

*organic*  
**Revision**

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**D21: Focus groups of value concepts of organic producers and other stakeholders**

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**Louis Bolk Institute**

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction	p. 3
2. Places and participants of focus groups	4
3. Results following discussion guide	
3.1 Introduction	5
3.2 First associations with <i>organic</i>	6
3.3 The participant's organic history	7
3.4 Meaning of collected values	11
3.5 Value conflicts and priorities	14
3.6 What values will be important in the future	15
3.7 Closing remarks	16
4. Results of structured questionnaire	17
5. Tentative conclusions	18
6. Core values compared with IFOAM Principles	19
6.1 Values related to the principle of health	19
6.2 Values related to the ecology principle	20
6.3 Values related to the principle of fairness	22
6.4 Values related to the principle of care	23
6.5 Values related to animal welfare	24
6.6 Values related to the soil	25
6.7 Proximity (nearness) and local networks	25
6.8 Holism and systems thinking	27
6.9 Professionalism and professional pride	28
7. Final conclusion	29
8. Literature	30

## 1. Introduction

About the Dutch situation

Since 2002 the organic area has not grown, there is even a slight decrease. In relation to the total area of land used by farmers, 2,2 % is organic. The area per farm has increased. In table 1 the development of organic area is presented.

Table 1: Organic area from 1999-2004

Year	Area (ha)	Ha per farm	% Organic area
1999	27000	22.2	1.3
2000	30000	23.7	1.7
2001	38000	25.2	1.9
2002	42810	27.3	2.2
2003	41865	27.5	2.2
11-2004	40143		

(Source eko monitor October 2004)

Grassland was the largest area of organic production in 2003. The area of different types of agriculture are presented in table 2

Table 2: Area of agriculture types in 2004 (source eko monitor October 2004)

Type	Area (ha)
Arable fodder	4670
Arable human	6335
Vegetables open	2965
Vegetables glass	100
Grassland	20935
Others (nature)	6860
	41865

(Source eko monitor October 2004)

Consumers and markets

In the second quarter of 2004, consumers spend 105 million Euros on organic produce. This was an increase of 4.5 % compared to 2003. This increase is special because total turnover in food products has decreased in the supermarket in the Netherlands in 2004. The total turnover in food products is 6.1 billion compared to 6.2 in 2003 which is the direct result of the high competition (price war) between supermarkets. Consumers associate organic with fresh food, the largest percentage of products sold are therefore dairy, fruit and vegetables, meat and bread. Organic consumers choose mainly potatoes, vegetables and fruits. Product groups and percentage spent by organic consumers are presented in table 3

Table 3: Product categories in 2004

Product category	Percentage
Potatoes, vegetables and fruit	28
Dairy products	18
Meat	12.5
Bread	6.5
Others	35

(Source eko monitor October 2004)

Since 2001 the supermarket chains have more than 50% of the total turn over of organic produce. Local farmer markets, farm shops and door-to-door sale constitute almost 13 % of the total. Table 4 presents the organic turnover in 2002 and 2003.

Table 4: Turnover in million Euros

	2002	2003
Supermarket	180	182.53
Health stores	145	160
Others	50	52.5
	375	395

(Source eko monitor October 2004)

The main motives of consumers to buy organic produce have been identified: personal health, concern for the environment and nature and animal welfare. In percentages how often these motives are mentioned:

- Personal health 69%
- Improve nature and environment 66 %
- Animal welfare 63 %
- Taste 33%
- More reliable 25%
- For the children 16%

## 2. Places and participants of the focus groups

Four Focus group discussions were held in the Netherlands, one pre-test with researchers, and three groups with established organic producers both of livestock and horticulture, but it was not possible to recruit newly converted producers to a meeting in NL.

- Group 1 (R): (Pre-test) Researchers from the Louis Bolk Institute, 5 participants, all female. (08/2004)
- Group 2 (B): Biodynamic dairy farmers, 3 participants, 2 males one female. 12 farmers were invited to the meeting, 7 were planning to attend, but 4 participants send apologies only shortly before the meeting, so the meeting had to be run with only 3 participants. (11/2004)
- Group 3 (O): Organic dairy farmers, 6 participants, all males. 15 farmers were invited; a meeting was planned with 8 but only 6 participants attended. (11/2004)
- Group 4 (A): Organic arable farmers, 3 male producers attended. In total 42 growers, old organic producers (vegetables) from the Flevopolder were contacted, but response was poor. Finally the meeting was held with only 3 participants, one of them was an organic farmer and two were biodynamic farmers. (12/2004)

Characteristics of the participants are presented in table 5

Table 5: Characteristics of groups

Group	Date of conversion	Farm animals/crops	Ha	Sex	Fulltime
1	n.a.	Work fields: plant, soil and animal husbandry	n.a.	5 females	yes
2	1988-1991	50-100 dairy cows with sheep, pigs and nature conservation	Approx. 50-10	2 males, 1 female	yes
3	1987-1994	28-100 dairy cows with arable land, production and sale of dairy products.	50-75 ha	6 males	yes
4	1989-1995	Arable crops, vegetables and beef cattle	28-110	3 males	yes

### 3. Results following discussion guide

#### 3.1 Introduction

Quotes of the researchers, biodynamic dairy farmers, organic dairy farmers and arable farmers are specified per group by *R*, *B*, *O* or *A* and sex of the participant (*m* or *f*).

In the group with researchers, motives to work in the organic sector were developed during their study or daily life. For some this went back to their youth and how their parents raised them.

*“It started already in my childhood, that I went already to many different farms and I wondered how the relation is between animals and humans (R, f)”*.

What they liked about organic agriculture was that it does not only focus on solutions but first looks into the real causes of a problem. For one it was on a turning point in her life as a reaction to everything that went so fast in society but also an idea of how crops were meant to grow, she said:

*“I’m missing the basics and how things are meant to be, it is not natural anymore and this frustrates me, it was a motivation to choose for organic agriculture (R, f).”*

Also mentioned were human-animal relationships, product quality in a wide sense (sustainable, tasty and healthy), nature, respect for complexity of the plant, pollution and wanting to show it can be done in another way, that the system works and there is a balance.

*“I like home made dairy products with seasonal effects which you can taste for example in cheese” (R, f).*

In the group of biodynamic farmers, two farmers mentioned the fact that their children will take over the farm. One of the biodynamic farmers came from a family farm, and is farmer himself since 1984. Since 1988, he works on his parent’s dairy farm, which was already converted beforehand. He has worked in industry, as a teacher at high school and has worked

in Kenya in development aid. Choice for organic came when he returned to the Netherlands because of its pioneering character and the positive attitude compared to conventional agriculture and the expectation that one of his children will take over the farm.

*“Organic farming is a positive development for society” (B, m).*

The second biodynamic farmer said: *“Farming means everything to me” (B,m)*. He discovered in Columbia that indigenous farmers had no chance due to the export of Dutch milk products. He is inspired by the concept of harmony and tries to incorporate nature values on the farm (landscape and natural grassland). Conversion took place in 1990 and he moved to a new farm in the north of the country in 2002. His three sons will become or already are organic farmers. The third biodynamic farmer of the group has a small farm. She gave up dairy cows two years ago, when it became clear that there would be no succession on the farm. They have pigs now and grassland. When everything was growing and going faster they thought this could not go on. *“We want to pass healthy land over 50 years” (B,f)*. She moved to the north of the country in 1990 due to soil pollution in the parental area (Cadmium) and started with biodynamic farming. She is inspired by the principle of a closed cycle.

In the group with organic dairy farmers the first person started his introduction with the following statement illustrating how serious the farmers take their work.

*“Agriculture is the fundament of every society, where life starts, I’m happy to be able to contribute to that (O, m)”*

Similar to the farmers, aspects of thinking globally, acting locally were already introduced in these first minutes of the discussion, and participants of this group also ended their personal introduction with prospects on continuation of the farm by their children.

