

Feedback from external stakeholders on second draft of Principles of Organic Agriculture,
as sent out in January 2005

Comments listed in no particular order

Comments on organic agriculture principles proposed from IFOAM

General idea is very good but in my opinion, the names of some principles are confusing.

A number of quick remarks and possible suggestions:

ecological

It is very general and without explanations, out of context it says nothing.

May be something like “living ecosystem principle” would be better ?

Another point. This principle does not mention whether organic agriculture can use any external inputs (for example, fertilizers, pesticides and if yes, how).

It mentions somewhere “to minimize resource inputs”: it means that they are used ?

In my opinion, it is better to mention it than to face allegations that you are covering with words the factual situation , namely that organic agriculture can not survive without using some chemical inputs.

Fairness

Totally confusing and even politically dangerous (fair to whom ?).

It might be “society responsible” ??

Care

Also confusing ; may be “sustainable care ” ?

Hope my quick comments might be useful.

*Yours sincerely
(Mr) Serguei Kouzmine*

*secretary to UNECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation
and Standardization Policies (Working Party 6-WP.6), Geneva,
Switzerland*

Consultation on Principles of Organic Agriculture

Dear Madam, dear Sir,

Although a non-member of IFOAM, Switzerland welcomes the opportunity to participate in the current consultation on the review of the IFOAM-principles of organic agriculture.

Clearly defined and broadly accepted principles of the IFOAM could be a basis for further discussion and development of the principles of organic agriculture in the International Task Force of UNCTAD / FAO / IFOAM and in Codex Alimentarius.

We would like to answer some selected questions you have formulated in your request for inputs:

1. Switzerland proposes to remove the term “principle of care” as it stands for all the other principles (health, ecology and fairness) and could therefore be subsumed there. Health and fairness express (partly ecological and) social sustainability and could therefore be combined and united in one principle. We are surprised that economical sustainability is not taken into consideration. Switzerland proposes to base these principles on the three dimensions of sustainability: the social, the ecological, and the economical dimension
2. The proposed wording of the principles makes them universally applicable and takes into account regional variation. However, IFOAM's mission being to unite all forces in organic agriculture, we suggest that they are formulated more precisely in order not to give room to too many interpretations, which would lead to very varying or even controversial interpretations and not to harmonization.
3. Given the very general wording of the draft, the word “should” can, from our point of view, be removed.
9. Switzerland has the impression that the present draft is not enough specific, science-based and maybe technically useful. Therefore, the text does not give sufficient guidance when it comes to controversial questions in the international context (e. g. inclusion of sodium nitrate in the list of admitted substances for fertilization in the annex of the Codex Alimentarius-guidelines). Without a more specific content, the IFOAM-Principles will remain an important constitutional element of IFOAM, but the possibility to have an influence on or to be taken up in another international framework, such as Codex or ITF will be extremely limited.

We thank you for taking our inputs into consideration.

Yours sincerely

Federal Office for Agriculture
Principal Division for Production and International Affairs
Quality and Sales Promotion Section
Patrik Aebi

Dear Task Force on the review of Principles of Organic Agriculture,

We are responding your request for input on the review of the Principles of Organic Agriculture.

We developed the following suggestions:

- The Principle of Health should also cause development on positive direction in thought of people including the current functions.
- The Ecological Principle should ensure the usage of local renewable resources economically and rationally including the current functions.

...

Sincerely,

Prof. A. Babayev,
President of Ganja Agribusiness Association.

1. The principles are narrowed down in 3 only since health and care can be integrated but proper wording must be carefully done. I will try to submit it today.
2. Please delete the sentence on Health : "This principle is the foundation of organic agriculture". It has been stated in the preamble that all the principles are the foundation of OA and therefore to single out that health is the foundation, it contradicts the preamble.

All for now,

GIRLIE R. SARMIENTO
Department of Trade and Industry
Manila, Philippines
01 April 2005

Recommended changes including the format

PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

PREAMBLE

We *uphold* these PRINCIPLES as the foundation of the organic movement:

The Principle of Health (Care)
The Ecological Principle
The Principle of Fairness

The Principles are the roots from which organic agriculture obtains its direction for growth and development. They express the important role of organic agriculture, its contribution to the world, thereby having a vision to improve all agriculture in a global context.

