



Organic Agriculture and Fair Trade two concepts based on the same holistic principal

Short history of the two movements

More than 75 year ago organic agriculture started in Europe with the idea of the demeter movement to bring all natural forces in regard to agriculture into balance, also with the whole cosmos. The aim of organic agriculture is to serve mankind in developing a most sustainable kind of agriculture: starting point is a healthy and living soil, the basis for healthy plants and animals, all aiming to produce quality food and at the same time taking care of the environment. But the concept is not ending at the production level: processing and labelling is defined as well as the exclusion of Genetic Engineering and criteria for Social Justice within agriculture. The latter means it is not consistent with organic agriculture to treat nature and animals as friends but to violate the rights of the farm workers, small farmers etc. or to exploit producers at the same time. Reference is made to the IFOAM basic standards, published on the IFOAM web page: www.ifoam.org

The Fair Trade movement started 25 year ago as a kind of educative concept, using alternative trade methods to show to the European public the injustice and social unbalance caused by the international trade. The terms of trade (price relation between raw materials and processed/technical goods) developed very much in favour of the industrialized countries at that time. Fair trade started to counter this development in establishing special criteria for sustainable trade with (mainly) smallholders, starting with 'colonialism' products like coffee, tea and cocoa. The most important criteria are:

A defined part of the price (surplus) is paid for community tasks/social issues of the cooperative or farm workers community,
the trade relation should have a long term perspective,
part of the price is paid in advance in order to make the producers independent from local credits (with exaggerated high interest rates).

Why do the two concepts belong together

The well being of humans is to be considered as main priority of both concepts: to allow a sustainable development for all parties involved in the process. Both, organic agriculture and fair trade are including this holistic approach in their standards and criteria.

From the producers perspective the two concepts belong together, because they use similar questionnaires for inspection and could easily save manpower in working together more closely.

The perception of consumers in supermarkets, organic shops and fair trade shops is as follows: buying a product certified/labelled by one concept includes automatically the other label/concept. But in reality not all organic products would fulfil fair trade criteria. On the other hand less than half of the fair trade food products are at the moment certified organic.

What are the differences between the two

The concept of standards/criteria is founded on a different basis: fair trade is more process oriented than organic. It starts in cooperatives with a very low profile in social justice and opens possibilities of development for this cooperative/organisation. Social justice is an aim to be reached during the process/trade relationship. Organic agriculture standards have to be fulfilled before you can label the product 'organic'.

The IFOAM Basic Standards are developed by 600 IFOAM members from more than 100 countries. They should apply worldwide. Fair trade criteria are developed for the south-north trade relationship and (yet) are not applicable to the north-north trade sector.

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The IFOAM guarantee system is a well established concept offering one international accepted set of basic standards, following one inspection, one certification and one accreditation. The fair trade sector has developed a lot of different sets of criteria and has hardly no practice in third party certification.

Main actors in the field of fair trade

Besides those organic traders, who are implementing their own social standards since many years, the following organisation are to be mentioned as main actors in the international fair trade sector:

The Fair Trade Labelling Organisation International (FLO) as the umbrella organisation for TransFair and Max Havellar initiatives (based mainly in Europe and the US) takes care of the register for producer cooperatives for about 10 products (e.g. coffee, tea, cacao, sugar, bananas, etc.)

The International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT) started as association of handicraft producers and traders and is nowadays networking with food producers, wholesalers and traders also.

The Network of European World Shops (NEWS) is an umbrella of the fair trade shops in Europe, defining their identity as significantly different from the conventional shop owner/trader.

The European Federation of Alternative Trade Organisations (EFTA) is the eldest network of fair traders in Europe today engaged in lobby work in regard to the European Union as well as information exchange and cooperation among their members.

The four organisations mentioned above have started the initiative FINE (FLO IFAT NEWS EFTA) in order to find a platform for coordination and cooperation.

Perspective and conclusion

Taking serious the producer's perspective and the consumer's perception as mentioned above, it leads to the conclusion that the cooperation between the two movements has to be intensified. There are different programmes ongoing to increase the knowledge about the other concept and its implementation. But there is still a way to go for better using the synergy effects of both concepts e.g. in regard to inspection and standard setting, lobbying and outreach, etc.

After five years experience in fair trade, more than four years in organic and due to the fact that the roots are so similar as well as there are a lot of synergy win situations ahead of us, I would like to state:

we should take care and grow together what belongs together!

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