

organic
Revision

Focus groups of value concepts of producers:

National report UK

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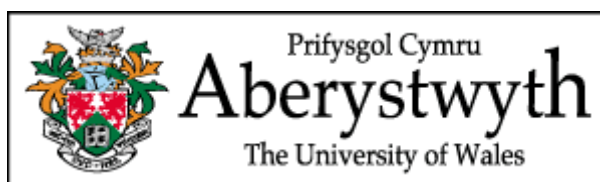


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1 Introduction

The UK has experienced a sharp increase in the number of farmers interested in organic conversion since 1997, shortly after the introduction of subsidies. At the end of 1997 approximately 1000 producers and nearly 55,000ha, compared with 4000 producers and nearly 700,000 ha at the end of 2003. Decline in land area, however, has been reported for the first time since this rapid increase in 2004 (SA, 2004). The distribution of organic farms within England and Wales is skewed towards livestock production, and partly in consequence, the predominantly grass-based regions in the South and West have a proportionately higher number of organic producers (SA, 1999). Compared to conventional agriculture, relatively more mixed farms are managed organically, whereas the percentage of specialised dairy and arable farms is lower. The reasons for the skew are not fully understood, but are likely to be both technical (e.g. enterprise mix and farm type).

In an expert survey with representatives from the farming community, agricultural policy and the food market the following drivers were suggested for the rapid development in the 90s: Crisis in conventional agriculture; increased consumer demand for organic food; good organic prices and a relatively high profitability of organic farming; and higher conversion grants and increased government commitment to supporting organic farming under the labour administration including increased publicity (Michelsen et al., 2001). This period of growth in organic production in the late 90s was followed by a period of consolidation, problems of higher supply than demand occurred in some key markets (for example for milk and red meat), resulting in lower farm gate prices.

The UK organic food market is historically quite dependant on imports. In the market as a whole import dependency has reduced as more farms have converted to organic production in the UK, but there remains a mismatch between consumer demand and production in some areas (such as fruit and vegetable production). An above average growth rate was noted in direct sales, in particular through farmers markets. However, the most important outlets for organic food in the UK remain the multiple retailers (approx 80 per cent of all organic sales) and there is significant competition between supermarkets in this area. The major retailer chains engaged in this sector report continued investment in expanding their organic range and elevating organic sales but have increased their focus on brands and lines that have proven to be successful. All supermarkets state commitment to procure domestically produced organic food. However, Firth et al. (2004) concluded that price pressure will perhaps be the main threat to the UK organic vegetable industry. The high retail prices act as a barrier to consumers purchasing, and on the other hand the lowering of returns to growers could threaten organic integrity and the livelihoods of producers.

Some studies have looked into the motives and attitudes of organic producers in the UK. The first survey of 70 organic farmers in England and Wales included questions about the farmers' motivations to organic production. The farmers most frequently mentioned improvement of husbandry (approximately 75%), followed by concerns about food quality for humans and stock (38%), debt reduction (28%) and the risk associated with agro-chemicals (24%) (Vine and Bateman, 1981). Ashmole (1993) reported similar motivations but environmental concerns were more dominant.

Several farmer and growers mentioned the desire to go “back to the land”. In a comparison of five Scottish and ten French organic producers economic considerations were the main motive for the Scottish producers, whereas the interviewees in France were also attracted by the values attached to organic farming (Marshall, 1999). In contrast and more in line with older surveys Burton et al. (Burton et al., 1997) found non-economic aspects dominant in the decision to go organic among 237 horticultural producers (151 conventional and 86 organic). With the help of factor analysis of a survey of 122 organic producers in Scotland McEachern and Willock (2004) identified underlying motives as environmental, ethical and societal and important factors that explained variation in attitude were named as naturalness, market demand and policy, implying that the producers were more strongly inclined to agree with statements regarding these areas than to other statements. The study also reported that half of the producers surveyed think that the organic sector might lose its high ethical status in the future, because new entrants to the industry are believed not to have the same ethical values as more established organic producers.

Ramsden and Rodgers (1999) attempted to cluster organic producers based on attitude and found a difference in relation to marketing in a postal survey of 59 organic producers. For the majority direct marketing was the main outlet, but a large proportion of the sample (81%) used more than one outlet; five producers supplied supermarkets. The authors detected a difference in attitude between the supermarket users and other producers. The former group was characterised as more business-oriented, whereas the non-supermarket users were concerned about their loss of independence and the lack of compatibility of the supermarket outlet with the organic farming ethos.

