

Wild Organics: A Frontier Shift from Agriculture to Wildculture

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“Wild honey smells of freedom” wrote Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (1943). But to provide a stable and regular supply of food, most cultures and peoples at some time in the distant past forsook a hunting and gathering lifestyle, a wildculture, and shifted to agriculture. Not all peoples converted to agriculture; Australian and Tasmanian aborigines traditionally relied on wildculture.

The concept of organics evolved in the first half of the twentieth century as a response to chemical agricultural practices. This idea of “organic” flowed through from farming practice to farming produce, and hence we have Certified Organic food, including Certified Biodynamic produce. There are now 30.4 million hectares of organically managed agricultural land worldwide (Willer, Yusefi-Menzler & Sorensen, 2008, p.235).

There is currently a twenty-first century “backflow” of the “organic” concept, from its agricultural heritage to wildculture. By wildculture, I mean all aspects and styles of hunting and gathering food harvesting. Wild harvested organic land now totals 33.8 million hectares worldwide (Willer, et al., 2008) and already exceeds the global total of agricultural organic land. This is a new phenomenon and, from 2006 onwards, limited statistics have been reported by the *International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements* (IFOAM)(Willer & Yusefi, 2006).

Australia leads the world with organic agriculture land, with a total of 12,294,290 hectares (Willer et al., 2008) and accounts for 40% of the world total. However Australia, and Oceania do not rate a mention when it comes to reported wildculture organic hectares.

Finland leads the world with 7,507,523 wildculture organic hectares, being 22% of the world total. The statistics for organic wildculture follow a Pareto Principle pattern, though even more extreme than Pareto’s 20:80 ratio. The top 20% of the world’s organic wildculture countries account for 90% of the world’s organic wildculture hectares (Fig. 1).

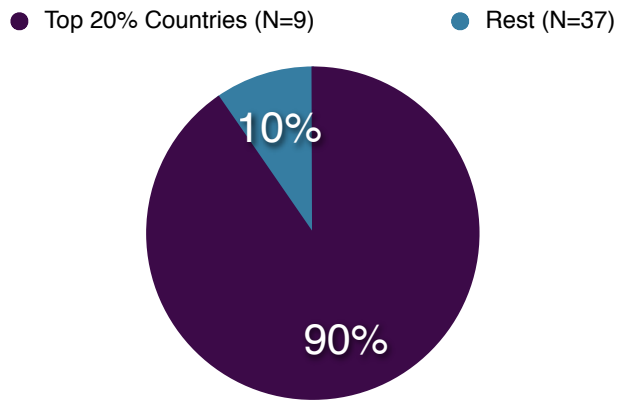


Figure 1: The top 20% (N=9) of the world's organic wildculture countries (N=46) account for 90% of the world's organic wildculture hectares (Data source: Willer et al., 2008).

Three of the leading countries for certified organic wildculture, based on hectares, are in Asia (Azerbaijan, India, and China); three are in South America (Brazil, Bolivia, and Argentina); two are in Africa (Zambia and Sudan); and two are in Europe (Finland and Serbia) (Fig. 2).

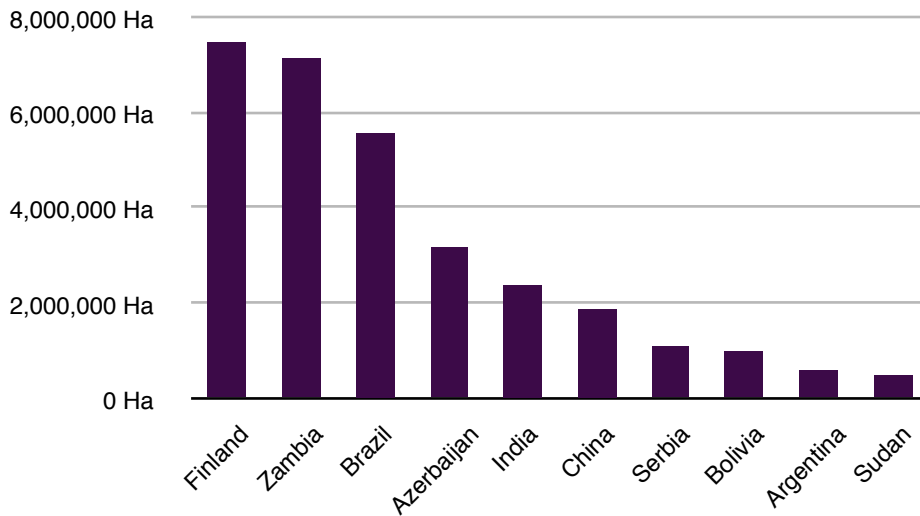


Figure 2: Organic Wildculture - The world's top 10 organic wildculture countries by hectares (Data source: Willer et al., 2008).

