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BOOK REVIEW

Global Development of Organic Agriculture: Challenges and Prospects

Edited by N. Halberg, H. F. Alroe, M.T. Knudsen and E.S. Kristensen. CABI Publishing, Wallingford, UK. <www.cabi.org>. May 2006, 380 pages, £55, ISBN 1 84593 078 9.

"… the organic standards and control systems themselves can be a barrier that hinders the potential growth and spread of organic farming" (p. 77).

Global Development of Organic Agriculture is valuable for its both explicit and implicit championing of the diversity of organic agriculture systems – and, in particular, its acknowledgment of the legitimacy and value of both certified and non-certified organics. In this, it serves as a useful foil to the fortress organics mentality that sees non-certified organics as some kind of impostor or threat to "the brand". This book takes as a starting premise the legitimacy and value of both strands of organics, and proceeds from there.

One of the remarkable, as well as exemplary, things about this new publication from the *Danish Research Centre for Organic Food and Farming* (DARCOF) is that five of the twelve chapters are available for free downloads: <www.ecowiki.org/GlobalPerspective>. Brief summaries of a further two chapters are available at: <www.orgprints.org>.

Despite the ambitious title, this book presents a Eurocentric view of the topic. ***Global Development of Organic Agriculture*** is the fruit of what the editors call a "knowledge synthesis" (p. xi) workshop by DARCOF (the acronym is generated from the Danish). Two of the chapters are written by congregations of six authors; in total there are 33 contributing authors, half are from Denmark, most are from continental Europe, none are from Asia, Oceania or the Pacific.

The editors report that ***Global Development of Organic Agriculture*** was "initiated by five key questions":

"Can organic production contribute to global food security? How?
Can organic production in developing countries contribute to a sustainable development? How?
Can organic certification protect natural resources, improve work conditions, etc.? How?
Can a fair global trade with organic products be realized? How?
Can organic research in high-income countries benefit organic agriculture in low-income countries? How?" (p. xii).

Chapter 1 reports that Oceania accounts for 42% of the global area under organic management; and that Australia leads the world with 11,300,000 organic hectares (p. 27) - that is nearly four times the area reported by number 2, Argentina, and twelve times the area of USA organics (the authors use Willer & Yussefi, 2005 data, available at: <www.soel.de>). Other than this fleeting mention, Oceania, Australia and New Zealand are noticeable by their absence, and do not figure in the index - in contrast, Bhutan receives three index-entries. This chapter includes interesting case studies of the beef trade/deforestation nexus in Brazil, and of GM soy crops in Argentina and the concomitant rapid rise of herbicide usage - with Fig 1.8 showing the increases of GM soy hectares closely tracked by glyphosate usage increases from 1996 to 2004.

Chapter 3, a web-available chapter, *Organic agriculture and ecological justice: ethics and practice* could instructively be read by those in Australia currently proposing mandatory certification. Alroe *et al.* write that:

> *"… non-certified food systems may be more in line with the organic values and principles than certified systems, because the latter face direct pressures of market competition and globalization that threaten to move organic food systems towards conventional systems, or in ways that are similar to conventional systems, and away from its original values and principles"* (p. 102).

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In *Chapter 6: Certified and non-certified organic farming in the developing world,* Parrott *et al.* present two informative SWOT analyses of organic farming, one from "a small farmer's perspective" and the second from "an institutional perspective" (p. 173, 174). They suggest that uncertified organic farms, especially in the developing world, lead to under-reporting of organic statistics, a kind of iceberg effect.

The final chapter observes that: "The two strands of OA, certified and non-certified, offer different opportunities and prospects, which should be dealt with consciously by the organic farming movement" (p. 364). The rather cumbersome acronym NC-OA (non-certified organic agriculture) is proposed, "as a concept specifically suited for promoting and protection of organic agricultural production, which is marketed locally without premium prices" (p. 358) - confounding localness and price.

Cosmologists will be tickled to read of "*worlds' …"* (p. 330), geographers to learn that "*Ukraine and China are the major certified organic producers in Asia"* (p. 28), and grammarians may choke on the cringe-worthy: "*possibility for premia prices"* (p. 173). Some readers will be irritated by chapters chopping and changing between OA (organic agriculture) and OF (organic farming) without apparent distinction.

This "*knowledge synthesis*" tome is further synthesized for readers in *Chapter 12: Synthesis: Perspectives for organic agriculture in a global context* - and there is a recommendation in the *Preface* (p. xi) to begin with the *Chapter 12: Synthesis* (which is available on the www).

Global Development of Organic Agriculture is a worthy contribution to the organics literature. However, the tone is timid rather than bold, and the conclusions (p. 363-365) tentative and insipid, rather than vibrant and challenging. For example, a "*challenge"* is: "*The major challenge in livestock production systems is to think the organic principles into a wide range of diverse systems with very different conditions"* (p. 364). A "*prospect"* (called "*promise"* in the www version) is: "*Non-certified OA methods should be developed to accommodate the specific agro-ecological conditions including soil types"* (p. 364).

Absent is a full-frontal account of such biting challenges, to both local and global organics, as GMOs, nanotechnology, cashed-up chemical companies, green-revolution technocrats, corruptible bureaucrats, the consumer-inadequate (sometimes misleading and deceptive) food labelling, the migration of standards to government, the erosion-of-concept (e.g. USDA's *organic = 95% organic* rule and the EU 0.9% GM rule), and the corporatisation of the supply chain, just to mention a few. And this *vis-a-vis* the hopes and desires of Mr. & Mrs. Ug Boot the world over, who are trying, and sometimes desperately, and in the shadow of malfeasance by omission and commission, to feed their children, with preferably and demonstrably wholesome food and beverages.

Five interesting questions have been raised to precipitate discussion and debate - to be addressed and explored rather than be definitively answered - and in this regard the book is successful. ***Global Development of Organic Agriculture,*** despite having an out-of-Europe feel, is an interesting and useful contribution to the literature of organic agriculture, and it is a worthy addition to any library with an agriculture, organics or world-development focus.

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