In the introduction of the arable farmers one denoted as possible reason for the poor reactions at the meeting mailing, that farmers were often invited to take part in activities, but without any financial compensations (whereas the researchers are getting paid). Therefore, only those come who themselves are already interested, which leads to a selection of participants.

### **3.2 First associations with *organic***

In this section many important values were already touched on, that were explored in greater detail in later parts of the discussion.

The group researchers mentioned some negative associations with organic, these are dealt with under 3.5 (conflicts). Other associations were: positive, the right thing, alive, life processes, balance, and growth. Asked about typical organic farmers the following associations were mentioned: giving organisms time to be themselves and grow/ develop according to their nature, self regulation, connection with plant and animal, work together with soil, plant and animal. Typical consumers were divided into two groups, conscious consumers where organic is related to a whole way of living (and who go to nature stores) and yuppies who buy because it is said to be healthy or good. In the researcher group the discussion came up that consumers often have an unrealistic (romantic) image of what organic is (e.g. small-scale). For consumers the taste is the most important. They relate taste with health. Health has to do with the whole feeding pattern. For many producers organic is based on an attitude, a specific way of living. Many consumers don’t understand this.

First associations with organic in the group of the biodynamic farmers were mostly related to farming and their daily work.

*“You need more fantasy, it is the way of thinking when you encounter problems; solutions you are looking for are not all in the same direction” (B,m).*

Other associations were: harmony, to work as natural as possible without artificial tricks, rely on self-regulation and use as little external inputs as possible.

*“It is a balanced development, everything matters. On conventional farms everything is about milk, and quota (market rights). You should think about the consequences for the animals and the environment. It is about harmony and the atmosphere (energy) of the farm. (B,f)*

Also mentioned were: the pioneering character of organic, every organic farm is different (diversity), you have to take the surroundings into account and small-scale production.

The organic dairy farmers associate organic with closed cycles and regional production:

*“If that is okay you can also solve world problems. The problem of people asking for asylum here has also to do with that we do not have a closed cycle. Those people come and get what we took from them”(O,m).*

For the organic farmers, equity between people is very important, and goes hand in hand with regional thinking. Cyclical thinking is considered being much more important than using no chemicals, and should be the first condition for new converters. Organic chicken and pig production are examples of systems that go in the wrong direction. Closed cycles ask for a continuous search for better solutions, a challenge, in which the farmer can also develop himself. In practice closed cycles are sometimes difficult to realize. Cooperation between dairy and arable farmers can be difficult when organic manure has not an economically viable price for both of them. Organic agriculture was also mentioned to be the future. It was seen as the only method of agriculture that comes close to sustainability. Sustainability is in their opinion: doing justice to humans, animals and the environment for generations onwards. Naturalness, sustainability and a closed system as ideals were first associations with organic of the arable farmers. They mentioned the promise to the earth to take good care of her, healthy and tasty products and social aspects as typical organic. Also for the arable farmers animals play an important role to reach a closed system, in cultivating nature and strengthening life processes.

In the following section of own organic history many values introduced here were explained in greater detail.

### **3.3 The participant’s ‘organic history’ and further development**

In the group of researchers personal reasons for getting involved with organic farming research had already been covered in the introduction so this section focussed on further development. Things that have changed for the researchers are the disappearance of the ‘hippie’ context (feeling different) and the fact that research is no longer focussing on biodynamic only, co-operation with regular researcher is now possible and an increase in ecological knowledge helps organic agriculture to find solutions. There is also the recognition by society, also due to crises in conventional agriculture and growing awareness of whole chains of production. However, the issue of GMO and animal welfare has enlarged the distance between conventional and organic. On the other hand, reduction of organic intentions has also taken place, for instance high tech solutions in organic greenhouse horticulture (specialisation instead of systemic solutions). For future development this group pointed to the consumers, being the market, as they can direct organic production. On the other hand it is difficult to expect from the average consumer to be closely involved with technicalities of organic farming and the effect of their consumption pattern on these.

The biodynamic farmers group has converted more than 10 years ago. Farming is experienced as beautiful work, compared to office-work. Conversion was not a rational decision, but a matter of feeling and personal values. The idea of balance, harmony and being part of nature,

was an important inspiration. At the time these farmers converted there was a limited market for biodynamic products. One of them said that they did not want to end up in the ever-growing pig industry; that did not feel right. Also production of all fodder and concentrates at own land was an issue. They experimented with this and shifted the borders of their system to make it more self-sufficient. The farmers were emphasising that over a period of time they gradually developed a deeper understanding of working together with the natural cycles. In their opinion, technology must serve this goal, as illustrated by the following statement about building housing systems.

*“Horned cattle were difficult to combine with a free range barn with slatted floors. We are now planning a deep litter barn. Some extra mechanisation is planned to decrease human labour which comes with this new system” (B,m).*

On future development one person stated that sustainability is the ideal. For the farmers sustainable production is not about how long they can produce themselves (10 or 20 years), but how long a production system can produce. The farmers mentioned: more than 100 years, over generations, ‘endlessly’.

This implies healthy cows, good soil and good health for the farmer and on a farm that is truly sustainable the idea of “no growth” should be possible.

*“If you cannot work economically (efficient, few dead animals, low costs) with 50 cows you will not be able to do it with 1000. The idea of ‘no growth’ is possible when your farm is really sustainable (B,m).*

The others support this. Someone stated that the principle of freedom is not valued enough by farmers; this was supported by others.

*“The rules for conventional agriculture and the economic system obstruct further growth of organic. The organic rules do not restrict you, you can always do more” (B, f).*

The biodynamic farmers see many challenges: increasing their connectedness to the soil and to become sustainable in all parts of the farm, combining arable production with keeping animals, decreasing the use of concentrates, trying to work according to the specific nature (character) of the animals, to increase the life duration of the animals and to get better economic and technical results of the whole farm. One has a piece of land for experimentation with Soya for human consumption. To realise the above it is important to have a vision.

*“You need your own strategy of how to develop your farm. To have your own vision, that is what makes you strong. Authenticity is extremely important” (B,m).*

At a certain moment the ‘identity’ of the farm becomes more important than the rules. The organic principles invite you to become more and more organic; use natural (homeopathic) substances instead of antibiotics; increasing the resistance of the animals to prevent diseases and maintaining a healthy soil (soil life) (without artificial additives) etc.

The organic dairy farmers also raised opportunities for people in other countries as motivation to convert.

*“In a project in Africa we tried to introduce oxen, for traction, with a tribe to work the land. It worked and they had better harvest. A step further was to keep a cow, to have a bit of milk and being able to breed their own replacement stock. However they were not able to sell their milk because every three days there was a local market where milk powder from The Netherlands and Denmark was handed out for free. The overproduction from our countries was delivered there. Did the farmers in our countries know they held back the development of African farmers in that way?”(O,m)*

For the organic farmer group organic means more than concern for the environment, it is also about energy and people. One mentioned combustion factories where manure is being burnt, which worries him because it is very unsustainable, and farmers using this technique are



allowed to double their animal numbers because the government regards combustion as a solution for the manure problems in The Netherlands.

One farmer explains, not polluting the environment (no chemicals) was important in the beginning. The concern for non-renewable resources came later.

Conversion is a combination of reasons, sustainability being the main issue. Other factors regarding conversion were soil condition and social recognition.

The organic dairy farmers were convinced that conventional agriculture does not move into the direction of organic, but the introduction of GMO's in The Netherlands worries them. They state that another economic system is needed.

The arable farmers also converted at least 10 years ago and started in the introduction with social aspects "*organic agriculture is about people*" (A,m). One of the farmers has been in Africa and experienced there a lot of co-operation in the farming work. Returning to the Netherlands he did not want to have a one-man farm. He has now a family farm, with two companions and the help of school children in the high season. Another farmer of this group does not agree; he rather works alone or with very few people. The number of people however influences the production process (with few people you have to burn the weeds). On the other hand more people (that need to make a living) result in a higher pressure on the environment.

