

I denna undersökning framkom ett antal saker vilka kunde vara bra att granska mer i fortsättningen. Specifiering av kostnaderna och uträkning av arbetsmängden kunde vara noggrannare än i denna undersökning för att kunna göra upp ännu bättre gårdsvisa analyser. Med hjälp av en noggrann specifiering av kostnaderna kunde man upptäcka hur kostnadsstrukturen är uppbyggd. Hur arbetsinsatsen är uppbyggd kunde som nämnts vara bra att utreda för att veta varför den årliga arbetsinsatsen är be-

tydligt lägre på ekologiska gårdar. Dessutom borde variationen mellan gårdarna kunna utnyttjas t.ex. genom att söka efter orsakerna till bra eller dålig lönsamhet. ■

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Översättning från finska: Bertel Riska

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**”En olönsam produktion är svår att få lönsam genom att lägga om till eko, men en lönsam gård kan ytterligare förbättra lönsamheten genom omläggning till eko.”**

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## How to find and understand developmental problems and learning challenges in organic vegetable farming?

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TOHTORIN-VÄITÖKSET

**M**any RD (= research and development) -projects start by finding out or assuming problems which need to be solved. As the cultivation techniques and marketing channels in organic vegetable farming so far may be undeveloped, it is not easy to define which problems are the most urgent ones to be tackled with in the projects. Besides, each farm and region is unique, and farmers, advisors, researchers and administrators may have differing views about the problems. The specialized agricultural disciplines often do not reveal how different problems in farming are related to each other, nor which problems are relevant in developing organic vegetable farming.

### Methodology

A recent doctoral dissertation in agroecology, using an approach derived from cultural historical activity theory, examines the developmental problems and learning challenges in organic vegetable farming. Problems and challenges are seen in the practices of farming, and

therefore a careful ethnographic field study was first done on two organic vegetable farms that had different production histories (milk and greenhouse production). A general history of organic farming and agriculture in Finland were examined in order to put into temporal context the practices and problems of the farms. Working hypotheses were derived from ethnography and from the history. Later, these working hypotheses were tested with qualitative analyses of audio- or videotaped crop rotation planning sessions and organic inspections of the farms. The field study and data collection was carried out in 1997–1998 when Finland recently had entered the European Union.

### Dimensions of learning

In their generalized form, the main developmental problems found can be grouped as contradictions within and between two dimensions: societal integration and use of natural resources (see the framework in figure 1). The horizontal dimension shows the problem of

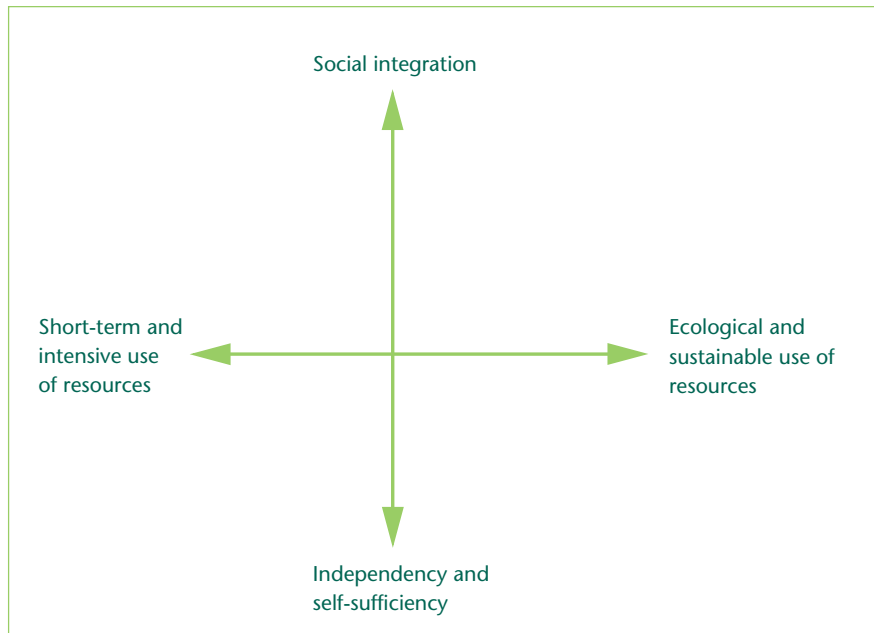


Figure 1. The framework for the study of learning challenges in organic vegetable farming.

intensiveness of farming. When analyzing or reflecting upon farming practices, the framework may help in two ways. First, it reveals how in practice issues of the use of natural resources are intertwined with social relations. The three main categories of social relations affecting the use of natural resources are market, administrative, and 'organic' relations. Second, it helps see that the site-specific practices and problems are part of the general organic farming. In this view the choices made on farms are not outside of how organic agriculture in general develops. It is important that for reflection purposes the abstract framework (figure 1) is first made concrete or translated by practitioners to their own local circumstances. For instance, the critical societal integration may imply close farmer cooperation for marketing purposes, which also affects land use of the farms.

The historical analysis suggests that the contradictions are expansively solved when farming practices move both to-

wards societal integration and towards ecological and sustainable use of natural resources (that is, to the right and upwards in the framework, figure 1). In practice contradictions are solved in various ways, which implies that development does not proceed linearly. The two farms in the study had practices that in their local cultures and circumstances are expansive, that is, they move the farming to the right and/or upwards in the framework, figure 1. They were for example the use of catch crops, farmer cooperation, a new crop rotation plan, rules for hired workers, and creating social relations with administration.

The thesis-part of the dissertation (Laura Seppänen, 2004. Learning challenges in organic vegetable farming. An activity-theoretical study of on-farm practices. University of Helsinki, Institute for Rural Research and Training. Publications 1.) can be found at <http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/julkaisut/maa/sbiol/vk/seppanen/>

The whole dissertation (in English) with the six articles listed below can be ordered from the Institute for Rural Research and Training, e-mail:

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