Only three countries, Brazil, China and Argentina, appear in both the list of top organic agriculture countries and top organic wildculture countries (Figs. 2 & 3). This suggests that these three countries are taking advantage of the established advantages offered by organic agriculture certification, and are also awake to the new opportunities offered by organic wildculture certification. Of 132 countries reporting organic farms, Chad is an interesting case with 36 organic farms yet no certified organic agriculture. All 36 Chadian organic farms are wildculture enterprises (Willer et al., 2008).

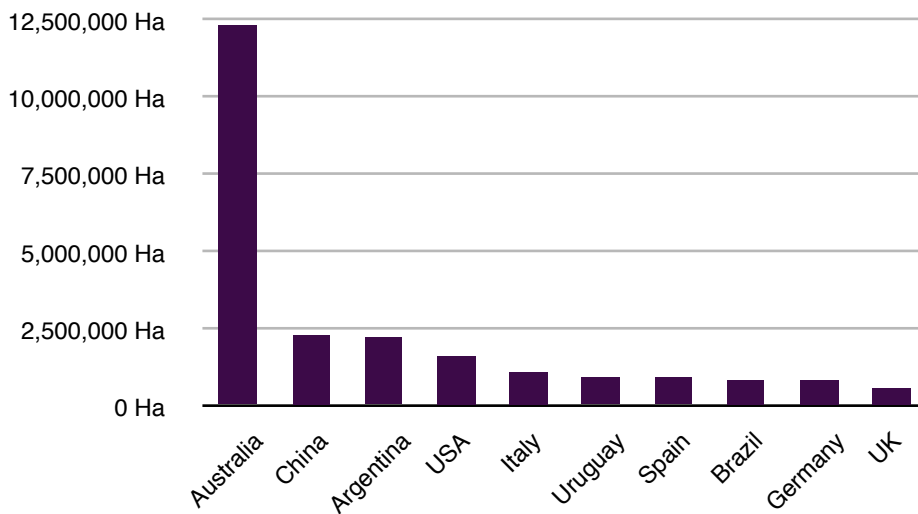


Figure 3: Organic Agriculture -The world's top 10 organic agriculture countries by hectares (Data source: Willer et al., 2008).

Of the 46 countries reporting organic wildculture, approximately one third (35%) are in Africa, 26% are in Europe, 22% are in Asia, and 15% are in Latin America. Canada is the North American entrant with 434,123 hectares (Fig 4).

“Organic” was originally defined in terms of farming, taking a viewpoint of “the farm as organism” (Paull, 2006). It is now bursting out of this restricted application into new frontiers. Some of these newfound organic frontiers are now uncontentious extensions, for example, organic food, fibre and floristry, and more recently, organic cosmetics and personal care products. Some extensions are hotly contested, for example certified organic water, and some are barely evident as yet, for example certified organic forestry.

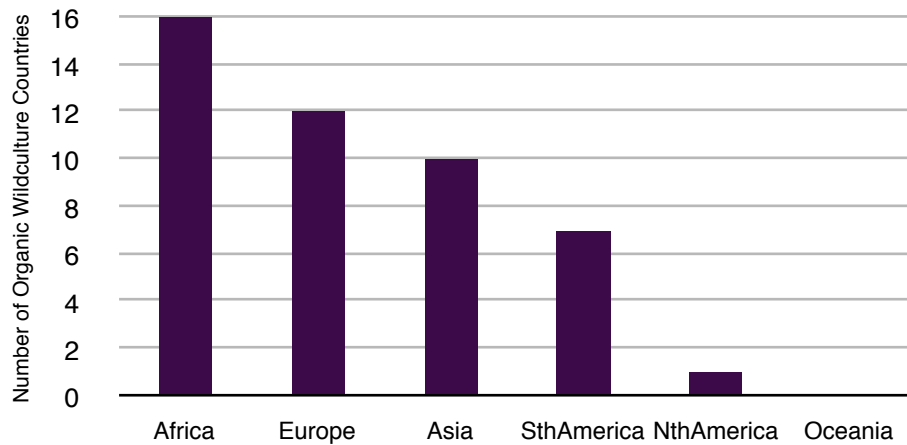


Figure 4: The distribution of organic wildculture countries (N=46) by continent (Data source: Willer, et al., 2008).

