

18th Organic World Congress

Written inputs from panelists of the Main Track Session

9B: Making Organic Mean Sustainable:

Bringing the Principles of Organic Agriculture fully into practice can make organic the mainstream approach to sustainability

Tuesday, 15 October 2014 (11:30-13:00)

Istanbul, Turkey

Making Organic Mean Sustainable:

Bringing the Principles of Organic Agriculture fully into practice can make organic the mainstream approach to sustainability

Background

The reality of the present world falls far short of the vision of a sustainable world: over-reliance on cheap, non-renewable energy, declining biodiversity, loss of fertile soils, rampant pollution, threatened water supplies, poverty and inequity. The Principles of Organic Agriculture encompass a broad vision of a better world, of social and environmental harmony. Only by considering all dimensions of sustainability - societal, ecological, economic, and cultural â€“ can we attain such a vision with a process of continuous improvements. By aspiring to best practices we take a path to an agriculture that can be sustained over the long term. The Organic World must improve its own performance, both in terms of productivity and of relevance to a full spectrum of sustainability issues. We need to demonstrate that organic practices really work and are attractive enough to be adopted by the mainstream. We need to help the producers who identify themselves as "organic" embody best practices more and more. Furthermore, we need to highlight and find solutions for the most pressing issues beyond farming itself that affect the viability of organic producers, such as energy scarcity, debt, misguided policies, and unbalanced consumer habits.

Session Objectives

This session will explore the ways to facilitate and accelerate continuous improvements towards Best Practice. It will seek to identify the barriers to reaching operators along the value chain, and the messages and actions needed to achieve a maximum impact.

Leading Questions

- How can the Organic Movement further unite its understanding and position of the content and use of best practices?
- What are the quickest and/or most effective best practices that operators can make, so that they realize immediate tangible benefits?
- What organic practices can we most easily promote to non-Organic producers so that they start to approach organic practices and can then convert more readily?
- What are the best ways to reach and build capacity in operators â€“ organic and non-organic â€“ to adopt best practices?
- Using evidence of the benefits of best practices, how can we influence policy makers' decisions so that Organic Agriculture is better supported?
- Which strategies for organic stakeholders can we promote to support and enable the adoption of best practices?

Methodology: Panel discussion with 4-5 panelists.

Moderator/Rapporteur: Matthew Holmes/Patricia Flores

Speakers

- Katherine DiMatteo, Sustainable Food Trade Association, USA
- David Gould, IFOAM, USA
- Niels Halberg, ICROFS, Denmark
- Vijayalakshmi K., CIKS, India
- Louise Luttkholt, Helvetas, Germany

David Gould¹

Background:

David Gould is the designer of this Main Track session and wrote the abstract that appears on the OWC website. He may be reached at d.gould@ifoam.org.

Intention:

My intended participation on this panel is to answer the leading questions posed in the abstract by touching on a range of experiences gained through a variety of activities, including:

- The creation of the Best Practice Guideline and the discussions that took place during that phase;
- The ways the Guideline has been and is being used to define sustainability, and more broadly the role that the organic movement and the Guideline play in related discussions, negotiations, and activities;
- The ways in which the organic movement is working collaboratively to promote organic practices and principles as the mainstream strategy for sustainability in agriculture, both within the organic movement itself and through additional engagements outside;
- The current status of projects, enterprises, and case studies that are manifesting best practices, and communications and interactions about them;
- Priority areas where the organic movement can have greatest impact toward manifesting best practices and the Principles of Organic Agriculture in a mainstream way, ie by the greatest number of producers and to reach the greatest number of consumers;
- Identifying the greatest challenges and barriers to sustainability and/or manifesting best practices, and possible ways to overcome them;
- Interactions with governments and other policy makers, donors, researchers, capacity building organizations, and other supporters of value chains that exemplify how the organic movement's approach to sustainability can be taken to scale on widespread local, national, regional, and global levels;
- Sharing the current status of SOAAN, the IFOAM Best Practice Community, and related efforts that have concrete action plans and vision for leading the organic movement forward.

