

Organic Agriculture, Definition

August 15th, 2007

Background:

The 2005 General Assembly adopted the motion that “IFOAM shall succinctly define 'organic agriculture' based on the Principles of Organic Agriculture”. The World Board agreed that the Definition of Organic Agriculture (DOA) should adhere to the following criteria:

- Short / concise
- Positive as opposed to normative
- Positive as opposed to negative (what Organic Agriculture is NOT or does NOT use)
- Covers the full diversity of Organic Agriculture in the world
- No specific reference to certification (in line with position on full diversity of organic agriculture)
- Based on the Principles of Organic Agriculture

The IFOAM World Board installed a Task Force to steer the process on articulating the Definition of Organic Agriculture.

In addition to the mandate set by the World Board, the Task Force decided the definition should:

- Be functional, without being legalistic
- Be elegant, without being poetic
- Refer to organic's farming roots

The Task Force began formulating a first draft based on a report that summarized and analyzed existing and submitted definitions. A call was then made to IFOAM's internal bodies to comment on the first draft. All responses were analyzed, considered and appreciated.

Details of the process are contained on the IFOAM website at http://www.ifoam.org/organic_facts/doa/index.html.

Based on the feedback, the Task Force now proposes several optional definitions, all of which would go with the same explanatory notes.

A:

Organic agriculture includes all agricultural systems that are rooted in the organic principles to sustain and enhance health, ecology and fairness in a precautionary and responsible manner.

B:

Organic agriculture: A system that provides healthy food and other products through natural ecological cycles, methods that care for the environment, and fair relations with all involved.

C:

Organic agriculture sustains and enhances health, ecology and fairness in a precautionary and responsible manner. Organic production relies on ecological processes and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic management protects and benefits the common environment and provides fair relations, a good quality of life and healthy food to all involved.

D:

Organic agriculture sustains and enhances health, ecology and fairness in a precautionary and responsible manner.

Explanatory notes (these would go with all of the proposed definitions)

- The definition is based upon the Principles of Organic Agriculture that have been formulated and adopted by the IFOAM General Assembly in 2005.
- Agriculture and agricultural systems is used in the broadest sense to include processing and distribution systems as well as production systems of food and other goods, and to include pastoral and wild harvest systems as well as farming.
- Health is the wholeness and integrity of living systems, and the health of individuals and communities cannot be separated from the health of ecosystems. Health is not simply the

absence of illness, but the maintenance of physical, mental, social and ecological well-being.

- Ecology is the inter-relation of all living organisms, including humans, with their environment.
- Fairness is characterized by equity, respect, justice and stewardship of the shared world, both among people and in their relations to other living beings.

Questions

1. Do you prefer one definition over the others? Which one and why?
2. Based on the definitions as proposed here, could you come up with one definition that improves the proposals?
3. Is there a need for additional explanation in the explanatory notes?

Please submit your comments until September 24th, 2007 to Louise Luttikholt (l.luttikholt@ifoam.org).