“Organic” has made a successful extension from agriculture to wildculture. The produce so harvested is diverse. The wild organic harvest includes fruit, berries, nuts, mushrooms and honey. Morocco reported harvesting Argan oil from its 100,000 wild organic hectares. Chad reported a harvest of gum arabic. Bulgaria and Croatia reported harvesting medicinal and aromatic plants, and Iceland reported aquatic products (Willer et al., 2008).

Xianjun Li (2007) reported that China's output of certified organic wild produce in 2006 amounted to 50,000 tons, that being 1.3% of China’s total annual organic production of 3,850,000 tons. Chinese wild organic produce on display at the inaugural BioFach China (2007) in Shanghai included Tibetan wild walnut oil, pine pollen harvested from forest reserves (CAF, 2007), and honey from the “National Nature Protection Area of Northeast Black Bee” (NBBDC, 2007).

Australian organic standards allow for wild harvesting. The *National Standard for Organic and Bio-Dynamic Produce* (2007, p.19), mostly avoids the word “wild”, but declares that “The collection of plants and parts thereof, growing naturally in pristine areas can be classed as an organic production method”. This standard specifies that “wild-harvest cannot be certified Bio-dynamic unless the Bio-dynamic preparations, as per this standard, have been applied to the areas to be harvested” (p. 35). Both the BFA and the NASAA organic standards allow for wild harvested organic, and carry a similar qualification for Biodynamic certification.

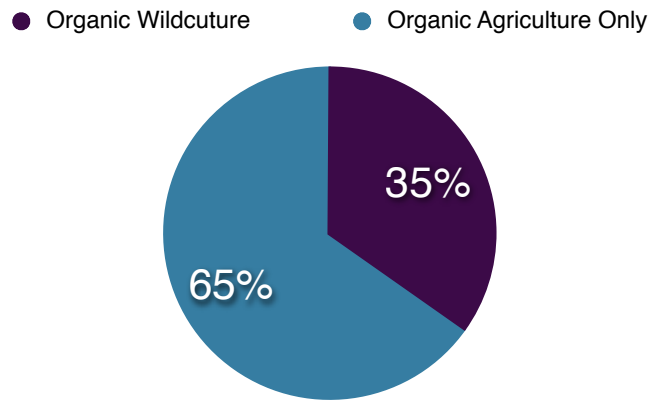


Figure 5: Countries reporting organic wildculture (N=46) compared to countries reporting organic agriculture only, i.e. no organic wildculture (N=86) (Data source: Willer et al., 2008).

Of the 132 countries reporting organic agriculture hectares, only 46 report organic wildculture hectares (Willer et al., 2008) (Fig. 5). This indicates that there is the opportunity for substantial expansion of organic wildculture certification. There are two new additional wild standards developing in parallel with certified organic wild. *FairWild* has a fair-trade emphasis, and the *International Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants* can be invoked for certain plants (ISSC-MAP) (IMO, 2008).

There is no in-conversion period for wild organic certification, although prohibited substances need to have not been used in the prior three years. Certified organic from wildculture offers added-value opportunities for producers already wild harvesting, and for consumers it offers the reassurance of third party oversight. There is a free manual for organic wild plant harvesting available (SIPPO, 2005).

Organic wildculture provides producers with a vested economic interest in excluding prohibited substances from the nominated area. This additional level of oversight can serve to raise the standard of wild area management. Such management is frequently in the hands of government agencies, Forestry Tasmania is such an agency, and history demonstrates that their options for environmental management include a spectrum of herbicides, insecticides and pesticides. Certifying an area for organic wildculture can refocus such management on more benign management approaches.

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