¹ David Gould is IFOAM's Value Chain Facilitator and the SOAAN Secretariat. He was the principal author and editor of the Best Practice Guideline for Agriculture and Value Chains and coordinates IFOAM's Best practice Community. He has worked over 20 years in the organic and sustainable food and non-food sectors, from raw material to finished product.

Louise Luttikholt²

Louise Luttikholt is co-director of HELVETAS Intercooperation, a German non-governmental organization which is committed to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged people in developing countries. It is rooted in the tradition and vast experience of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation. HELVETAS is engaged in over 30 of the world's poorest countries and contributes to reducing poverty through specific development projects in rural parts of Africa, Asia, South and Central America and Eastern Europe.

Earlier, Louise worked as director strategy with Fairtrade International. Before that, she was professionally active for IFOAM and had the honor to coordinate the process in which the Principles of Organic Agriculture were articulated, later followed by the definition of Organic Agriculture; the results of which function both as an anchor and future vision for the whole organic movement.

11 years ago I was cycling through Italy. I like cycling because it is a way of traveling made for human scale: first of all it does not need external energy to move around; secondly the speed of traveling is such that my brain and consciousness can adapt to it. Moreover I like the openness of it: open in the out, down to earth, close to other persons.

Human scale, external energy input, possibility of grasping, down to earthiness and closeness to others, might be, when thinking about it, good indicators for sustainable development.

During that trip, I visited in Florence the Brancacci Chapel, in the St. Maria del Carmine Monastery, where Massaccio made a fresco in 1427 on the expulsion from Paradise. The picture of Adam and Eve sent away dramatically expresses the grievance these persons, our mythical ancestors, undergo having to leave the Garden of Eden. But what is their grievance about?: they lost their innocence.

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Since that time, we are no longer innocent. However, instead of making smartly use of the consciousness we are gifted with, we behave as if the Garden of Eden, our Earth, provides an endless supply of goods, and therewith created major global challenges:

- degradation and depletion of natural resources soil, water and biodiversity;
- climate change and its effects (including changing weather patterns causing floods and/or water scarcity);
- the need to feed a growing population with sufficient food of good quality;
- high levels of poverty, particularly in rural areas;
- the necessity to generate jobs and income, and to further communities.

In this world that is far from paradise, we cannot maintain our innocence. Indeed, by eating the apple we gifted ourselves with the responsibility of taking care. That is my motivation for being active in the organic sector.



By applying the principles of health, ecology, fairness and care, organic agriculture reduces many of the current interlinked challenges and their impacts. The principles and their applications through best practices are interconnected; the strength lies on the holistic approach. Through daily conscious activities we have the potential, and therewith the responsibility, in our hands to restore the viability of a sustainable planet. However, we sometimes get distracted by processes, laws, including those who regulate organic agriculture, and institutions that seem to want to push us back in innocence³. A mono-issue focus reduces or even undermines other (important aspect of) sustainable development.

Since we are gifted with the knowledge of good and bad we need to ponder on what are the right questions to ask. What are the questions that Organic Agriculture wants to answer? And, are they still pertinent, given the global challenges we face? And do the answers stand a simply ‘bicycle test’ with indicators on human scale, possibility of grasping, down to earthiness and closeness to others?

³ what about this commercial: ‘do not think, google’

Dr. K. Vijayalakshmi⁴

Dr. K. Vijayalakshmi has a Doctorate in the area of Biological Control of Pests. She is one of the Founders and Research Director of an organization which is promoting organic agriculture to improve the livelihoods of small and marginal farmers. She has coordinated more than 55 organic agriculture projects and has experience in this area for nearly three decades. Besides this she is an author of several publications in this area and has more than 40 publications to her credit. She is also currently the Programme Director of a DFID funded project which involves 9,000 farming households which focuses on sustainable agriculture and marketing. She has also been on the International Task Force of IFOAM on rewriting principles of organic agriculture. For more information view www.ciks.org

MAKING ORGANIC SUSTAINABLE THROUGH A BUSINESS MODEL FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Background (Ideas about the session)