Their function is to guide the positions, programs and standards developed by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). They are formulated as normative, or ethical, Principles in recognition that the desired future is not always realised today.

The Principles concern agriculture in the broadest sense wherein history, culture and community values are embedded. It includes also the way human tend the soil as well as their interaction with landscape, plants, and animals; how food and other vital goods are obtained, handled, prepared, and distributed; and the legacy left by mankind for future generations.

All Principles belong together to be used interdependently in consideration with the other Principles. Together, they have been composed to inspire action and to make their vision a reality. Each Principle is articulated in a statement with an explanation.

Comments by Ananto Seta, ITF
Principles of Organic Agriculture
draft for consultation 0501

Preamble

We hold these Principles as the foundation of the organic movement. The Principles are the roots from which organic agriculture grows and develops. They express the potential contribution that organic agriculture can make to the world, and a vision to improve all agriculture in a global context. Their function is to guide the positions, programs and standards developed by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). They are formulated as normative, or ethical, principles in recognition that the future we desire is not always realised today.

Agriculture is one of humankind's most basic activities because we need to nourish ourselves daily. History, culture and community values are embedded in agriculture. The Principles concern agriculture in the broadest sense, including the way humans tend the soil and interact with the landscape, plants, and animals; what we eat and wear; how food and other vital goods are obtained, handled, prepared, and distributed; and the legacy we leave to future generations.

Four principles have been created to identify organic agriculture:

- The principle of health
- The ecological principle
- The principle of fairness
- The principle of care

Each principle is articulated in a statement with an explanation. The principles all belong together to be used interdependently in consideration with the other principles. Together, they have been composed to inspire action to make their vision a reality.

Note:

Principles of OA should be based on the ultimate goal of OA which is giving the benefit to the Planet, People, and Profit (3P). We need to define the scope/boundary of each of the proposed principles,

otherwise they are intermingled. For example, Principle of Health and Principle of Care are identical, both are stressing on the health of human and environment. With the clear boundary then we could define actions/programs to achieve each of them.

Principle of health

Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil and aquatic environment, plant, animal and human as one and indivisible.

This principle is the foundation of organic agriculture. It states that the health of all living systems and organisms, from the smallest in the soil and aquatic environment to human beings, are mutually dependent. Even though they are separate entities, they belong together and form larger entities. It builds on the shared origin of the words “whole” and “health” and stresses the integrity of living systems as a whole.

Health is the maintenance of physical, mental and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease or illness. It is a continual process that accumulates and distributes the materials and energy necessary for the function of all living organisms. Mutuality, resilience, self-regulation and regeneration are key characteristics of this process.

The role of organic agriculture whether in farming, processing, distribution or consumption is to sustain and enhance the process of health at all stages and levels.

Ecological principle

Organic Agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.

This principle roots organic agriculture within living ecological systems. It stresses that production is to be based on local ecological processes instead of external inputs. Nourishment and well-being is achieved through the ecology of the specific production environment. For example, in the case of crops this is the living soil; for animals it is the farm ecosystem; for fish and marine organisms, the aquatic environment.

Production, through farming or wild harvesting, should not be exploitative. It should be managed in accordance with the cycles that are observed in nature and all living systems. It should seek to enhance the properties of resilience, self-regulation and regeneration inherent in them. These cycles are universal but their operation is site specific. Therefore organic management must be adaptive and appropriate to local conditions, ecology, culture and scale.

This principle also applies beyond the farm to the processing, manufacturing, distribution and retailing of the products of organic agriculture. The concept of cycles should be applied to minimize resource inputs by enhancing reuse, recycle, and recovery of materials and energy. Organic agriculture should also ensure that it does not adversely affect living systems, such as landscape, habitat, biodiversity, water or the general environment, which exist outside of its production areas.

