

Considerations from the Task Force about the Definition of Organic Agriculture Final Draft

Organic agriculture is a food production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.

The considerations of the Task Force to the sentences of the definition are:

“Organic agriculture is a food production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people.”

Since food belongs to the essence of organic agriculture, then it must have prevalence in the order of the definition. Other products like textiles and cosmetics are less essential. Also, choosing ‘food production systems’ harmonizes with the preamble of POA: ‘we nourish ourselves daily’. It was also considered if animals have a place/are considered in this definition. The answer is ‘yes’, because they are part of the fair relationships, that arise because of organic agriculture.

Is soil overemphasized? No, it is the essence of organic agriculture.

When discussing the word ‘Ecosystems’ it was thought that it could be too difficult or too scientific. Nevertheless, it was kept because it refers to the interdependence and interconnectivity among communities of living organisms including the human being.

Only “sustains”, or also “enhance”? In this case, a simple language has more strength: “sustains health” implies that you have enhanced the system to be healthy and not only for a short but a long term.

“It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects”.

This part of the definition refers to the how, or the process necessary to produce something called organic.

Here was taken into account the suggestion to add negative wording that emphasizes the positive; the Task Force chose the phrase “rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects”.

“Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.”

The process of innovation could combine tradition and science, but it is not a must. Although it could also happen without science, organic agriculture is supported by the latter in order to make it more credible before the scientific community and some skeptics, and the application of science must be consistent with the precautionary principle.

The TF discussed the sequence of the 3 sources 'tradition, innovation and science', concluding that as now mentioned should be the simplest way; it confirms with ancients way of farming, still used in organic agriculture, that without science have achieved a level of innovation.

Besides this, the use of the verb "combines" instead of "integrates" or "uses" was seen as a good way to see the whole definition as a good marketing sentence.

The expression "shared environment" points to the impacts at farm level and also beyond.

Explanatory notes:

The former versions of the definition contained explanatory notes. The TF considered that the necessity of making explanatory notes is now taken out with the definition itself. In fact, some people who commented on the Second Draft thought that explanatory notes made it more difficult to understand the definition.

Standards Committee:

The Definition was presented to the Standards Committee for Feedback at their meeting January 19 - 21. The Standards Committee strongly advised to remove the word 'food' so that the definition could cover also other areas of the IBS like cosmetics OR textiles.

Executive Board Meeting in January 2008

The Executive Board considered the work of the Task Force and also the advice of the Standards Committee and decided to remove the word 'food' from the definition.

Therefore the final definition which will be brought for ratification at the General Assembly in June 2008 is:

Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.