*"The more people who need an income, the more the area should produce, I rather have a low input and extensive crop rotation" (A,m)."*

This farmer also made a plea for more patience and trust in the development of the system. He mentioned wheat as an example. In the early years it needed extra nitrogen (additional manure) to grow at all, but later this was no longer needed. He criticised:

*"Nowadays new converters have no feeling or patience for development of their system, and are using an increasing amount of inputs and once you start with this, there seems to be no way back" (A,m).*

This process is enhanced by the anonymous market system. He fears that conventional agriculture may overtake organic agriculture, because it loses credibility. Others agreed that such short term thinking in terms of minerals, instead of life-processes is found among new converters. According to the farmers it has to do with the temperament of the farmers, the feeling you have for instance when using slurry.

One of the farmers talks about: "*how to stick to your own values , how you want to do the farming yourself*" (A,m). The biodynamic farmers also referred to having your own ideas on the development of your farm, they called it vision.

One of the arable farmers grows broccoli and cauliflower, which are difficult crops. These plants each have their specific characteristics, which he tries to explore. He rejects the system of taking samples and adding fertilisers, when the advisors tell him that it is needed.

*"It is easy to be carried away by the advisers, but you have to go back to the basics, to grow from a healthy soil. When you take care of the soil, the rest will come by itself. This (rotation of crops) demands more of myself, but that is the fun of it" (A,m).*

When things turn out well and the crop is growing, trust in the system grows. The farmer who mentioned the promise to the earth in the introduction explained that this statement is related to stewardship: "*The piece of land you work with; you have to use this gift in a sustainable way*" (A,m). Others agree that the soil should be the starting point of everything. One said it means that when you have patience and the trust that organic agriculture works, it results in being able to work preventive rather than curative. It also means more craftsmanship, finding the best solution for a particular situation. Tailor-made systems and solutions become more difficult to accomplish, because of the (economic) demands of the market. Economic pressure leads to more standardisation, rather than diversification. This is visible in all areas, for instance in the limitation in the choice of varieties for the farmers but also for consumers. In

the past, a baker was able to adapt the baking of his bread to every kind of wheat (craftsmanship). Now, all wheat must have the same composition, the same percentage of protein.

In summary, there were many reasons for conversion to organic or biodynamic farming. It is interesting to see how many farmers have experience with developmental work abroad and the impact this work has had on how they want to farm themselves. The farmers see closed systems not only about nutrients, but also about social aspects, about not producing at the expense of other people. The cycle is also about the origin of your resources and where your products go. The researchers were the only group that also discussed the consumers. The organic farmers were convinced that conventional agriculture does not move into the direction of organic. The farmers were worried about new converters and the credibility of organic agriculture, but recognise that their personal development took some years. For them, the values of the organic system give them the freedom to develop, but rules are still needed as a minimum and for the new converters and organic farmers that converted with economic motives.

### 3.4 Discussion of meaning of collected values

During the introduction, when first associations and own organic history were mentioned, motives and values were written down by the co-moderator. In the discussion of meaning of collected values the participants were confronted with these motives and values. They were asked to add missing ones and to group them into main value clusters. In tables 6A, B, C and D an overview of the result of the groups' discussions is given.

Table 6: The clusters of the researcher group

Cluster of values	Sub values
<b>A. The system</b>	Balance/harmony Sustainability Cycle Season bound Self regulation
<b>B. The attitude</b>	Respect for plants and animals Giving plants and animals time to develop (respect for life, life processes) Authenticity/integrity, as things are meant to be, what is essential Plant and animal integrity Conscious relation to all aspects of the system (being involved in)
<b>C. The chain</b>	Fair trade Local chains (to reduce transport) Degradable packing material Humanity (human social relations: work, payment, etc.) Consistency throughout the chain
<b>D. The product</b>	Quality Healthy Good taste
<b>E. The surroundings</b>	Naturalness Care for nature (Sustainability) Natural fertilisers Nature conservation

In the researcher group it was mentioned that agriculture is the fundament of society, where it all starts. Sustainability can have different meanings depending on personal background. For some, it was only concerned with the environment (the surroundings), but for others it had also to do with animal welfare or how people treat each other. In addition to the production system, they also identified a cluster of values related to the food chain in which values concerning fair trade and humanity belong. The value attitude is about the integrity of plants, animals and soil.

Table 6B: The clusters of the biodynamic farmers group

Cluster of values	Sub values
<b>A. Animal Welfare</b>	Long life-duration Animals must be able to act according to their nature. Characteristic nature of each domesticated animal Animal resistance to diseases The needs of horned cattle No earmarks
<b>B. Harmonious Agro-ecosystem</b>	Importance of having a vision (prevents uncertainty, gives energy) Importance of freedom, rather than restraints (rules) (The regulations for conventional agriculture are restricting the growth of organic agriculture) Importance of having a range of choices Pioneering: finding solutions oneself, use your fantasy (each farm is different)

	Being in nature is good (good job) Values inspired by the whole Closed cycles Developmental perspective A healthy country in the future
<b>C. Inter-dependence at macro level</b>	Social aspects (third world) Opportunities for third world development (based on personal experience of several farmers in developing countries) Sustainability in all (also social) aspects
<b>D. Harmonious system for the people</b>	Harmony between production and environment Right balance (when there is a balance, there will be no conflicts, not even between values) Being relaxed in your work Having a positive attitude towards life Having enough leisure time Being a healthy farmer who loves his work Qualitative growth more important than quantitative growth Intentions are more important than norms and regulations A good systemic-energy
<b>E. Housing animals without problems (technical aspects of A, animal welfare)</b>	Cows without problems 'Slow' roughage (ripe) Solve problems by preventing them Cows must move freely in the stable Cows should have right structure, good condition (muscles) Homeopathic/ natural medicines
<b>F. Being a farmer rather than a businessman</b>	Income as a necessary condition, not the goal Low system costs through prevention Sustainability
<b>G. Connection to the land (soil)</b>	Balance between nature and environment Diverse soil life Nature values Diversity Healthy soil Extensive Self supporting
<b>H. Working as natural as possible</b>	No artificial tricks from outside Adapted to the environment
<b>I. Intrinsic value of the milk</b>	Product quality related to the whole system

The biodynamic farmers grouped values in eight main clusters, and considered them all as equally important and that they should be in balance. The biodynamic farmers group indicates that all aspects are dependent on each other and in a harmonious agro-ecosystem the different aspects are in balance. The phrase “think globally, act locally” is reflected in the cluster interdependence at macro level. The cluster animal welfare and harmonious system for the people should do justice to these aspects. The farmers’ love for their profession is illustrated by the cluster farmer rather than businessman. With respect to this cluster sustainability has a specific meaning: an income is a precondition to be able to farm but profit should not be the leading principle in farm activities. Soil received a separate cluster, similar to working as natural as possible. A special cluster is made for intrinsic value of milk.

Table 6C: The clusters of the organic dairy farmers group

Cluster of values	Sub values
<b>A. Economic and social justice</b>	Other economic system, think about economics differently Think globally, act locally Social justice for developing countries Prevent division of the world in two parts Income for the farmer Organic agriculture does not hinder others in their development Organic agriculture as a way of development
<b>B. Conservation of the earth</b>	Sustainability Don't disturb natural balances To prevent is better than to fight against (diseases, problems) Trust in organic soil fertility Recycling of (re-using) resources The problem of the environment Good for the environment The problem of energy Nature No chemicals Regional production Self supporting Closed cycle on the farm and regionally
<b>C Global Inter-connectedness. Seeing connections</b>	Agriculture as the origin (basis) of society Change, development Organic agriculture is the future Challenge to develop the system as a whole
<b>D. Care (respect) for human beings, animals and plants</b>	Personal responsibility, start with yourself Humane, equity (all people have the same value, and have equal chances) Healthy production Freedom of the farmer to make his own choices Good way of using your time (making sense) Feeling happy when organic agriculture is recognized by society Animal welfare Friendly for animals Limit animal transports (keep it within the region) Don't spread animal diseases through transport Well-being of the plant

The organic dairy farmers also discussed global interconnectedness heavily and explained this as seeing the connection between continents. Social aspects were a dominant aspect in the discussions and are present in three of the four value clusters. Conservation of the earth was a cluster that includes a lot of aspects with concern to recycling, saving energy and the environment. Their cluster 'care (respect) for human beings, animals and plants' is a good indication of their attitude concerning all living creatures.

