature of complaint is related to TC, while the investigation is in process TC will be kept on hold till the conclusion has been made by the Complaint committee. **D. Outcomes of the investigation:** 1. Where a non-conformance is substantiated against a certified client, a complaint investigation may result into various actions, including, but not limited to: - Asking further corrective actions in defined timelines - Reduction of the scope - Suspension for a defined time-period and specific conditions - Withdrawal/ Revoke of the certification, etc. These decisions are communicated immediately to the client and not less than within 2 working days. The decision of Aditi can be appealed by the affected client, the policy remains same as described earlier in this document. 2. Where a non-conformance is substantiated against Aditi's staff or audit processes, it may result into the revising of it's policies, and retraining it's staff. Where needed, strict actions will be taken against the intentional and severe violation of code of ethics.
6	**Access to this policy**	• This policy is available to all interested public • It must be handed out to all ADITI certification and inspection personnel.
7	**Related Documents**	• F 7.2.1_Contract of Certification • F 2.3.3A_Appeal record • SOP 2.3.0 Complaint Management • F 2.3.2A Record of complaint • F 2.3.2B Complaint Register • WI 2.3.1_Complaints Handling Procedure • WI 4.2.15.1 Notification of Suspension and Withdrawal/Cancellation of Certification

Revision history:

Revision date	Version	Description of Changes

18.06.2020	02	The entire document is updated to fulfill the requirements of ISO 17065:2012. Section 5 has been modified to include differences between Complaints and Appeals and how to address the same. Appeal Record (2.3.3 form) has been included in section 7 and WI 2.3.1 is removed and is to be archived.
01.10.2020	03	Background- section Sentence b) is updated. Section 5.1 "Appeal can be filed by any person……reasons" are updated. Personnel who will be handling the Appeal have been updated. Page 2 "The progress of the investigation and the outcome shall be …" is updated.
25.11.2020	04	Normative references have been updated to include the BioSuisse standards.
25.11.2022	05	Normative references have been updated to include the EU Regulations 2018/848
16/03/2023	06	Updated IndG.A.P. and VCSMPP requirements
01/06/2023	07	Added addition control measure from ADITI end to ensure the integrity has been maintained in the entire process of investigation.
22/12/2023	08	Updated the COS changes as per the version 19 in the section C2.2
18/07/2024	09	Updated with Complaint receipt and its acknowledgment. Updated the OFIS investigation questionnaires.
02/09/2024	10	Updated as per Commission Regulation (EU) 2018/848 and it's delegated acts