



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS

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Speech at the opening of the 15th Organic World Congress

September 2005

Dear participants in the 15th Organic World Congress,

Dear friends of organic farming,

This is the 15th Organic World Congress organised by IFOAM; It is my 8th. When I went to my first one in Budapest 1990 I could not envision that I would end up here in beautiful Adelaide 2005. I could also hardly envision the development IFOAM has undergone since then. But I could to a large extent envision what has happened with organic farming.

Most visible is probably the tremendous development in the market. Market shares have increased in a rapid pace reaching around 5 percent in Denmark and Switzerland. Also, organic producers have developed new and innovative marketing schemes, Community Supported Agriculture, box schemes etc. Research had a very slow start but now we get increasingly more and better organic research. In the agriculture policy arena we have managed to get organic into the centre of the debate. Many international organisations, the European Union and many governments have recognised the relevance of organic. Both countries in the North and in the South; Germany, UK, Brazil, Costa Rica and several Indian states have set targets for organic. OK, in some cases there is a lot of rhetoric and not so much action, but these words will sooner or later have to be materialised.

Last but not least, the development in organic farming itself: the tremendous growth in acreage and numbers over the last decades. Australia is the world leader when it comes to total certified organic acreage. My own home country, Sweden, has a target that 20 percent of the land should be organically farmed by year 2005, and I can happily announce that it is almost accomplished - the latest figures states 19 percent! I also think it is worth mentioning the actual increase in productivity. I don't think there are any statistics, but I am very convinced from what I have seen that organic farmers of today have improved their productivity and the



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quality of their products a LOT compared to 20 years ago. Practice shows that organic farmers can reach comparable yields as conventional. Research shows that organic is a more productive system if all relevant aspects are taken into account, such as the external costs and the maintenance and production of eco system services

I became engaged in organic some 28 years ago because I thought that it was very important to show that another reality is possible, that human kind is not forced to destroy the whole planet in our quest for happiness, a good life and fulfilment. On contrary, by destroying nature man is eroding the very foundation for our happiness, a good life and fulfilment. Industrial and chemical farming practices destroy nature, they cause the eradication of species, they pollute, they degrade the food, they even kill an unknown number of people. These practices have not been any blessing for human kind, they have not even been able to give farmers a decent income.

I think we all, all of us in this room, all the million organic farmers in the world, all the hundreds of millions consumers that buy organic products, all the good forces have shown that it is indeed possible to have a farming system that is capable of combining:

- good and healthy food
- the maintenance and improvement of soil fertility
- protection of bio-diversity and nature
- maintenance of critical eco-system services
- respect for humans and respect for animals

That is organic farming - clearly the most sustainable production system!

Of course, we still have a long way to go. We have a long way to go on two fronts:

The first front is to continue to expand organic. The fact is that organic is only practiced by around a percent of the world's farmers. It is our mission to constantly increase this proportion. This includes fighting a very powerful alliance of big input supply companies, parts of the food industry and the larger part of the agricultural establishment. But it also includes education and dialogue with all the potential organic farmers, i.e. the common farmer. It includes building partnerships with other movements,

environmental, consumer and social movements. Also to work together with the forces within the establishment that have started to change their mind. We are a liberation movement, a movement to liberate animals from cages, to liberate acres from poisoning, to liberate farmers from the chemical treadmill, to give safe and good food to the people. I look forward to hear the reports of progress in this Congress!

The second front is to improve organic. We all know that organic is not perfect. On a number of accounts we need to improve:

- We need to better adapt organic to all the conditions of the world, from paddy rice over pastoralism to the management of natural areas. I have understood that Australia has its own challenges.
- We need to improve the environmental performance of organic. While undisputedly organic farming is superior to conventional farming when it comes to bio-diversity and protection of nature, there is still plenty of improvement to be made e.g. in energy use.
- We need to improve the social performance of organic. Here we have issues like working conditions for farm labourers, but we also have the role farms can play in the knitting of a new social fabric creating or recreating relationships with consumers, the resurgence of rural areas and the redesign of the food system.

For all this, the promotion of Best Practices is essential, and in many cases more efficient than working through standards. While I do think standards can play an important role, and they surely have played a very important role for organic, I think we would be greatly misled to believe that most of the future challenges for organic is dealt with by producing additional pages of standards. Too detailed standards are killing variation. Variation is a key for development - a statement that all ecologists will support. A forum like this Congress is an excellent platform for the promotion of Best Practices. We need to hear about what others are doing, we need to debate and discuss and never rest and become complacent. It helps that a Congress like this is also a place to have fun, to meet old friends or make new ones.

We need to maintain the steady focus of our main goal. That goal is expressed in the mission statement of IFOAM:



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Our goal is the worldwide adoption of ecologically, socially and economically sound systems that are based on the principles of Organic Agriculture.”

We have not yet tapped the potential of organic. IFOAM calls on governments to allocate sufficient resources in this green growth-industry. Give us the resources spent the last fifty years on chemical farming and we will present miracles!

Let this Congress inspire us; inspire Australia and the world at large!