Table 6D: The clusters of the arable farmers group

Cluster of values	Sub values
<b>A. Ability to produce endlessly</b>	Closed system Cycle As little input from outside as possible Challenge (for instance to work with less fertilisers) Promise to the earth (stewardship + sustainability)
<b>B. Craftsmanship</b>	To work preventive Patience
<b>C. Regional production</b>	Social aspects: co-operation with others Therapeutic effect of working with the land, plants and animals.
<b>D. Healthy soil</b>	The soil is the basis of all

	Naturalness Crop rotation Enhance life processes (give living organisms, including the system as a whole, time to develop and grow) Cultivating nature (taking care of natural processes, in order that it can produce)
<b>E. Healthy food with good taste</b>	Healthy food with good taste

The arable farmers grouped values in five main areas: ability to produce endlessly, craftsmanship, regional production, healthy soil and healthy food. Craftsmanship was about the human factor, it had to do with development of the farmer, their production system, and development of skills. One farmer explained in which direction his craftsmanship developed: *“You are not the creator of the ecosystem as a farmer, but you take care of life processes in a way they develop into the right (desirable) direction. You learn to work with nature. This feeling gets stronger with experience. And when it all fits, you believe that the product will be healthy”* (A, m). Regional production was explained as *“working for people you know, not for an anonymous market”*. In relation to the sub-value therapeutic effect the question came up why most ‘therapeutic (care) farms’ are organic. One reason could be that no pesticides are used, and you can work with the crops anytime, without health risks. All participants mentioned healthy soil to be the central value. And illustrating the importance of the value of healthy food with good taste one person said: *“That is where you do it all for!”* (A,m).

### 3.5 Value conflicts and priorities

The group of researchers discussed many conflicts, more as the other groups, such as:

- Import of organic (food may be of regional importance, but often transported over long distances) vs. season bound production in our own country. Should we buy apples from New Zealand when we grow them here as well? Should we buy organic products from Israel where much water is needed, and where water for human consumption is scarce? These conflicts were seen to relate to values of energy use, food quality, and fair income/fair trade. It was stated: if we accept import from developing countries we should be sure that the farmer gets a good price for his products.
- With coffee it is also important to look at the process of extracting caffeine. We should not only look at the products but also include the process (e.g. genetic engineering).
- Organic products need to distinguishable in stores, where conventional products are also sold. Usually the organic products are packed in plastic in this situation but the use of packing material gives negative associations, also when degradable packaging is used.
- Animal welfare versus human welfare
- Conflicts between organic values and economy: keeping calves with the mother, a beautiful landscape when you keep cows outside but on the other hand land is expensive, good animal welfare costs money. Also the case with crop rotation in greenhouses. The pressure on organic values from conventional economy is the greatest problem.
- Free range versus the environment. There was discussion whether this is a real conflict. What is your frame of reference: the animal density in conventional agriculture?
- Male chicken as organic cat food? Is it sustainable? Should the criteria be how it fits into the whole system?
- Consumers want the same products as in conventional but want them organic. Is 100% organic possible, desirable? What about the freedom of choice of the consumer? Do we want organic coca cola (100% organic ingredients)?

The ideal for the future is to have a system “that fits, that is true” (in which all values are in balance). The question is raised if you should always stick to the values, or make compromises? Sticking to the values may mean less freedom of choice for consumers.

The group with biodynamic farmers seemed to agree that the different values are related to each other (you cannot leave out one). When the whole system is in balance (harmony) there will be no conflicts. Unbalance arises when one principle or value is emphasised at the cost of another. The greatest conflicts arise due to conventional regulations (with respect to ear tags, inoculations, manure, disinfecting etc.) and due to the conflict between economy and intentions (castrating pigs). When de-horning or keeping calves with the mother cow (natural behaviour) were mentioned, one farmer explained that the calf rearing issues had not been thought about in the past. The methods of organic farming are also under development and can always be improved.

There was little time to discuss conflicts with the group of organic dairy farmers. One issue that came up was the consequences of modernity: *“Is a farmer in Rumania, who works with horses, not working more sustainable than myself having 5 tractors?”* All central values mentioned by the group were considered equally important, but conservation of the earth was seen as a basic, necessary condition for the others. Conflicts with economy are talked about, money rules the world. What to do when you cannot afford your principles? Eco tax was seen as a solution.

Most conflicts experienced by the arable farmers were based on economic factors. These factors cause that produce is sold to other regions or countries but also to industry:

- *“Another Dutch grower on sandy soil is buying and reselling my onions because it is too expensive to grow them in their own region” (A,m).*
- *“Sometimes conventional industry is the best client, for instance when they have high standards: broccoli for baby food” (A,m).*
- Adding fertilisers is easier and gives more production than working together with nature (short term versus long term solutions).

The group regards some conflicts as would-be problems, due to taking things out of the context of the whole (for instance the conflict between environmental values and animal welfare values when having cows outside). Ultimately the best solution to conflicts (such as the fertiliser one) is to look at the system as a whole as highlighted in the value cluster ‘ability to produce endlessly’. When you work along with natural processes and have a sustainable system, you can trust that it all turns out all right.

### **3.6 What values will be important in the future**

For the researchers consistency in the whole system is important. For example, the care for animals should also extend to the transport and slaughter of animals. And product presentation in the shop should be taken care of. And for trade there seem to be some pre-conditions. These conditions relate to the use of energy (heating, transport etc.), processing and income.

The researchers would like the consumers to understand what the consequences are of accepting the organic values; that the demand for organic meat goes together with lower consumption of meat. Or that organic means that the use of fertilisers, seeds etc. from conventional sources should decrease and that these aspects have its effects on production and price.

In the biodynamic farmers group there was great concern that there will be concessions made to the values and as a result the norms become more simple and reduced in the future. For instance in organic pig production through increasing the number of pigs, feed from outside, export of meat. The smaller farms, which did well in the past, and were considered truly organic, are now pushed out of the market. Will money dictate what is organic in the future (price wars between supermarkets for instance)?

*“You cannot expect that converters will develop in the same way as we did. Perhaps we will have a division in the future between ‘real’ organic (having it ‘between the ears’) and those who remain on the border of what is organic” (B,m).*

The future was not discussed with the organic dairy farmers. From the start of the session it was clear that these farmers are not afraid of conventional agriculture moving towards organic, but they see threats coming from outside the sector, for example GMO's. About importance of the values they all subscribe the idea to draw a circle around the four clusters of values they have made themselves, all values are equally important today but also in the future.

The arable farmers had mixed feelings about the future. They saw the value cluster of healthy soil as the leading values for the future. Soil together with the system; the ability to produce endlessly is where norms should be build on; and regional production is the precondition to stay in the market. The soil is the source of all production; norms should be very clear and strict about soil conservation.

However, they were worried about conflicts with economy. One saw a future development in which economy dominates and the producers will stick to minimal norms, under the influence of the government, supermarkets and consumers. He feared that this will be an irreversible process and does not know what can be done to counteract this development. This was supported by another farmer who feared society is not willing to translate the surplus value of organic in economic terms. The ideal solution would be a regional production and consumption system, which is independent of the free market forces. A farmer with her own market was referred to as example. She has created her own economy with consumers. This demands a lot of input, but two or three families can make a living of it. She has a good story and good products. Changes in the real market do not affect her; she has direct links with her own consumers.

They conclude with the statement that it is easier to produce for a market which does not ask for intrinsic quality but only product appearance and consider the conventional baby food industry as the most anonymous one they can produce for.

### **3.7 Closing remark**

In the group of researchers the point was made that the organic sector needs to open the conversation with all stakeholders in the chain, including the managers of the supermarket, because they have influence on what the consumers buy.

