

A social agenda for organic agriculture?'

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I believe that fair trade, combined with organic production can help to reduce the kind of trading that exploits producers distant from the final market and ignorant of prevailing prices.'

HRH The Prince of Wales on 'Benefits of organic farming',
21st March 2002, London

The issue of where a social agenda fits in organic agriculture is not new. Aspects were inte-grated into the concept of organic agriculture (OA) at the very beginning of the movement. Organic agriculture, which has a holistic approach that includes taking care of human beings' needs and rights, is supposed to be beneficial for all people involved at all levels. This is, indeed, an ambitious goal. But where to start? How to measure? At what point to conclude?

A significant proportion of IFOAM's members are already working with fair trade issues. For example, the pioneers in setting and implementing criteria and standards for Fair Trade, such as the Fair Trade Labelling Organisation International (FLO, Germany), and the International Federation For Alternative Trade (IFAT, UK), are both IFOAM associates.

Several of IFOAM's trade associates, such as U-Landsimporten (Den-mark), TWIN trading (UK) and Equal Exchange (USA), linked fair trade and the organic movement together from the very beginning. In addition, some IFOAM members, including Instituto Biodinamico (Brazil), Rapunzel and Lebensbaum, (both Germany) and Sekem (Egypt), who started their own programmes have developed specific standards or codes to promote a social agenda in their own organic environment. However, the past shows that the aim, though admirable is ambitious and not easy to achieve or handle.

The implementation of social justice within the daily organic operation has revealed specific challenges; and a social agenda for the entire organic movement, in all its complexities, means much more than just considering its place in trade relationships. Some areas in which a social agenda and the organic are interconnected include:

The development of rural areas and communities: organic agriculture aids rural development, which has a significant positive impact on the social revival.

- Creation of employment. Organic agriculture is known for creating employment all over the globe, this is a social impact from a specific production method, although it is much more than that.
- Local marketing. Organic agriculture encourages local marketing thus it brings people together and establishes relationships between producers and consumers, which for the long term are beneficial and sustainable for both sides.
- Gender aspects. Prevailing attitudes to gender are very progressive in the organic movement giving women equal rights and respect.
- Globalisation. Organic agriculture can be seen as a positive kind of globalisation, harmonised by the idea to serve people, now and in future generations, as well as the environment.
- Financial issues in trading. The longterm influence organic agriculture can have on trade depends on whether specific economic structures on the financial and company level are needed to make the trade more sustainable. Under what conditions would multinationals and global financial trusts convert to a fair, socially and economically sound behaviour in the market place?

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The long history of discussions about social justice standards in IFOAM is still ongoing. According to IFOAM Basic Standards, chapter 11, it is recommended that 'All ILO [International Labour Organisation] conventions relating to labour welfare and the UN Charter of Rights for Children should be complied with'. However, how many people are aware of ILO conventions, what they are concerned with, and what impact their implementation might have to daily operations? Furthermore, is it possible to come to an agreement on the definition of social standards/codes of conducts not only for production and processing, but also for the complete organic trade chain? How can globally relevant and worldwide implementable standards and codes of conducts be developed? One specific challenge to the organic movement in this context is the cost of inspections and certifications. High ethical standards including a detailed social quality will not be implemented on a large scale for any product unless there is a market demanding it. How many consumers are willing to pay an extra social premium on top of the organic premium? Few people could resist agreeing with the statement that 'Organic production shall not be based on violations of basic human rights.' (IFOAM Basic Standards, chapter 11). The problem starts when it comes to defining at what precise point in a specific situation violations begin. The inspector needs clear and 'measurable' indicators to evaluate social justice issues within a reasonable time frame. In an attempt to merge the philosophical discussion with the reality in production and trade,

IFOAM's World Board has initiated two programmes:

1. Working with IFOAM trade members an option paper for a code of conduct for organic trade was developed and discussed at different events all around the globe. Issues covered included: What makes organic trade different?
Which criteria should apply and how should they be monitored?
2. The Social Accountability in Sustainable Agriculture (SASA), focussing on the inspectability of Social Standards, was brought on its way together with Fair Trade Labelling Organisations International (FLO), Social Accountability International (SAI) and the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN). Under the framework of twelve worldwide pilots studies different types of farms in different climates and on different continents will be inspected jointly in regard to different products.

The result of these studies could help the organic movement define the social justice standards in more detail and will help to identify possible fields of further cooperation with the other participating organisations. The cooperation with the fair trade sector is particularly important in further constructive development. It will be mutually beneficial for the image of both sectors to use synergy effects and to avoid unnecessary competition in the market place as much as possible. It was emphasised at IFOAM's General Assembly in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in 1998, how smallholder production systems require, both in the south as well as in the north, special attention and protection. One aspect of this is to make smallholders' voices heard by authorities, especially when a new regulation has been installed. Through its I-GO programme for developing organic agriculture in developing countries, IFOAM has recently financed two workshops specifically related to Internal Control Systems (ICS) of small scale cooperatives. The objective of these workshops are to harmonise the approach of relevant stakeholders, mainly certification bodies, so that they speak with one voice when it comes to negotiations and reasonable revisions of respective regulations such as the EU regulation. How can globally relevant and worldwide implementable standards and codes of conducts be developed?

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