



Identifying the basic normative principles for organic agriculture

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Three principles



The Cyclical Principle



The Precautionary Principle



The Nearness Principle

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Why basic principles?

There are explicit goals (e.g. IFOAM's principle aims).
But the underlying basic values and norms of organic farming are seldom made fully explicit.

Our first assertion is that there is a need for formulating a few simple principles on how to act in an organic way.

- The organic movement needs it
- Research needs it

Our second assertion is that such basic normative principles can be identified.

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Why do we need them?

- Development of organic farming in other regions with different cultural, climatic and agricultural backgrounds.
- Development of 'organics' in different food and non-food areas (e.g. fishery, forestry).
- Confronting the de facto technological and structural development of organic farming
 - Do we really want to go there? Can we avoid it?
 - Consequences for food safety, consumer trust, animal welfare, etc.
- Development of simple and consistent rules

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Why these normative principles?

Basic 'organic views' of human and nature



Basic principles for acting 'in an organic way'

Not particular to, but characteristic of the organic movement

Not justification, but suggestion

To be discussed and confirmed by the organic movement

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Why these?

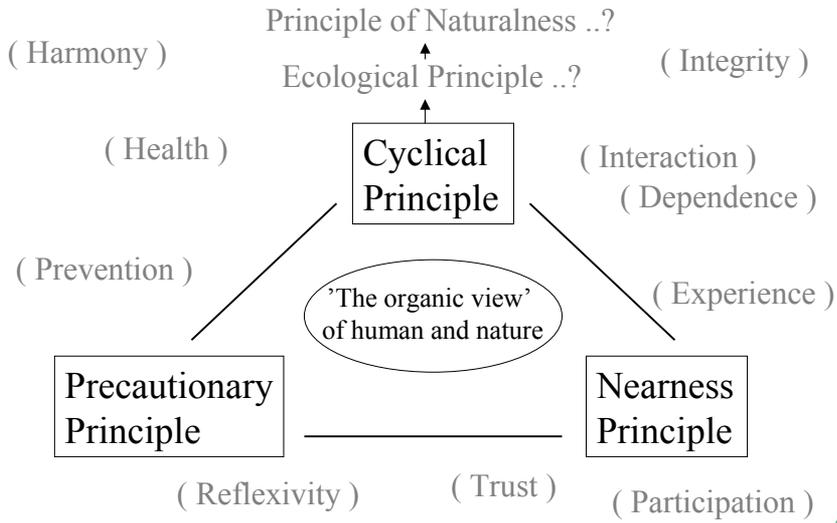
Basic 'organic views' of human and nature

- Human is a part of nature. Social systems can be distinguished from, but not separated from, natural systems.
- Scientific knowledge of complex systems will always be limited and contextual.
- Living and learning is both experiential and social. People need to be involved.

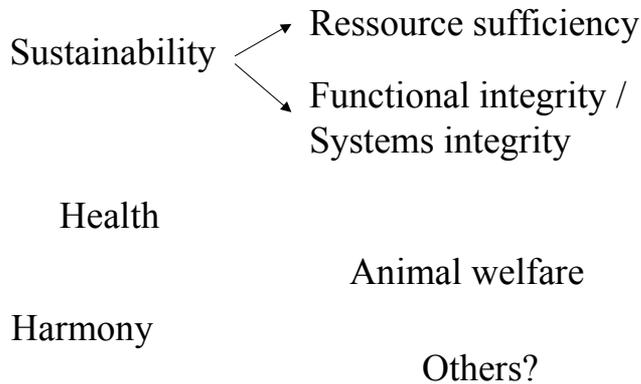
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Why these?



And why not these?





The Cyclical (or Ecological) Principle

This is a principle for how the organic practice should interact with nature, saying that:

Organic production should cooperate with nature.

That is, the production should emulate and benefit from nature's systems and cycles, fit into them, and help sustain them.

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The Precautionary Principle

This is a principle for how to make decisions when introducing new technologies or expanding production.

It says that:

Action should be taken to prevent harm to the environment and human health, even if there is no conclusive scientific evidence that this harm will occur.

Apart from 'stop this', the principle also implies

- the general promotion of cleaner, safer technologies
- comprehensive research to detect and reduce risks.

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The Nearness Principle

This principle is concerned with learning and the social communication between consumers, producers, researchers and other actors in the organic food cycles.

Important aspects are:

- Creating systems with possibilities for firsthand *experience* and personal contact.
- Furthering the *participation* of all relevant actors and their values and cultures.
- Promoting *transparency* in the organic food cycles.

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The Nearness Principle suggests

that we should further develop production, processing and marketing systems

- that are founded on close relationships between producer and consumer
- that build on greater openness and transparency
- in which the producer is identified and available for contact

This may be an alternative to the present development towards ever more complex rules and increasing control.

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What use are they?

Basic normative principles can

- confront the rapid technological and structural development
- further the development and extension of organic practices
- help the development of simple, consistent rules for organic practices of a still wider scope

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What next?

The identification of such principles calls for value inquiry and comprehensive discussions on the values of organic farming between all the relevant actors of the organic movement.

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