One organic dairy farmer made two points in relation to the regulation. He missed good legislation to protect and care for flora and fauna, and he would like to have different rules on animal health for organic agriculture as for conventional, with special attention for the infectious diseases.



#### 4. Results of structured questionnaire<sup>1</sup>

The first draft of the IFOAM principles was presented in a questionnaire to the participants. They were asked to score the importance / priority of the principles for organic agriculture from 1 to 5. Score 1 indicated highest priority and score 5 lowest priority.

It seemed that, unless a description of each principle is given, the interpretation of the principles was diverse depending on the background of the participants. The participants indicated being not familiar with all the principles and it was difficult to discriminate between the principles.

The discussion on values in their own words could therefore be more valuable than the results of this structured questionnaire.

The results of the questionnaire are presented in table 7, which shows the group average per principle.

Table 7: IFOAM questionnaire

Principles	Researchers	BD dairy farmers	Organic dairy farmers	Organic Arable farmers
Principle of Health / Principle of Ecological Health / Principle of Holistic Health	1.7	1	1.2	1.7
The cyclical principle / The Ecological Principle / Principle of Ecological integrity / Principle of Organic Integrity	1.9	1	1.3	1
Livelihood - Equity Principle / Principle of Ecological Justice	2.6	1.3	1.7	2.3
The Precautionary Principle	2.4	1	2.2	2
Principle of Animal Welfare / Principle of Animal Integrity / The Humane Principle	1.7	1	1.8	2
Principle on Soil	1.8	1	1.8	1.3
Other principles:	-Adapted to cultural identity of the region -To do right to all living organisms: man-soil-life, animals and plants -Integrity of the ecosystem -Cyclically -Fair income		-Economic and social justice -Organic agriculture should be connected with "life" and society.	

<sup>1</sup> Here we mention the names of the principles as used in the first draft of the IFOAM Principles. In part 6 we use the wordings of the Principles as accepted by the IFOAM board in September 2005 (except for table 8).

## **5. Tentative conclusions**

### **Researchers**

The discussion about values was seen as more complicated when financial and economic issues were considered. The idea is that all conflicts can be solved under the right economic conditions. The researchers group was really worried whether the organic sector can maintain the standards of organic and how it can make consumers more aware of these standards.

### **Biodynamic dairy farmers**

What comes out clearly in this group is the ideal of a harmonious, balanced agro-ecosystem. This is seen as the solution to prevent problems, as a great challenge for the farmer to reach this ideal. Idealistic farmers have a great feeling of responsibility for the world (ecologically and socially). For all of them the intentions are more important than the norms. The group is optimistic about the future.

### **Organic dairy farmers**

This group was characterised by the importance of the system approach (thinking in terms of the whole, interconnected system, both regionally and globally). Interesting is the close connection that the group saw between ecological and socio-economic issues. When our relation to the earth is sound, healthy, as it is in organic agriculture, then this is a good basis for a healthy society (economy should be ecologically based). As one farmer said:

*“We want to create a better world, and accidentally we are farmers” (O,m)*

It was regretted that many other organic farmers don't have this feeling so strong; they don't go further than what is prescribed by the regulations.

### **Arable farmers**

The arable farmers group shows a strong value orientation, with sustainability as its central value: taking care of the soil, working along with natural processes to prevent problems, and the need of craftsmanship when you want to work like this. The group is worried that new converters use all kinds of short-term (easy) solutions without investing in the system as a whole, and giving it time to develop and grow under human guidance. To prevent this the contact between society and farmers should be close. We are responsible to show what we are doing.

## 6. Core values compared with IFOAM Principles

The focus group discussions were coded according to 9 different principles. These 9 different principles were specially defined for this project and derived from IFOAM with some extra values added. The participants discussed their own values in their own world. From the transcripts of the groups' sessions their statements were associated with the 9 different principles of this project. An overview of the results is presented in table 8. In the paragraphs 6.1 up to 6.9 all principles are analysed for the different groups.

Table 8: Key results following core values as coded, number of times the principles are referred to.

Principles	Researchers	Biodynamic dairy farmers	Organic dairy farmers	Arable farmers	Average
Principle of health	12	7	4	7	8
Ecological integrity	28	21	30	29	27
Principle of fairness /livelihood/equity	5	13	17	6	10
Principle of care	2	2	14	11	7
Principle of animal welfare	6	34	9	0	12
Principle of soil	1	9	2	10	6
Nearness and local	4	1	4	7	4
Holism and systems thinking	16	22	10	14	16
Area of professional pride	8	23	13	11	14

### 6.1 Values related to the principle of health

The principle of health was for the arable farmers a first association. Other groups mentioned it in the introduction and in other parts of the discussion. The researchers spoke more about health as the other groups. Compared to other values health was not discussed much.

Already in the introduction the researchers group raised a healthy environment and tasteful, qualitative and healthy products.

*“It is especially the quality aspect what I find very important in organic agriculture, that you really try to produce qualitative products” (R,f).*

In the discussion of the values among the researchers, health, quality and good taste were the three aspects that were mentioned as values with respect to product quality.

*“Taste is very important, also the enjoyment of tasty food is beneficial. I rather have a sweet biscuit as something dull with grain syrup. However this can also lead to conflicts between health and quality (taste)” (R,f).*

The biodynamic farmers’ intrinsic value of milk was introduced as product quality aspect. When your system is healthy and your cows are healthy, this will increase the intrinsic value of the milk. They referred also to the health cycle, in the sense that they want an agricultural system that produces healthy food but is also healthy in itself and sustainable.

*“In 50 years we want to pass a healthy country to future generations” (B, f).*

The organic farmers did not speak much of the principle of health. However, it was clear that health is an important aspect of organic products. Organic agriculture should be good for everyone, for the people who eat its products, for the farmers who make a living of it, but also for the people in third world countries.

Healthy and tasty were first associations with organic for the arable farmers. As producers they are confronted with quality demands of the trade. Traders want consistency over harvests and years. Cabbages should weigh 1 kg and all carrots should have the same size or red beetroot should have a maximum nitrate level. Supermarkets have a strong influence on the selection of varieties that are used. These are quality aspects for an anonymous market and result in conflicts with other values for example application of fertilisers or slurry instead of stable manure. The health cycle was also referred to.

*“When all values are in balance, you can be sure the result will be a healthy product. In other words taking care of the values results in healthy products” (A,m).*

Overall it can be concluded that the researchers spoke more of the standards they have as consumers, and aspects of health and taste were more often raised than by the farmers. The biodynamic farmers lifted quality to another level and introduced intrinsic value as a quality aspect and even as a separate cluster. Arable farmers have more contact with trade than the dairy farmers, this could be the reason they talked more about aspects of trade. They are confronted with trade as selling party and the consequences it has for their choice in varieties and manure application.

## **6.2 Values related to the ecology principle**

The ecology principle or the principle of ecological integrity as it has been called in the beginning, was a first association of all groups. The values concerning this principle were discussed most of all values. Only the group of biodynamic farmers mentioned values concerning animal welfare more in their group than values related to ecology. From coding the transcripts it became clear that the values related to the ecology principle were most talked about by the organic dairy farmers. The cyclical production was discussed heavily.

The ecology principle is important as first association for the researchers, also in the sense participants do not like the way society develops.

*“When you ask children where milk comes from they answer from the factory, but it comes from a source, from nature. That was for me very important to choose for organic agriculture, to strive towards how things are meant to be, natural. Important aspects mentioned were: nature conservation, to be in balance, no nutrient and energy losses” (R,f).*

In relation to this principle the principle of naturalness / integrity was added as a value, with respect to the integrity of plant and soil. One researcher explained what this value meant for her:

*“When I look at research, observing what the plant is like, why it is like that, and how can you grow them from that point of view and direct it towards what growers need, that’s what I like, it’s a challenge” (R,f).*

The researchers experienced the connectedness of the farmer with its plants and animals as typical organic, however one argued conventional farmers could experience this as well. They agreed the difference between the sectors is the way the organic sector is actively conscious about the intrinsic value of all that lives. All researchers agree on the importance of the values related to the ecological principle but see conflicts arising with other values.