Overall, this survey showed that in 2004/05 the UK organic sector was characterised by slowed down growth in both retail sales and conversion, a heavy reliance on multiple retailers as the main outlets with negative impact on farm gate prices, a higher supply than demand in some livestock markets. On the other hand there appears to be a growing interest in direct sales and local food and efforts to diversify into different sales channels. Few studies have investigated the values of organic producers in the UK, but several have looked at the motivation to convert. There are indications that motives for organic producers have changed to some degree. In the first surveys improvements to husbandry were mentioned by the majority of producers, in later studies the environment and financial considerations appear more important, but the reasons for this change are not fully understood, but external circumstances have also changed. It also appears that organic producers are not homogenous in relation to their attitudes with factors such as farm type and marketing channel, explaining some of the observed differences.

2 Places and participants of the focus groups in the UK

In the UK, three focus groups with producers were carried out, one in England and two in Wales. One further group with newly converted producers in England was cancelled at short notice by the facilitator. There was not time to run a replacement group yet, but this is still envisaged.

Table 1 Place and participants of UK groups

Group	Date	Type	Full time growing		Position in organic organisation (%)	Age	
			No	(%)		(Av.)	Years in organic farming (Av.)
UK 1	18/11	Experienced producers (E)	15	87%	20%	47	15
UK 2	22/11	Researchers (R)	8	0%	63%	41	14
UK 3	8/12	Experienced producers (E)	10	80%	20%	57	16
UK 4	10/12	Converting producers (C)	8	100%	0%	46	8

Group UK 1 was held attached to a regular meeting, of a group of experienced organic producers and demonstration farms in Gloucestershire, England that meet every 6 months, and therefore had to be run to a shorter period of time. The majority of producers had arable enterprises and livestock (both dairy and other livestock), but pigs and poultry and horticulture were also present on at least 25% of the farms that were participating.

Group UK 2 was held at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth with researchers and professionals from Organic Centre Wales. The participants knew each other and group was responsive and gave considered answers.

Group UK 3 was held at a hotel in Llandissilio, West Wales with established organic producers. Apart from one or two exceptions, the group also appeared to know each other well and were comfortable in each others company.

Group UK 4 was held using meeting facilities of a newly converted farm in Pembrokeshire. This group of newly producers that had converted since 1999 included members of an organic livestock producer group that meets regularly in the area, but to have a wider representation of enterprises some other producers had been invited to join the group. Overall the group had fewer farms with a wide range of enterprises, but all major enterprises of the organic industry in the UK were represented.

Table 2 Characteristic of participants in UK producer groups

Groups	UK1	UK3	UK4
Type	Experienced producers	Experienced producers	New producers
Location	England	Wales	Wales
No of participants	15	10	8
Average year conversion	1987	1992	1999
Average Farm size	379	59	162
<i>Enterprises present</i>	<i>% of producers</i>	<i>% of producers</i>	<i>% of producers</i>
Dairy	40%	30%	50%
Pigs/poultry	33%	20%	13%
Other livestock	67%	50%	38%
Arable	80%	40%	38%
Horticulture	40%	60%	25%
Marketing strategies			
Direct marketing	53%	60%	50%
Multiple retailer	27%	10%	0%
Wholesaler	60%	70%	88%
Other	40%	30%	38%

3 Summary of results following discussion guide

This section is based on summary reports for each group that were written shortly after each meeting.

3.1 Introduction

In two of the UK groups the participants knew each other well, so the introductions were kept short. In one group (UK3) the participants started to talk about why and how they had converted their farms which is included below. In the meeting of UK4 this topic was kept extremely short, in an attempt to discourage participants talking about their organic history with hope to discuss this more fully later.

3.2 First associations with organic in the "Warm- up"

The participants were asked to write down a few keywords of what came to their mind when thinking about "organic" and share them with the group afterwards.

