

## Communication of Ethical Values in Organic Farming

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### Abstract

*Due to globalization and growing anonymity of trade with organic products, farmers are under pressure to lower their production standards in order to keep up with worldwide competition. On the other hand, consumers increasingly criticize food products that were produced under unsatisfactory social and environmental conditions.*

*Ethical consumerism is a growing trend worldwide, and moral responsibility is a relevant buying motivation among various consumer groups (Carrigan et al. 2004, Shaw and Shiu 2003, Browne et al. 2000). Several examples illustrate that consumers of organic food are willing to pay an additional price premium for ethical values in organic production, such as fair trade products from developing countries or the direct support of small farmers' initiatives in disadvantaged areas (Schmid et al. 2004). Higher prices, however, can only be achieved if potential buyers know about the additional ethical commitments and efforts undertaken by the suppliers of organic food. Communication with potential buyers is thus crucial for the success of adding ethical values to organic offerings.*

*Holistic approaches internalizing ethical values into production systems and living conditions are very difficult to communicate to consumers who are confronted with a flood of product information day-to-day. It is of great importance to accentuate the personal benefits of consumption, such as enjoying the full taste of an organic product without a bad conscience about tortured animals or exploited workers, or with the additional good feeling of contributing to real jobs for disabled persons or to the protection of endangered landscapes.*

*The following hypotheses are to be verified by further research.*

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*Communication of additional values to consumers is easier:*

- *if the messages about additional ethical benefits are consistent with the product image,*
- *the higher the additional value for the consumer,*
- *the larger the differences to the common organic standards,*
- *the easier the proof and the certification of ethical values,*
- *the closer the connection between product and additional value.*

*So far, not much is known about which ethical values and arguments are comprehensible and important to organic consumers, nor is much known about how to communicate them most effectively. A CORE Organic pilot project, which started in 2007, aims at the identification of promising arguments to improve the communication of additional ethical values between organic farmers and consumers.*