*“Organic agriculture has developed from environmental problems in the western world. However, when the market grows and products are being imported, new environmental and welfare problems arise. The organic sector should take care of providing a good income to the farmers elsewhere, and have preconditions for transport (energy), production and packaging” (R,f).*

Environmentally friendly was also a typical aspect of organic agriculture.

*“When you look in the Netherlands at nature conservation than you end up at agriculture because there is no nature here (maybe some little spots) but almost all nature is being shaped, influenced or directed by agriculture. Organic agriculture makes sense because it is so close to nature” (R,f).*

The ecology principle also is an important value for the biodynamic farmers. The development of nature on the farm and integration with nature in the surroundings of the farm was seen as important. Another important issue is the independence from inputs. The farmers want to produce everything they need for their animals on their own land. This stands in big contrast with conventional agriculture, which makes use of a lot of external hectares also in developing countries. Motives for organic production are: working with closed cycles, save energy, producing fodder which suits your animals and not wanting to harm developing countries.

In the discussion of the organic dairy farmers they expressed their opposition against landless production, in which livestock farms only have a few hectares and buy most of their feed. Regulations on land-based production were considered important for new converters. They should have thought about where their inputs (feedstuffs) come from and where their manure goes. When organic dairy farmers cannot close the cycle at their own farm they should cooperate with arable farmers in the region. Conflicts arise because the manure has little market value and it is the economy that rules above organic values.

*“The cycle is not only about minimising nutrient losses it’s also about energy. Recycling is extremely important to be able to continue forever. That is sustainable” (O,m).*

One farmer brought in organic agriculture is not always the most sustainable method.

*“For people in Africa for example a little fertiliser or chemicals under extreme conditions could be better for the people than using nothing. However for organic agriculture you should be very clear against these inputs” (O,m).*

Naturalness, sustainability, the cycle with arable and animal production to enhance life processes, were first associations of the arable farmers. Working with nature, cultivating nature, trust in nature’s processes, a system not relying on input of huge amounts of manure (contrast with conventional) and a system which can supply it’s own inputs are statements of the arable farmers, all referring to nature’s systems and cycles. Fertiliser application has changed over the years: the use of ‘vinasse kali’ (a potassium rich by-product of conventional sugar industry) has been promoted strongly over the last few years. This worries them together with irrigation:

*“Irrigation is not all profit, it is labour intensive and, difficult to maintain, also economically” (A, m).*

In conclusion, it appears that values related to the ecology principle are the most dominant of all aspects. The farmers discard landless production, being an important aspect in discussions in The Netherlands. Conventional agriculture is highly dependent on inputs, import of feed and nutrients, resulting in nutrient pollution, high energy losses due to transport and also by manure combustion installations. Organic farmers try to close the cycle and be self-supporting at farm and sector level. The cyclical production is very often mentioned. The value naturalness, integrity of soil and plant were added to the principle of ecology.

### **6.3 Values related to principle of fairness**

The principle of fairness (or livelihood/equity) was a first association of the arable farmers. The organic and biodynamic farmers discussed values related to this principle most, in relation with their experiences in developing countries. It played an important role as motive to convert to organic production.

In the researcher group the principle of fairness was not mentioned explicitly as typical for organic, but it seemed to be a clear precondition for trade and import of products. Important aspects of the production chain were: Fair trade and humanity (in social relation with workers and traders concerning work conditions and payment).

*“When you import coffee, you should take care the farmer gets a good income instead of being a labourer on a plantation where only the landowner benefits” (R,f).*

In the group of biodynamic farmers several participants had experienced themselves the effect of overproduction in western countries on the development of farming in third world countries. Therefore securing the farm income of others was very important to them (*“Think globally, act locally”*).

The rural lifestyle with children, taking over the parental farm and pass it through to future generations was also an important aspect to them.

Already in the introduction the organic dairy farmers touched a lot of values related to this principle. The responsibility they feel for the whole world society is part of their motivation to work in organic agriculture. Being an organic farmer is not only about securing your own income but also that of others. The farmers spoke of their experiences in developing countries and how trade and export disturbs local developments. A precondition for conversion was the market development and ability to sell their milk organically. Their children were also involved in the development and continuity of their farm, and in discussions on how to take care of the farm and the animals.

Arable farmers were also aware of their impact on others. One talks about export and how 70 percent of his broccoli is sold in the UK.

*“We compete with growers in the UK but I would rather sell my product in the Netherlands. It’s all about economy; the old organic farmers usually have difficult and sandy soils with a lot of weeds. One of them buys my onions because it’s too expensive to grow onions himself” (A, m).*

The pioneering farmers are respected and other organic farmers are rather seen as colleagues than as competitors, while conventional farmers are clearly in competition with each other.

Overall, securing farm income was seen as the most important value of the fairness and livelihood principle. All groups talked about fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities. These were seen as important for farmers close to home but also for

people in developing countries all over the world. Life opportunities were summarised as development opportunities, fair income but also good circumstances for labourers and people who live in the region. For the farmers, continuity of their parental farm and being able to pass it to future generations is an important value, which was already mentioned in the introduction by many participants.

#### 6.4 Values related to the principle of care

The principle of care (precaution) was a first association of all groups. However it was not a strong feature in the discussion of the researchers and biodynamic farmers, while the organic and arable farmers discussed it a lot more.

The researchers rarely mentioned values concerning the principle of care. It seems that the participants assume this principle is covered sufficiently if other values, especially the ecology principle, livelihood, animal welfare and soil are well implemented. One mentioned:

*“Respect for all that is alive and taking care that all parts of the system fit, in order to create a balanced system” (R, f).*

The biodynamic farmer group said it is important to work as naturally as possible and in first association to do it differently than conventional (instead of bigger and faster) to prevent damage.

The principle of care was heavily discussed in the group of the organic dairy farmers. Social responsibility was an issue in all groups. For all groups did social responsibility refer to chances for development and a fair farm income (principle of fairness). However, the organic farmers emphasised the prevention of depletion of soil and pollution as aspects of social responsibility. One farmer rated the principle of fairness clearly higher than the principle of care:

*“For me it is more important not to produce at cost of people in the third world than a closed cycle at my farm” (O,m).*

For one farmer the aversion to use chemicals on plants, animals and soil was reason to convert to organic. The increasing number of water purification installations was an indication something was going wrong. In the same discussion the aversion to GMO's was mentioned in the group of organic farmers.

One farmer, talking about their cluster “Care and respect for human beings, animals and plants” (see table 9C), added the development of ‘Care taking farms’ where disabled, elderly people or physically troubled people have a home and job at farms.

The arable farmers introduced stewardship; *we are taking care of nature, nothing more nothing less.* And asked themselves why most ‘care taking farms’ are organic farms. *In my conventional years I would have never thought of that, but now you notice. Or because you work with it and experienced it.* Another added it's also the absence of chemicals, which makes it easier.

The organic dairy farmers and the arable farmers mostly referred to the values concerning the principle of precaution or care. The care for other humans now and in the future was discussed the most. This was also present in the researcher and biodynamic groups but the discussion went more in the direction of fair trade. The principles care and fairness (livelihood/equity) seemed to complement each other.

## 6.5 Values related to animal welfare

The researchers, biodynamic and organic farmers mentioned values related to animal welfare. The arable farmers did not discuss animal welfare at all. The attention animal welfare received was very diverse. Animal welfare was between groups most referred to by the biodynamic farmers. And was most often referred to within the biodynamic farmers group.

For the researchers, human animal relationship was important as a first association and they referred to the connectedness of the farmers with their animals. In the discussion on values, it turned out the researchers were very principled in their attitude towards animal husbandry. Respect for the animals' integrity and their natural behaviour were seen as the basis of good animal husbandry. Referring to naturalness and giving animals what they need one participant said:

*“Give the animal the chance to be itself, for instance when it is ill, let it run outside and it will seek what it needs to get well, not concentrated fodder but herbs. An animal takes what it needs when you give it the opportunity. They develop in the way they need to develop, they have an internal balance to weigh and decide what is good for them. You should give the animal the opportunity to self regulate otherwise you interfere with its system (R, f).*

Rules were seen as important to ensure that also new converters have good welfare standards.