Productivity in agriculture is rapidly going down due to rapid decline of land fertility because of the excessive use of inorganic fertilizers and pesticides; use of substandard quality of seeds which are poor in germination, less tolerant to pests, diseases and local climatic conditions; poor awareness and adoption of improved cultivation techniques. The major reasons for this situation are agriculture services to farmers are next to negligible; agriculture is becoming un-remunerative for small holders due to the exorbitant prices of inputs (both inorganic and organic); market forces are not acting in favour of farmers and therefore interventions needed to bring equilibrium; interventions in value chain have been isolated and not comprehensively addressing the issues of the entire agriculture value chain; demands and issues of organic farmers not addressed by the general extension system. While most of the issues mentioned are relevant both to chemical and organic agriculture it is all the more striking and difficult when farmers are wanting to convert to organic agriculture and it becomes extremely crucial for us to develop and put systems in place which can help farmers to convert to organic agriculture and attain sustainability.

There are several ways in which we can facilitate and accelerate conversion to organic agriculture. The key solution is to demonstrate significant and tangible impacts at the farm level and parallelly work towards sustainability at technical, institutional, economic, environmental and policy levels.

How can the organic movement further unite its understanding and position of the content and use of best practices?

Organic agriculture is practiced in several forms across the globe. There are several forms of it like no tillage farming, do nothing farming, zero budget farming and use of organic inputs as alternatives to chemical farming. What works in a situation may not be the ideal in a different area. Solutions need to be worked out which suits the local requirements and needs. While documentation of these practices in different parts are happening to a certain extent, it is not being done systematically and disseminated to the organic farming community. We need to evolve mechanisms through which this can be done and the IFOAM community is suitably positioned to

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take this forward. While efforts are being done by IFOAM to document best practices it is also necessary to develop regional centres which can help accelerate this and also feed information at a central level which could be located at IFOAM. IFOAM which is an International Network has also a greater bargaining power with Governments and Universities and can use these for promotion and dissemination.

Can organic agriculture alone nourish the world? If yes how?

This is a question which has been posed for several decades now. The problem in most parts of the world is not insufficient production but inappropriate distribution of food. Besides this, most food that is cultivated inorganically lacks sufficient nutrients which also lead to major diseases and health problems. In several parts of the world (especially in countries like India) even today 75% of the farmers (dryland farmers) practice default or mostly organic. However, these farmers are not being provided sufficient support and as a result of this they do not have access to proper technologies, inputs etc. which leads to very low productivity. If only we can concentrate our efforts in this area and provide sufficient support and hand holding we can convert these farmers into very efficient, high productive organic farmers in no time and also be able to provide high quality nutritious food for the entire world.

What organic practices can we most easily promote to non-organic producers so that they start to approach organic practices and can then convert more readily?

Practices like use of vermicompost, neem seed cake as an alternative to chemical fertilizers can be encouraged through demonstrations in nonorganic producers fields. These are bound to show immediate results. Besides this, it is also important to provide them with certain very effective ready to use bioproducts where they can see the results within the season itself. This can help them to consider converting to organic more readily.

What are the best ways to reach and build capacity in operators – organic and non-organic to adopt best practices?

It is important to build the capacities of community groups through trainings, exposures, community sensitization workshops, localized discussions, cluster level reflections and planning, awareness and handholding support. This can be efficiently done by training a cadre of Village based Agri Business Development Service Providers (VABDSPs) who would be basically literate and progressive farmers in a village.

Using evidence of the benefits of best practices, how can we influence policy makers' decisions so that organic agriculture is better supported?

A constant engagement with the local Government is required. Local multi-stakeholders platforms need to be created which would include farmers, extension officials, traders, consumers, policy makers. Regular meetings, discussions should be held and areas for convergence should be identified.

Which strategies for organic stakeholders can we promote to support and enable the adoption of best practices?

The approach of providing household specific, demand based services through VABDSPs is a key strategy in our experience to promote organic agriculture and adoption of best practices. A business model for the social enterprise with multiple revenue options to sustain the benefits of organic agriculture needs to be put in

place (our model can be elaborated further in the panel). This can promote to support and enable adoption of best practices.