

Preface

Modern agriculture and food systems, including organic agriculture, are undergoing a technological and structural modernization and are faced with a growing globalization. Organic agriculture (OA) can be seen as pioneering efforts to create sustainable development based on other principles than mainstream agriculture. There are however large differences between the challenges connected to, on the one hand, modern farming and consumption in high-income countries and, on the other hand, smallholder farmers and resource-poor consumers in low-income countries.

The point of departure is the increasing globalization and the production and trade of food and fodder and how this influences the role of OA. The main aim of this book is to provide an overview of the potential role and challenges of organic agriculture in this global perspective, as seen from different perspectives such as sustainability, food security and fair trade.

Initially, the book provides an overall status of global trends in agriculture followed by discussions of sustainability, globalisation and the relative new concepts of 'ecological justice' and 'political ecology'. Different views on economy and trade are furthermore discussed with a focus on ecological economics. Then, the status and possibilities of organic agriculture in developing countries are discussed, including problems of nutrient cycles and soil depletion plus issues on veterinary medicine. Furthermore, organic farming is related to the world food supply. The possibilities of knowledge exchange in organic agriculture are also evaluated and it is assessed how a large scale conversion to OA would impact on food security. Finally, prospects and challenges of organic farming in a globalized world are discussed in a synthesis chapter. Readers who seek first an overview and summary across the different chapters are recommended to start by reading the synthesis.

The book springs from a so-called 'knowledge synthesis' initiated by The Danish Research Centre for Organic Food and Farming (DARCOF¹) in January 2004 to provide an overview of the potential role of organic agriculture in a global perspective.

¹ DARCOF (Danish Research Centre for Organic Food and Farming) is a so-called 'centre without walls' where the actual research of organic food and farming is performed in interdisciplinary collaboration between the participating research groups. The aim of DARCOF is to elucidate the ideas and problems faced in organic farming through the promotion of high quality research. Knowledge synthesis is one of the central activities of DARCOF to ensure that the research focuses on the most relevant challenges and the projects are undertaken in the most appropriate manner.

In short, a knowledge synthesis analyses, discusses and synthesizes the existing knowledge on a subject not yet clarified and often disputed in relation to the main points of view. This work takes place in a group of experts from different fields that represent the different points of view on the subject. It is therefore important to include experts with different backgrounds and different perceptions of the subject. The work was initiated by five key questions: To which extent and under which circumstances:

1. Can organic production contribute to global food security? How?
2. Can organic production in developing countries contribute to a sustainable development? How?
3. Can organic certification protect natural resources, improve work conditions, etc.? How?
4. Can a fair global trade with organic products be realized? How?
5. Can organic research in high-income countries benefit organic agriculture in low-income countries? How?

An international workshop, 'Organic farming in a global perspective – globalisation, sustainable development and ecological justice', was held in April 2004 in Copenhagen to provide inputs to the knowledge synthesis, discuss the issue and clarify ambiguous concepts. Experts from USA, Sweden, Austria, The Netherlands and Denmark were invited to give presentations on the international workshop. On the basis of presentations, discussions and group work at the workshop the outline of this book was laid down and the Danish and international experts started preparing the chapters.

The knowledge synthesis on organic agriculture in a global perspective was performed by a group of Danish experts from a wide range of relevant fields in cooperation with international experts (see list of contributors). A website was established to communicate background material and working papers, and facilitate critical comments from other participants. Thus all chapters have been improved from reviews made by other experts, whom we wish to thank here.

DARCOF wishes to thank all contributors to the book; their efforts are most gratefully acknowledged.

Head of DARCOF,
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