

Ethical Concerns Associated with Organic Food in Europe

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Abstract

Values are at the center of organic farming, but with the growing market for organic food involving large agribusinesses and global trade, there is increasing concern that the core values and principles of organic farming are no longer respected. This was one of the reasons for IFOAM to consult on and formulate Principles of Organic Agriculture (POA): health, ecology, fairness, and care (IFOAM 2005).

The paper examines ethical concerns that are important to consumers, producers and other stakeholders. Most concerns can be related to the three pillars of sustainable development, but equally important are issues that cut across these dimensions.

The paper also looks at what ethical reasoning lies behind the concerns and how they relate to current standards and the four IFOAM principles of health, ecology, fairness, and care.

The value expectations differ between the different stakeholders. They relate to farmers and suppliers of organic products, to employees in various stages of the organic food chain, to consumers, to the community or society at large as well as to animals and the environment or ecosystems.

Not all values are considered in the rules and in certification, although clear and auditable standards and external verification is important for trust & transparency of organic food system.

Future challenges lie in delivering on the ethical concerns of the various stakeholders as they are expressed in the four principles, but striking the right balance with practicability, while determining what aspects can be included in the inspection and certification systems (clear rules/audits), and for which the provision of guidance through training, education, best practice examples, and communication is more important.

Considering a broader range of value requires developing such standards in a participatory and transparent way that shows respect for different positions. For this, a wide communication about the core values is necessary and more experience needs to be gained how certain values, for example fairness can be implemented.

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