For the biodynamic farmers this principle was very close to their daily practice and was often touched on and in the coding this appears to be the most important value. Also in examples the subject often came up to clarify their statements. They spoke of fodder, behaviour, breeding, health care, disease resistance and calf rearing. One farmer formulated it very clear:

*“The essence of keeping animals organically is that the animal should be able to be ‘animal’, a cow should graze in the pasture, a chicken should be able to range freely and a pig should be able to root” (B, f).*

One of the farmers has built a new stable to improve the welfare of his horned cows. Cows with horns need a different environment. He is aiming for a low replacement rate and tries to minimise the losses in calves. He stated:

*“Over the years I’m getting more convinced we could beat the competition at all fronts with conventional agriculture” (B,m).*

The farmers see continuous improvement of their farms as an important goal of organic farming. The intention should be to improve disease resistance and robustness, in order to prevent problems and when problems do come up, to solve them in the natural way using herbal and homeopathic treatments instead of antibiotics. In the discussion on conflicting values, castration of fattening pigs, vaccination and dehorning were mentioned. It seemed conflicts were not between values but between organic values and national regulation and market. For example the castration of fattening pigs is done because the market will not accept the meat of boars because of the risk of a bad smell in the meat, while animal welfare is affected by the castration. It is stated that the organic regulations are never restricting, the producers are free to be more ‘organic’, i.e. to be stricter than the standards.

All participants in the group of organic dairy farmers subscribed the importance of animal welfare and health. In particular, they were worried about animal transports and how this harms the animals but also increases the risk of spreading diseases.

The arable farmers did not refer to the principle of animal welfare explicitly. However, they recognised an important role for animals in closing the cycle, to enhance the life processes.



They talk about the responsibility of taking care of all living creatures, but their daily work is with the soil and their crops and these were the subjects on top of their minds.

Concluding, important values that could be associated with a principle of animal welfare were naturalness, integrity, and giving the animal the opportunity to self regulate and build up disease resistance. Conflicts mentioned were with the Dutch regulations for agriculture in general. The organic regulations were not seen as restricting in this area, but rules should set out the minimum requirements to prevent new converters (who convert mainly on economic grounds) from harming the credibility of organic agriculture.

## 6.6 Values related to the soil

Values related to soil were discussed very differently in the different groups. For biodynamic and organic farmers groups it was a first association. The researchers mentioned it only once. The arable farmers discussed it much more but not the most of all principles.

The researchers mentioned only one value related to the principle of soil explicitly. It was discussed that an organic farmer works together with its soil and is very connected with it. Soil and soil fertility were mentioned many times in another context, very often as part of the whole system or production chain. The system should be in balance and the soil is an important factor in the health cycle. Arguments concerning soil were therefore scored under other principles.

Biodynamic farmers mentioned soil more often than the researchers and referred to it in a wider context, in relation to the preservation of water quality:

*“The land should be clean, the water clean and the cows peacefully. Healthy land means a good soil life (B,m)”.*

Apart from the statement: *“Soil fertility is the basics of all life” (B, m)*, the organic farmers spoke little about soil aspects.

In contrast, the arable farmers agreed on a special soil cluster (see table 9 D) and referred often to the soil principle.

*“Soil is the source from which you produce, Organic agriculture started with soil and soil was always the most important factor and always will be” (A,m).*

One explains:

*“As organic farmer you start from the soil. In conventional agriculture the soil is reduced to a medium, a substrate; fertilisers and chemicals are being applied for different symptoms. In contrast we want to take care of the soil, resulting in plants that feel comfortable and happy (A,m).*

It becomes clear that the perspectives of the farmers and other participants differ according to the importance of soil. Livestock farmers tend to find animal welfare more important, while arable farmers are more concerned with the soil. However, talking about soil they all agreed it is the main source and it should be handled with care. The importance of soil is also illustrated by the opposition to landless production (see values related to ecological principle).

## 6.7 Value of proximity and local networks

The value of proximity (or nearness principle) was not a first association of the groups. Values related to this principle received the least attention. By the researchers it received attention also in relation to product characteristics. For the arable farmers, proximity also had to do with contact and trust of the consumer in the farmer.

A result of this principle is that seasonal changes can be found in the assortment of products. The researchers as consumers appreciate this, but they also expressed that they don't want to eat cabbage all winter. Short supply chains were also seen as attractive from the point of view of energy conservation. One stated:

*"I rather have a conventionally grown apple from my own region than a organic papaya from South America which is flown in" (R, f).*

Another important argument was the appreciation of seasonal influences on the products.

*"My favourite products are dairy products, yoghurt and cheese, and preferably from the farm itself. That the farmer makes it's own products and you taste the seasonal changes in the products; the cheese made in winter tastes differently as made in summer and the yoghurt in winter contains more fat as in summer, that is what I like" (R, f).*

The researchers complained that consumers have little idea of how agriculture looks like. Honest and realistic communication is needed. But the question remains how much understanding one can expect of a consumer.

One of the organic dairy farmers has his own store, delivery route and he sells at local markets. He wishes to sell regional produce and exchange dairy and vegetables with his colleagues. Others see the region as very important for their input but less important for their output. They all see the function they have as example for society as very important.

Agriculture is seen as the basics of society.

*"When you want to build a new 'house' you should start with the fundament. In order to introduce more social justice in society it was suggested to start changing agriculture into that direction. A motivation to consume organic products to live longer does not change a thing. However when the consumer thinks it should be a fair and honest product than something has changed. And when he is shopping with his bicycle instead of by car, even more has changed (O,m)".*

Regional production also played an important role in the discussion of the arable farmers. They saw this as the answer to problems that arise with the anonymous market. The market grows but only little comes from the region. Consequences are competition between regions because one can produce a little cheaper than the other where this works only contra productive. The concerns were for the moment but also for the future.

*"When the distance between consumer and farmer is large, the consumers don't know what organic means. We should express more how we work with nature and also the sustainability which is our strength" (A,m).*

Communication between producer and consumers is needed to see which values are shared, to improve trust. Mutual trust is also improved when people visit a farm, and farmer and consumer get to know each other. The problem is that farmers do not seem to deal directly with the consumers but through trade and supermarkets that have different interests.

Overall, according to all groups regional productions has many benefits, but not every farmer sees himself selling his or her own products directly. The researchers like the direct contact between consumer and farmer, but also the seasonal changes which are experienced in the products. The farmers want a good communication with the consumer not only to sell their products but also to make them aware of the connection of agriculture with society and even with world problems. Education is seen as an important aspect. The arable farmers seem to believe regional production and consumption is the answer to the economic constraints. The difference in the attitudes in relation to local production of the different groups of farmers could be a reflection of the different retail channels they use. Arable farmers need to actively sell produce to different traders, whereas the dairy farmers have contracts with the dairy industry.

## 6.8 Holism and systems thinking

The principle holism and systems thinking at the first association of the researchers. This principle was the first association of all biodynamic farmers. For all groups together values with regard to system thinking and holism were discussed most after the principle ecological integrity.

The values of holism and system thinking are very important for the researchers and are quite dominant among the first association in this group. In most examples, the whole system constitutes of soil, plants, animals and farmers. The system approach is used to tackle problems. Systems thinking implies not only recognising that all parts of the systems work together, but also that systems are designed and customised for the soil, plants, animals and humans who are a part of it. The terms balance and harmony are mentioned often. Also the importance of patience is mentioned; to give plants and animals time and opportunity to grow and develop. Self-regulation is seen as an important aspect with respect to the parts and the whole system. The production chain is seen as another system, interactions take place between all stakeholders in the production chain; problems can be solved through optimisation of the interaction.

Holism and system thinking are also very important for the biodynamic farmers. It is mentioned in their first association with organic, in the way their farms develop, in how they solve problems. Balance and harmony are mentioned very often. All participants support the statement: if all values are in harmony, there will be no conflicts between them.

