



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS

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**“Women and organic agriculture”
Organic women’s day during the OWC Modena 2008**

Different studies demonstrate that organic is bringing more women into farming. Some people talk about the refeminization of agriculture. There is an increased interest in the role of women in organic agriculture.

The first farmers in the world were women and during human history they have always played a part in agriculture. In most small-scale agriculture in the Third World women are still responsible and/or heavily involved in farming. But in the so called developed countries of the world agricultural production became increasingly the domain of men maybe mainly because of mechanization and further industrialization of agriculture. Agricultural machines are often heavy, their design made for use by men, and they require mechanical knowledge, considered a male quality, not to be taught to women.

More and more farming has become an agro-industry, changing the nature of the agricultural production system from integrated, nature oriented, community based with regards to knowledge etc. as versus mechanized, monopolized, industrialized, etc. which takes away the knowledge, power of decision and most importantly the potential of further development of production techniques from farmers women, and subsequently men, in favour of an industrial development in the hands of a few trans-national companies which currently dominate large parts of the research and development as well as the markets for agricultural farm inputs and supplies.

But women have also played a big role in changing this situation and in developing organic agriculture. Women like Lady Eve Balfour who in 1945 wrote “The Living Soil”, founder and leader of the Soil Association in the UK. Rachel Carson who 20 years later wrote the book “Silent Spring”, an influential exposition of the drawbacks of intensive chemical farming. These women contributed strongly to the organic agriculture movement development in its first years together with thousands of women practitioners, advocates, scientist who followed their foot steps to further develop organic agriculture and enhance its benefits.

The rapid and extensive development of organic agriculture over the past thirty years has surely helped to embrace a change of paradigm and values, as organic agriculture is not just another agricultural production system, but a production system based on ethical values and principles. The principles of ecology, health, care and fairness are the basis upon which women and men are acting towards working for change. It seems that today women world wide are playing again a bigger role in agricultural and food production. Take for example India: Women are pushing for conversion family land into organic, but also carrying on education activities for spreading their knowledge. In Bhubaneswar 3000 tribal women staged a demonstration demanding the declaration of Orissa as an “organic” state. In Medak, Andhra Pradesh, 1000 women marched through the streets demanding a ban on hybrid and genetically modified (GM) seeds. Navdanya, an Indian

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organic association, established the Grandmother's University. It delivers courses on women's traditional knowledge in Food and Health with the aim of celebrating and sharing the wisdom and skills received from grandmothers, as custodians of culture, tradition and knowledge.

One of the theories for explaining this phenomenon is that conventional agriculture is dominated by the masculine values of domination over nature, people and gender, while organic farming is more open to embrace the female values which might easier accept the principle of equality between the natural environment and womankind, thus striving for harmony with nature, maintaining the quality of environment, embracing the principle of care and caution, thus promoting biodiversity, all inherent values and principles of organic agriculture.

It is clear that women fit perfectly with organic agriculture and that women can play an important role in promoting and developing organic agriculture. For the organic movement worldwide it is important to clearly give support to women's role and initiatives in organic agriculture, as well as to learn how to use the tool of "feminization" for a more sustainable development to meet the needs of all, Women and men alike in all countries around the globe.

Organic agriculture is a good example on how production technologies and the complete chain of supply can affect gender equality and sustainable development.

Women take important roles in the entire organic food chain:

- In the farm, women are very important for saving seeds, maintaining biodiversity, production of traditional crops and livestock, which in turn provides healthy and safe food and saves the culinary culture.
- They take leading roles in eco-tourism and didactic farm activities.
- In the cities, but also in rural areas women decide what to buy for their families. They are leading the increasing consumer demand for organic products.
- They are requesting for organic canteens in their children's' schools and rethinking maternity practices related to organic and biodynamic philosophy.

Despite all the contributions of women in organic agricultural and food production, consumption, sustainable development activities, women are still not well enough represented in decision making bodies. Likewise decision making bodies do not recognize, reflect and respect the women's role and the importance of gender equality for a sustainable development.

The more so is it the role of the global organic movement to do so. The organic women's day will demonstrate and discuss the important role women are playing in organic agriculture. This module should serve as a tool to encourage Women to take up public leadership and encourage intra-government organizations, NGOs and governments as well as corporate leaders to seek gender equality in their

composition as well as in their development strategies and daily operations.

The program includes:

- Photographic exposition
- A workshop including women from different sectors: activists, farmers, processors, retailers, politicians, indigenous, teachers, professors, consumers, doctors, obstetricians
- Cultural event run by women

Women and men are invited to submit an abstract with their ideas, so that the organizers are enabled to compile a diverse program!

Deadline October 15th.

Cristina Grandi
September 13th. 2007