The both groups with experienced producers (UK1 and 3) mentioned a wide range of issues, such as conservation and wildlife, quality, integrity, working in balance and with nature, minimising man's impact on nature, health, soil and health, GM free, farm assurance, trust and external verification, minimal resource use, animal welfare, sustainability, diversity, health, profit, self-reliance, farm recycling and local. The participants expressed considered views on what organic meant to them, rather than top of the head associations. The group with newly converted producers (UK4) was more quickly to respond with keywords. Participants mentioned sustainability, the environment and health/safety. Asked what the group considered to be typical organic consumers, the participants mentioned known stereotypes ('sandal wearing', mothers with young children) but were keen to point out that non-typical consumers exist. As for typical organic producers the group mentioned broad based people, caring for the

environment and market driven. One participant felt that organic producers could be divided into those that do it as a business or as a hobby.

Keywords mentioned by the group of researchers and other professionals of the organic sector (UK2) were quality of life, traceability of production, trust, environment, health, welfare, safety and mixed enterprises. Similar to the experienced producers' keywords represented considered views rather than top of the head associations.

Common first association with the term organic in all groups in the UK were caring for the environment, health and product quality/safety. In the producer groups sustainability was mentioned as a first association, experienced producers also mentioned working with nature, local production and trust; the professionals also mentioned traceability. Both groups of experienced producers gave very considered views rather than top of the mind associations, suggesting these professionals have to deal with answering similar enquiries on a regular basis.

3.3 The own 'organic history' and further development

In the English group of experienced producers (UK1) the reasons for going organic included the believe that this represents a better way of farming combined with an opposition to and problems with conventional agriculture, such as personal health problems from exposure to sprays, animal health problems, the need to farm with rather than against nature, concerns about the growing commercialisation and dependency on agro-business, reduction of inputs. Reasons also included, however, personal development and challenge issues, and commercial considerations, such as securing the future of the farm. Among experienced producers in Wales the issues that gave them confidence to enter into conversion were similar, including moving away from unsuccessful high intensity conventional farming, association with self-sufficiency and real-food movements, environmental concerns, interest in 'natural ways' and meeting other organic farmers. In the group of farmers that converted since 1999, some producers mentioned that they entered into organic certification, because they saw their method of farming as almost organic anyway. Also in this group personal reasons were also mentioned, such as the need to reduce stock numbers for health reasons, expanding the hobby of organic gardening to a small business, or generation change on the farm. Most felt that conversion grants did help to reduce the financial risk of conversion and in convincing others with an interest in the farm, such as the older generation or the bank manager.

The majority of participants were happy with the changes that conversion had brought, but two dairy farmers expressed their disappointment because they had so far not been able to sell milk as organic, despite being certified. The group was asked to respond to the statement "that later converters are only in it for the money". All participants disagreed strongly with such categorisation, but most found the grant aid helpful and pointed out that had to farm for profit, not as a hobby.

Entry points into organic agricultural of the group of professionals were quite different from the other groups. Two members identified social issues as being important for their entry into agriculture/organic agriculture. The ecologist of the group saw organic agriculture as an interesting experiment, whereas another member's

interest had come from a interest in pest control and biochemistry. Personal interests and family background in organic agriculture were also mentioned. Reflecting more recent discussion in the agricultural sector the two members of the group with the shortest professional involvement had been led from an interest in sustainable agriculture.

Common to all producer groups in the UK was the mixture of personal and professional reasons, ranging from problems with and concerns about the direction that conventional agriculture was taking and personal reasons, such as personal health, generation take over and personal challenge. Commercial reasons were mentioned in two groups (UK1 and 4). A more detailed comparison of the individual motives will be possible on the basis of the transcripts.

3.4 Discussion of meaning of collected values

During the discussion of personal entry points to organic agriculture the motives of the participants had been noted on a flipchart. In the following discussion participants were asked to discuss whether these points represent organic values of a more general nature. In each group values were written down using the terms mentioned by the participants and therefore the terminology in each group differs. At the end of the discussion the participants of most groups (apart from UK 1) were asked to indicate which values they considered to be particularly important by sticking 3 “vote” points onto the flipchart.

Table 3 shows the values mentioned in each group and the results of the “voting” in three groups. The values are grouped to follow the four proposed principles of organic agriculture by IFOAM, but include other terms covered by the producers that were included as own headings in previous drafts of IFOAM. It becomes clear that all areas mentioned in the unprompted discussion of values in these groups of producers, are now also covered by the principles proposed by IFOAM.

