Internal and Public Information Policy

1	Aims	Obtain a maximum of transparency in certification processes for all involved parties, without affecting the necessary principles of confidentiality.
2	Background	Internal and external communication plays a key role in modern enterprises. The success of our certification body depends in a high degree on inspectors and clients being updated permanently concerning changes in regulation, CERES policies and procedures.
3	Normative framework	**ISO/IEC 17065:** 7.1.3: *When explanations are required as to the application of (…) documents for a specific certification scheme, they shall be formulated by relevant and impartial committees (or persons) possessing the necessary technical competence, and made available by the certification body upon request.* 7.10.1: *When the certification scheme introduces new or revised requirements the certification body shall ensure these changes are communicated to all clients.* **NOP says:** § 205.501 (a) (a) A private or State entity accredited as a certifying agent ... must: (8) Provide sufficient information to persons seeking certification to enable them to comply with the applicable requirements of the Act and the regulations in this part; § 205.504: A private or State entity seeking accreditation as a certifying agent must submit the following documents and information…: (b) (5) A copy of the procedures to be used for making the following information available to any member of the public upon request: (i) Certification certificates issued during the current and 3 preceding calendar years; (ii) A list of producers and handlers whose operations it has certified, including for each the name of the operation, type(s) of operation, and the effective date of the certification, during the current and 3 preceding calendar years; (iii) The results of laboratory analyses for residues of pesticides and other prohibited substances conducted during the current and 3 preceding calendar years; and (iv) Other business information as permitted in writing by the producer or handler… **Rainforest Alliance Rules for CBs:** 1.3.67 The CB shall have a procedure in place to disseminate information to CB personnel and certificate holders about the Rainforest Alliance Certification Program, including its official standards, rules, policies and other certification documents within 2 business days from the date communicated by the Rainforest Alliance. 1.3.68 The CB shall have mechanisms in place, including contact points for questions, to answer certificate holder and CB personnel questions and provide explanations about official communications.
4	Terms	None
5	Policy	
5.1	Keeping staff informed	a. CERES facilitates access to all QM documents, including external standards, to all staff through an online filing system, which allows for continuous synchronisation. b. CERES informs all inspectors and other interested staff with a maximum timeline of one month about changes in relevant regulations, policies and procedures. Besides the regulatory text, an easily understandable

		explanation will be provided, either through an email, a "Brief Info", or a specific training. For RA, the timeline is two business days. c. Regular meetings (mostly online) take place between different teams for exchange of all relevant information.
5.2	**Staff participation in decisions**	Whenever possible, before making decisions, all potentially involved or affected staff should be informed and encouraged to give their opinions and comments. The management shall consider the criteria expressed by the staff.

5.3	**Keeping clients informed**	a. CERES provides clients or applicants for certification copies of the respective standard(s), if possible in a language understandable for them, accompanied by easily understandable summaries of the most important requirements.
		b. CERES publishes certification policies and other relevant parts of the Quality Manual on its website, to make structures and procedures as transparent as possible.
		c. All CERES staff gives clients or other interested public satisfying information upon request concerning standards, policies, or procedures.
		d. Inspectors or other local CERES representatives are responsible of informing all local clients immediately about relevant changes in regulations, policies, or procedures.
		e. The following kind of documents are provided in a locally understandable language:
		   o Management Plans
		   o The most important "Brief Info" documents
		   o The most important CERES Policies
		   o Contracts
		f. Upon request, clients will be informed about procedures for extending, reducing or suspending or refusing certification, by providing answers to specific questions, or sending copies of e.g. WI 4.2.10 or 4.9.1.

5.4	**Changes in standards**	Clients must de duly informed about relevant changes in standards. The responsible Programme Manager (PM) at CERES will decide, which changes are "relevant". If changes are relevant for clients, CERES informs clients accordingly in due time. Normally, the information is transmitted through the local representations (branch offices), which are more directly in contact with clients, but clients can also be informed directly by the head office. Under Rainforest Alliance, all changes of standards and other relevant information related to the certification program must be communication to clients within two business days from the date of receiving the information from RA. The PM decides if it is enough to forward the modified standard (and related information provided by the standard owner), or additional explanations must be given. Such additional explanation can be through emails or specific "Brief Info". In some cases, it may be necessary to offer online courses for clients, or even in-person meetings, to explain substantial changes to standards.
5.5	**Inform the public**	a. Updated client lists are published on the CERES website – except for programs that have their own certified client databases (GG, GOTS, NOP) b. Upon request by the public, CERES will make available test results of NOP certified clients. The affected client must be informed accordingly. If putting together the requested information is time consuming, the person or organisation seeking information, may be charged a fee for the respective work, at a rate of 80 €. c. Points of contact for informing staff and clients about any official communications are mostly the local offices in each country. When these

		cannot answer questions, they forward them to the country coordinator and/or program manager.
6	**Related documents**	0.4 Document Control WI
		2.1.2.1 Data Security and Confidentiality (WI)
		Chapter 3