Note:

It would be much better if we put “protecting and enhancing biodiversity” somewhere in the paragraph.

Principle of fairness

Organic Agriculture should be built upon relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.

This principle deals with human relations and relations between humans and other living beings. It stresses that organic agriculture should maintain and conduct these relationships in a manner that ensures fairness: a concept that includes the characteristics of equity, respect, justice and stewardship.

Its use and management of natural and environmental resources should not perpetuate social and ecological injustice. Instead, it should demonstrate how production and consumption can be socially and ecologically equitable and just by developing relationships built on fairness. Human relationships whether within or touched by organic agriculture should ensure fairness at all levels and to all parties – producers, farm workers, processors, distributors, traders or consumers – and should be seen to do so.

With regard to specific ecosystems and environmental resources, organic agriculture and all parties to it should acknowledge that rights and ownership are temporary and are ultimately held in trust for all living organisms and future generations. It's real environmental costs should be accounted for and should be transparent.

This principle insists that animals are provided with the conditions and opportunities of life that accord with their physiology, innate behavioral characteristics and well-being. Organic production systems should be constrained by the animal's needs - and not the other way around.

Note:

How about if we put more emphasize on the fairness in terms of “human relationship” in production, processing, and marketing/trading of OA? This includes “harmonization and equivalence” in OA.

Principle of care

Organic Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment. [how could we differentiate this with the Principle of Health above?]

This principle primarily stresses the approach of organic agriculture to strategic and day-to-day management. Precaution and responsibility is called for, not risk assessment which is a narrow notion based on a narrow scientific or economic appraisal. By contrast care: precaution and responsibility encompass evidence and perspectives that can be scientific but can also be outside of the realm of science, have a moral content and a relevance to non-experts. This principle should govern management, development and technology choices in organic agriculture. Such a precautionary approach to decision-making will recognize that, even when the best scientific knowledge is used, there is often a lack of knowledge with regard to future consequences and to the plurality of values and preferences of those who might be affected.

Organic agriculture is a living and dynamic system. It cannot be static and survive; it has to evolve in the face of both internal and external demands and conditions. Consequently, existing practices and technologies need to be reviewed and if necessary changed, new ones assessed and introduced. Efficiencies can be found and improvements made but this should not be at the risk of jeopardizing the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment. This principle therefore, like

the principle of fairness, depends on the involvement or representation of all stakeholders and it needs institutions of openness, transparency and participation.

Sehr geehrte Frau Luttkholt,

für Ihre Information über die Konsultationen zu den Prinzipien des Öko-Landbaus, die Sie auch im Namen von Herrn Bernward Geier an Frau Bundesministerin Künast gerichtet haben, danke ich Ihnen. Den Entwurf der Prinzipien habe ich mit großem Interesse zur Kenntnis genommen.

Nicht nur aus der Information über die nächsten Schritte sondern auch aus dem Entwurf selbst heraus habe ich verstanden, dass sich diese Prinzipien bereits in einem sehr fortgeschrittenen Disussionsstand befinden. Sie hinterlassen bereits jetzt einen fundierten und ausgewogenen Eindruck.

Es ist zu begrüßen, dass die Konsultationen innerhalb von IFOAM bereits einen derart fortgeschrittenen Stand erreicht haben, weil auch die Europäische Kommission in Aktion 8 des Europäischen Aktionsplans für ökologische Landwirtschaft und ökologisch erzeugte Lebensmittel eine Definition der Grundprinzipien der ökologischen Landwirtschaft vorgesehen hat, um die Transparenz der EU-Rechtsvorschriften zum Öko-Landbau zu verbessern. Ihre Überlegungen innerhalb Ihrer internationalen Vereinigung werden den Diskussionsprozess auf EU-Ebene sicherlich befruchten.

Den Ergebnissen der Konsultationen und der Entwicklung der Prinzipien des Öko-Landbaus im Rahmen von IFOAM schaue ich mit Interesse entgegen. Ich würde mich freuen, wenn Sie mich auch über die weitere Entwicklungsschritte informieren würden.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Im Auftrag

Uwe Slomke

Bundesministerium für Verbraucherschutz, Ernährung und Landwirtschaft

Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture

Coop Italy

Questions:

1. Do the proposed principles presented reflect the values of organic agriculture? If not, are there values or principles that are missing or some that could be removed?

