

Position on the full diversity of Organic Agriculture

What we call Organic

Introduction

Organic Agriculture is often perceived as only referring to *certified* Organic Agriculture. The aim of this position paper is to make clear that IFOAM's view of Organic Agriculture goes far beyond certification. IFOAM's mission embraces the 'worldwide adoption' of Organic Agriculture '*in its full diversity*'. Part of the *full diversity* of Organic Agriculture *worldwide* is non-certified Organic Agriculture.

IFOAM's position

Any system using the methods of Organic Agriculture and being based on the Principles of Organic Agriculture is regarded by IFOAM as 'Organic Agriculture' and any farmer practicing such system can be called an 'organic farmer'.

Organic Agriculture brings valuable contributions to the farmer and to the society outside the market place. IFOAM supports the adoption of Organic Agriculture regardless of whether the products are marketed as organic or not.

IFOAM regards third party certification as a reliable tool for guaranteeing the organic status of a product, and one that appears to be most relevant in an anonymous market. IFOAM has developed a comprehensive system of Norms¹ and an accreditation programme to promote and develop reliable third party certification. But IFOAM does not see this as 'universal' and not the only tool to describe organic agriculture.

Apart from third party certification there are other methods of organic quality assurance for the market place. These can be in the form of self-declarations or participatory guarantee systems. There are also situations where the relation between the consumer and the producers are strong enough to serve as a sufficient trust building mechanism, and no particular other verification is needed.

¹ IFOAM Norms: IFOAM Basic Standards for Organic Production and Processing (IBS) and IFOAM Accreditation Criteria for Bodies Certifying Organic Production and Processing (IAC).

Some more background to the position is given below:

**Different farmers, different circumstances, different markets...
...different scenarios and different solutions!**

Third Party Certification

When organic farmers are operating in an anonymous market, certification has been developed to show and guarantee to the consumers that a product has been produced in an organic way according to organic standards. Certification is the formal and documented procedure by which a third party assures that the organic standards are followed. Certification leads to consumers' trust in the organic production system and the products. Certification gives organic farming a distinct identity and credibility and makes market access easier. Certification can also be used as a tool for defining groups eligible for support programs, e.g. government support.

IFOAM believes that third party certification needs to be adapted to local conditions. One such adaptation is Smallholder Group Certification. Here, several small-scale farmers with similar farming practices who market collectively can be certified together. The farmers set up an Internal Control System (ICS) meaning that internal "inspectors" inspect every farm, whereas the certification body audits the ICS. This includes visits to a specified number of farms and an evaluation of the functioning of the ICS.

Participatory Guarantee system

There are non-certified initiatives using their own written standards, often based on IFOAM standards. In many cases they also comprise a verification component. The methods include relying on affidavits or producers' statements, seals from farmers or consumers' organizations or the guarantee provided by the name of a company or shop. In many of the systems there is an active verification component, carried out by the farmers themselves or specially appointed staff or committees. These systems are mostly flexible and emphasize a learning process². IFOAM sees a potential in these participatory systems and has embarked on a process for capacity building and further development of such systems. It is in their nature that they are localized and diverse, so while some general principles can be agreed upon they are not standardized to the same extent as third party certification.

Direct farmer-consumer relationships

When there is a direct contact between the farmer and the consumer, trust can often be maintained without any systematic verification mechanism. In its simplest form this is represented by direct sales at the farm-gate or in farmers' markets. More complex situations are represented by Box Schemes, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and Teikei (this last term being used in Japan). CSA and Teikei are partnerships of mutual commitment between a farm and a community of supporters that provide a direct link between the production and consumption of food. Supporters cover a farm's yearly operating budget by purchasing a share of the season's harvest and in some cases they assist with the farm work. Sometimes members help pay for seeds, water, equipment

² Many of the currently existing third party certification organizations started up that way.

maintenance, labour, etc. In return, the farm provides, to the best of its ability, a healthy supply of seasonal fresh produce.

Informal or Non-certified

There are organic farmers for whom certification does not have any advantages: this is true for farmers who practice subsistence farming, basically catering for the food security of their families or their community. It is also true for farmers who want to sell their produce as organic, where a demand for organic products does not exist in their region or where the intermediary or processor does not want to handle organic products. There are also farmers that reject certification on principal or economic grounds.

Challenges ahead

Recognizing that it is not certification that defines organic, and also that the situation for farmers is not equal and not static, i.e. they may first be non-certified, then want to participate in a certified system, IFOAM sees a need to find solutions flexible enough to allow farmers to ‘move’ from one system to another; or in other words how products from a Participatory Guarantee System can move into the market for third party certified products. Those solutions are not yet here.

Finally organic farming is increasingly delivering environmental services³ to society and it is yet to be seen which tools are most appropriate for verification of those services.

*In principle adopted by IFOAM WB 0409, Seattle
Finally adopted by IFOAM EB 0412*

³ Such as landscape, bio-diversity protection or carbon sequestration