Values discussed in all groups that can be related to the proposed principle of health included food quality and food safety; personal, family and animal health. These were all mentioned as motives for conversion but considered to values of organic movement in the following discussion. Particularly the Welsh group of experienced producers considered the issue of food quality and taste in some detail.

In all groups discussions about motives and values related to the proposed ecological principle were intensive. They covered issues, such as minimising agriculture’s impact on the environment, lowering energy use, global warming, food miles and local production, bio and genetic diversity. Particularly in the group with the organic professionals (UK2) the values of ecology, the environment and biodiversity were discussed at length. All groups also referred to the concept of sustainability in this context and the group 1 and 4 discussed the importance of soil fertility for organic farming.

Discussions related to the fairness principles covered social well-being, the need for profitability or financial sustainability, but also affordability to consumers and local/regional structures. Several members of UK1 (Experienced producers in England) and UK4 (newly converted producers, Wales) saw their livelihood

endangered through the growing involvement of multiple retailers and the resulting downward pressure on prices. Several participants (particularly those growing vegetables) were developing alternative marketing outlets and discussed at length supermarkets, their effects on the town centre and the success of farmers markets and box schemes. Although financial sustainability was very important in the discussion of most groups, participants felt that profits should not be allowed to rule in any case, but there were differences in emphasis between the groups.

For several members of the second group social issues had been an important motive to work with organic farming. Both groups in Wales (UK3 and 4) also discussed issues of education, consumer awareness and localness that included avoiding food miles.

In the 4th group it became clear that the term “local” could mean different things to different people. For some local was coming from the county (as local as possible), from Wales, from Britain or in one case even from Europe. There was some heated discussion with differing views on affordability of organic food to consumers, and the need for consumer education.

In relation to the principle of care, in UK3 and UK4 (both producer groups in Wales) the issue of genetically modified food was discussed in some detail. Many values covered in other sections are also related to this principle. For example, UK3 discussed at length the care that needs to be taken of the health of the consumers and participants in UK 4 were concerned about packaging materials and their potential risks.

In addition to that a wide range of other value concepts were discussed, such as job-satisfaction and independence in the groups of established producers. Both the second and third group discussed issues of trust, the experienced producers in Wales criticised the organic regulation as too detailed, too prescriptive and too leading to bureaucracy. Some participants felt that the existence of the regulation was undermining trust (that they had to be controlled) whereas other saw this as inevitable.

In the second and fourth groups the issue of animal welfare received some attention with one member of the fourth group questioning whether better animal health welfare would be guaranteed through organic rules. All values were discussed in some detail, and the more detailed coding analysis presented below illustrates the meaning of the values to the producers.

Table 3 Motives and Values and their importance as voted by the participants (3 votes per person)

	UK1*	UK2	UK3	UK4
<i>Related to principle of health</i>				
Health	X	4	10	5
Food quality		X	5	
Nutrition				
Better taste				x
Safe food				x
Schools and hospitals				x
<i>Related to ecological principle</i>				
Environment	X	X		5
Minimising negative impact on environment		2		
Sustainability	X	5	X	5
Lower energy use	X		X	1
Bio-diversity promotion		2		
Genetic diversity		1		
Closed cycles		x		
Ecological issues		x		
<i>Fairness principle</i>				
Social well-being		X		
Economic/profit/ commercial	X	X	X	X
Farm diversity/ mixed enterprise structure	X		2	
Local/regional	X	X	2	2
Food security		X		
Financially sustainable			X	
Affordable for consumers				X
Personal and job/challenge	X		4	
Self-reliance/Independence	X		1	
Positive future				X
<i>Principle of care</i>				
Inform about risks			X	
Non-polluting			2	
Education			X	2
<i>Other issues</i>				
Low food miles			1	
Traditional farming		X		1
Connect to soil/land/growing		1		X
Integrity		1		
Rural communities		X		
Trust			1	
Transparency		X	X	X
Trace-ability		X		X
Authentic		X		
Animal welfare/Ethology	X	1		2
Animal health	X			
Animal nutrition		X		
Farming with nature	X	X	X	
Holistic/ Systems approach		X		
Soil fertility	X		X	

*There was no “voting” in this group. Values mentioned are indicated with X.