Yes they do.

2. Do you think that the proposed principles are universally applicable and take into account regional variation?

Yes they are universally applicable and they do take into account regional variation.

3. The feedback on the first questionnaire suggested that principles should be formulated in a normative way¹. However some members of the consultative group questioned the use of the word 'should'. The Task Force solicits for ideas on a different kind of wording that is as strongly normative as 'should', but otherwise formulated.

We suggest the use of either 'must' or 'shall'.

4. Do you have any suggestions on the wording of the preamble?

No.

5. Do you have any suggestions on wording and language? Are the principles and the explanations that belong to them easily to be translated in your language?

No suggestion. Yes, the principles and explanations can be easily translated to our language.

6. Do the proposed principles and explanations address 'soil,' 'animal welfare' and 'biodiversity' in a satisfying way? Do 'soil' and / or 'animal welfare' deserve a separate principle? If you think so, please suggest some motivation, formulation and explanation of the new principle.

Yes, they do address this topics in a satisfying way.

In our opinion, 'soil' and 'animal welfare' do deserve a separate principle. They share a common root, but at the same time they have different ethical implications. For instance, as Coop Italia, we have a separate project on 'animal welfare'.

7. Do you think that the principle of fairness rightly addresses the responsibility of Organic Agriculture's in the world? Does the proposed statement make claims and imply obligations that are beyond the control of the Organic Agriculture Movements?

The principle of fairness shall express a commitment to 'ethics' and Social responsibility. Organic Agriculture is expected to be not only fair but also socially responsible and ethical. We would include a statement that expressly refers to ethic issues.

The claims and obligations made in the proposed statement are not beyond the control of the Organic Agriculture Movements.

8. *Repeated request from the first questionnaire:* Do you have any visualization / materialization (e.g. a photo, art, a poem, a music composition) that expresses for you the Principles of Organic Agriculture? You are invited to share them with the Task Force! Could you articulate in one sentence the relationship of this photo, painting etc. with the Principles of Organic Agriculture? At the coming General Assembly space will be provided to exhibit all these visualizations.

9. Any other comments.

No further comments.

Thailand response

Answers

1. Four proposed principles can reflect the values of organic agriculture. However, in the part of the ecological principle, the concept of 'fuel saving and effective fuel use without affecting the environment' should be added. Agricultural chemical substance is transformed from petroleum. Application of machines needs petroleum. Petroleum is the resource which is not replaceable.

2. Four proposed principles are applicable in regional level. However, in developing countries where economics is the main attraction for conducting organic agriculture, such principles will be considered. If application of four principles can not increase farmers income or make them have a better living condition, they will neglect them. Farmers who does not have his own land will neglect such principles.

3. The word 'should' means it should be done but it is not forced to be done. Application of the words 'must' and 'need' will emphasize the necessary of taking action and it is better to use the words 'must' and 'need'.

4. The preamble covers all of the notification of organic agriculture and the connection to four principles. It is O.K.

5. There is no suggestion. All of wording and language can be understood clearly.

6. It is O.K. to combine soil, animal welfare and biodiversity in the same principle because the ecological principle shows the relationship between soil, water, plant, animal and microbes in soil. It is like the food chain.

7. Message in the principle of fairness is right according to the role and responsibilities of conducting organic agriculture. But nowadays, there is limited land resource and there is the problem of soil deterioration. Productive aspects have been applied to increase crop yields, income and make a better living condition for farmers. So, the principle of fairness does not play an important role in mobilizing organic agriculture comparing with the principle of health and ecological principles.

8. I agree with the four principles leading to organic agriculture. My responsibilities concern application of organic fertilizer, cropping system and application of biological technology for soil improvement, production increase and reduction of chemical substance and chemical fertilizer application.