The organic dairy farmers see the systems approach as typical for organic. When the balance is disturbed you should look for the real causes. Solutions to problems are preventive instead of curative. Nature has an enormous self-cleaning ability, however people tend to disturb the balance.

The arable farmers talked a lot about the system; balance and inter-connectedness were experienced as a challenge. The system is seen as being always in development, but here again worries were expressed about new converters who do not take or have the time to develop a system that works.

*“The new converters think conventionally; they don’t have that feeling, not the intention to do it without those inputs or to optimise their system. It does not get the chance to develop, to get it right. They don’t have the patience and as a consequence keep applying minerals (A,m)”*

The arable farmers also introduced the word reproduction; they wanted to use it instead of production. They spoke of working with instead of against nature. And problems they used to have as conventional farmers are smaller now they are organic; this proved them the system works.

The values holism and systems thinking are very important for all groups as values in which all aspects of the farm come together. The farm was seen as one system, another important one is the food chain that includes producers, trade, consumers and other stakeholders. Terms referred to in this context by different groups were also: learning from and working with nature and self-regulation of a system, of an organism but also of the soil. The value ‘balance’ was added to harmony; both were often used and seen as very important. The participants said that there should be a balance between the different farm aspects but also between the values.

Some further values were mentioned that belong in this area, such as calmness: no rush, take the time (to grow, to develop) and patience was seen as complimentary to the value calmness. All groups refer to the system approach as the way in which problems are approached.

## 6.9 Professionalism and professional pride

The principle of professional pride was the first association of the researchers. Other groups are referring a lot to values related to this principle; it is the third in row of importance.

The professional pride of the researchers could be divided in three areas: the pride they have for their own profession, the pride they feel for the sector and the pride of farmers with whom they work. They experienced the sector as positive, as a good thing, as something that is right, which is seen also in the positive way society looks at organic agriculture. The farmers work in a value driven system, they make conscious choices. They look at their plants and animals with respect and try to work with soil, plant and animal, instead of against it.

*“I find it very inspiring to visit a farm and to see that it works” (R, f).*

In their own work, the researchers were proud of the professionalism and that they are now accepted also by ‘conventional’ research organisations, an aspect that has changed over time. The researchers also were proud of their participatory work and their system approach, but saw in other institutes also a conflict between professionalism and system thinking. Solutions become very high-tech and sometimes people are looking for one strain of bacteria to solve a multivariate complex soil problem.

The biodynamic farmers seemed to have a lot of professional pride. They have converted a long time ago when there was little market for their products and their development was off the common track. They themselves have a very positive attitude, but see this also as an important characteristic of the sector. Their work is challenging, for example through new developments such as letting dairy cows rear their own calves.

*“It is a big change, and again pioneers are needed who make themselves strong and give it a try. This is typically organic, it is and always should be in development” (B,f).*

Related to this is the fact that they also experienced a lot of freedom, which is said to be often underestimated. Because it is a value driven system, they do not feel restricted by the rules but keep developing their system. They are proud when individual aspects perform very well and remain sustainable in combination to other aspects, which reflects good agricultural practice. The farmers see it as important to be able to work with pleasure and relax during work, but find it also important to have leisure time. A typical biodynamic aspect is the farm energy, a form of life energy indicating the harmony of a farm.

*“You can do courses but it is most special when you have it yourself, it is part of the harmony on your farm” (B,m).*

The organic dairy farmers refer to the freedom they experience in organic agriculture. For them as well values give more freedom than strict rules, but minimum rules are needed as a quality guarantee. They experienced their choice to produce organically as a free choice and are proud of their profession; the recognition of society motivates them.

*“Farmer used to be a bad name, but nowadays it is quite an honour to be an organic farmer” (O,m).*

Also independence was mentioned in this context, the independence of artificial fertilisers and other chemicals for themselves, but also for farmers in developing countries.

*“You should not make them dependent on chemicals of the western countries. Chemicals are dumped and people don’t know what they are using” (O,m).*

They mentioned the morality of organic agriculture in aiming at educating people as it catalyses new processes.

The arable farmers like to improve their own skills and optimise their system and see organic as a real challenge, especially with difficult crops. Continuing their discussion on quality aspects set by the trade, they talked about how bakeries used to be experts in baking. They were professionals and were able to bake a good bread of all varieties of wheat. Today, the bakeries need a certain protein percentage etc. This gives the farmers less flexibility and makes them more dependent from inputs to have consistency in their crops and over years. Dependency was an important aspect to the arable farmers; one introduced in this context what the term sustainability meant for him.

*“You should not use inputs which are limited; you really have a problem when a situation of war is at hand and you can not produce because you need your inputs” (A,m).*

Participants in all groups were proud of their profession. They want to deliver good products and appreciate the recognition by society. The rules are not experienced as limitations. They work from their intentions towards their ideal system. The progress they make and difficulties they have to overcome are seen as challenges, which expresses their overall positive attitude. The value driven system gives them freedom, it was their own choice to become organic and they experience this also as freedom. Their work is demanding but flexible. Independence of fertilisers and chemicals seemed also to contribute to the feeling of independence. New values introduced and fitted under the area of professional pride were: pleasure in your work, leisure time, positive attitude of the sector connectedness/ co-operation with plant, animal and soil and last but not least the recognition they receive from society. They work with pleasure and also appreciate leisure time. The association with the organic profession and sector is positive.

## **7 Final conclusions**

Summarising the values in the words of the participants of these focus groups, organic agriculture could be defined as follows:

*Organic agriculture is about producing endlessly, with care and respect for humans, animals, plants and soil. Organic farmers produce healthy and tasty food without harming the environment or the development of others. Their farms and agriculture in general are inter-connected with small and big world problems.*

Overall there seem to be many similarities between the groups. Values related to all principles were discussed in all the groups; the differences observed were related to the different backgrounds.

The researchers spoke about their own experiences from work but also about their ideas from a consumer's point of view. For the dairy farmers animal welfare was an important value while soil was more important to the arable farmers. Also with regard to the values nearness and proximity, differences between arable and dairy farmers seemed to reflect their daily practice. Arable farmers are faced with an anonymous market, with high and changing quality standards of the trade, and regard local production and consumption as a solution to their problems. The other groups of farmers also support this quest for another economic system. The researchers mention the unrealistic ideas of consumers concerning organic agriculture and they wonder how to make consumers more aware. The farmers would like to educate the consumer more, also about the relation of production in their country compared with production and development elsewhere. The farmers see the inter-connectedness of agriculture with income and development in developing countries very clearly and for some this was an important argument to convert. The farmers have a great feeling of responsibility

for the world (ecologically and socially). For all of them the intentions are more important than the norms.

On the basis of the coding, it appears that values in relation to three principles were most important in the discussion. These are the ecology principle, holism and systems approach and professional pride, in order of importance. The following values were mentioned in relation to the principle of ecology: Recycling (the cycle) and saving energy were of major importance and nature conservation or nature integration on the farm was an important aim for some farmers. Co-operation between arable and animal production is seen as a very important means to close the cycle. And in the Netherlands with far going specialisation of farms this is sometimes a real challenge. Conflicts with the economy easily arise but also conflicts with national legislation restrict the farmers in their development.

The values itself are not experienced as restricting. All groups except for the arable farmers see a combination and balance of all principles as important in the future. Arable farmers see the soil as most important and other values as complementary. All groups of experienced farmers were worried about new converters, who seem to stick to the minimum values, as a threat to their profession. All participants seem to have the feeling to be part of the good guys and are being recognised by society in that way. They are proud of their profession and the sector. For the continuation of the sector a clear distinction from conventional agriculture is needed, but they are not afraid that conventional moves in the direction of organic.

For the future, steady development and growth is preferred above fast growth. Others should also get the chance and time to develop in the way they did, but the new converters should not decrease the credibility of organic. Therefore, acceptable minimum rules should do justice to the values held by the sector as a whole.

## **8 Literature**

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