I also act as the editor of the newsletter of Soil and Water Conservation Society of Thailand. I would like to quote the message from the newsletter as follows:

Soil, water, plant and forest are like the heart of people in the country.

Help maintaining and conserving them.

Our children will survive using such resource.

9. In order to conduct successful organic agriculture, the national executive should realize the importance of organic agriculture, the advantage for farmers, consumer and natural resources. In Thailand, organic agriculture is now determined as the national agenda. Most production in Thailand and Asian countries are conducted for consuming within the countries. In order to conduct organic agriculture, there should be organic agriculture zoning or conduct land reform. The implementing methods should be determined, beginning from soil preparation, prevention of contamination, soil management and cropping, planning for eradicating pests, storage and transportation, harvest and processing and certificate issue. Such procedures need potential technicians for giving advice. Farmers themselves should participate and cooperate willingly. Government sector will contribute knowledge and insure the price for organic agriculture products. The most important thing is there should be the market buying the organic agriculture products.

Feedback Thailand embassy in Brussels

1. Do the proposed principles presented reflect the value of organic agriculture ? If not, are there values on principles that are missing or some that could be removed?

Answer :

Yes. The 4 proposed principles can reflect and cover the value of organic Agriculture even though the principle of fairness and care is quite such a new topic raised

2. Do you think that the proposed principles are universally applicable and take into account regional variation?

Answer :

Yes. In details, the principle has explained that the organic management must be adaptive and appropriate to local conditions, ecology, culture and scale so the proposed principles are applicable in the regional level

3. The feedback on the first questionnaire suggested that principles should be formulated in a normative way. However some members of the consultative group questioned the use of word 'Should'. The Task Force solicits for ideas on a different kind of wording that is as strongly normative as 'should' but otherwise formulated.

Answer :

The word 'should' is suitable. The function of the proposed principles are to guide the position, programs and standards to the organic agriculture. It is strongly normative enough for the guideline and means should be done by any practice to satisfy the guideline.

4. Do you have any suggestions on the wording of the preamble?

Answer :

We proposed to add 'sustainable income' to be the part of economic that the principles should be concerned because that is such a important factor to shift the farmers especially in developing countries from their conventional agriculture practices to organic agriculture permanently

5. Do you have any suggestions on wording and language? Are the principles and the explanations that belong to them easily to be translated in your language

Answer :

Yes. All of wording and language are definitely clear.

6. Do the proposed principles and explanations address 'soil' 'animal welfare' and 'bio diversity' in a satisfying way? Do 'Soil' and/or 'animal welfare' deserve a separate principle? If you think so, please suggest some motivation, formulation and explanation of the new principle.

Answer :

The mentioned soil, animal welfare and biodiversity articulated in principle of health, Principle of Fairness and Ecology, which are fine and no need for the separated principles.

7. Do you think that the principle of fairness rightly addresses the responsibility of organic agriculture's in the world? Does the proposed statement make claims and imply obligations that are beyond the control of organic agriculture movements?

Answer :

We think the principle of fairness is covered. Farmers, producers, processors, distributors, traders and consumers are addressed and beyond the control of organic agriculture movement.

8. Repeated request from the first questionnaire. Do you have any visualize/materialization (e.g. a photo, art, a poem a music composition) that express for you the principles of organic agriculture? You are invited to share them with the Task force! Could you articulate in one.

Answer :

Every Departments in Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives which have obligations to give technology advice to the farmers normally have their own appropriate visual aids, and use them as a tool to transfer technology to the farmers.

9. Any other comments

Answer :

In Thailand, organic agriculture is now determined as the National Agenda in order to conduct successful organic agriculture in Thailand. The area of production and the certified farms are increased. The local consumers has realized and required for product certification system.

Comment from Larry Schlussler

Use renewable inputs to allow sustainable agriculture to be carried out on a large scale (national) for generations.

Discussion - Organic farms often import organic inputs which will decrease the fertility of another piece of land. These inputs may be manure, hay, compost, or grass clippings etc. These inputs allow a farmers' land to remain productive at the expense of other locations. Recycling of organic matter including human manure would eliminate the problem.