3.5 Value conflicts and priorities

In the following section participants were asked to identify conflicts between organic values or between organic and societal values. In the group of experienced producers

in England (UK1) the integrity of the organic systems was discussed as a conflict, with particular reference to the debate about the ending of the derogations of conventional feed in the regulation in August 2005. The majority of participants felt that not implementing 100% organic diets would undermine the integrity of organic production in the eyes of the consumers. However, one person made the point that standards have to be technically feasible for most producers.

Value conflicts identified in groups of experienced producers in Wales (UK3) included a perceived conflict between food quality and scale. Some participants noted that highly productive organic species or varieties may have reduced taste. Some participants saw another potential conflict between trust in the individual producers and the increasing scale of the organic sector, which was requiring more regulation. Linked to this concerns were expressed that food quality was currently not defined in the organic standards. They also discussed a potential conflict between the level of intensity, food security and conservation. High soil fertility (and nutrient contents) was seen as conflicting with conservation aims. On the other hand, setting aside land for conservation would reduce the area available for food production. The conflict surrounding diversity and food regulations was discussed in more detail. It was felt that the financial burden placed on producers through an increased number of regulations made it impossible to maintain enterprise diversity particularly on small-scale operations. In the group of newly converted producers (UK4) one group member felt strongly that high animal welfare claims in organic systems were contentious for hill and upland sheep systems, because producers treat their stock no differently after their conversion to organic, than they had done before.

In several groups a perceived conflict between profitability and ethical values received considerable attention. UK 1 saw lobbying for organic farming as a very political issue, taking a stand against agri-business and for environment and nature, thus indicating conflicts with other values of society. In particular shareholders desire to make a profit was seen as standing in conflict to a more “sustainable” development. Both groups of experienced organic producers saw the need for low prices that the supermarkets pursue as standing in direct conflict with their desire to make a profit.

In several groups it was felt that organic producers set a good example to others in agriculture. However, rather than lobbying for more support for the organic sector the farmers would prefer more accountability of the external costs of agriculture as a whole, which would generate a more level playing field for all agricultural producers.

3.6 Values important in the future

In the final section participants were asked what values they considered to be important for organic production in the future. For both groups of experienced producers the issue of global warming was of particular importance. In UK1 the use of fossil energy and the reduction of greenhouse gases were discussed, included the methane contribution that cows make. In the opinion of the group, organic farmers should seek a range of alternative solutions to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels. In UK3, participants saw carbon trading as the way forward.

In this same group participants also felt that there was no level playing field in terms of organic farming. Members of the group called for organic standards to be made

uniform worldwide and emphasised that both issues would need to be addressed so that organic agriculture could provide a livelihood in the future. In the fourth group the issue of health and food was considered an important value for the future, alongside being 'custodians of the countryside'.

The group of researchers and professionals (UK2) thought that food security and food safety would become important issues in the near future, alongside the need for a fair price for organic products so that producers' livelihoods could be maintained. The participants also highlighted that future development of organic values will be influenced by the development in the conventional sector. Raising standards in conventional agriculture in relation to animal welfare and the environment may diminish the need for the organic sector to specially regulate the issues. The group expressed some concern that a current focus of the UK organic sector on health and food quality may imply that other core organic values are neglected.

3.7 Closing remarks

In most groups some issues were raised in the finishing sections that were directly related to previous discussions and have been reported there. In UK4 (newly converted producers in Wales) producers raised concerns about the need for harmonisation of both grants and standards throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

4 Results of structured questionnaire

After the discussion, participants were given the opportunity to score the first set of draft principles of the IFOAM task force (draft of Nov 2004) on a scale between 1 (important) and 5 (not important). Figure 1 shows the results for the overall average and for the groups 1, 3 and 4. Only 2 participants responded in Group 2 and therefore this is not included in the chart. None of the principles received average scores lower than 3, so they were all considered important and the difference between the scoring of the principles are very small (not more than 0.3 points different from the average). Based on the average for all groups the principles were placed in the following order of importance: Principle of Animal welfare > Soil > Health > Ecological (or cyclical) > Precaution (or care) > Livelihood. Figure 1 shows the very few and small differences between the groups, apart from the principle of Livelihood that appears to have been less important for UK1 than for the other groups.

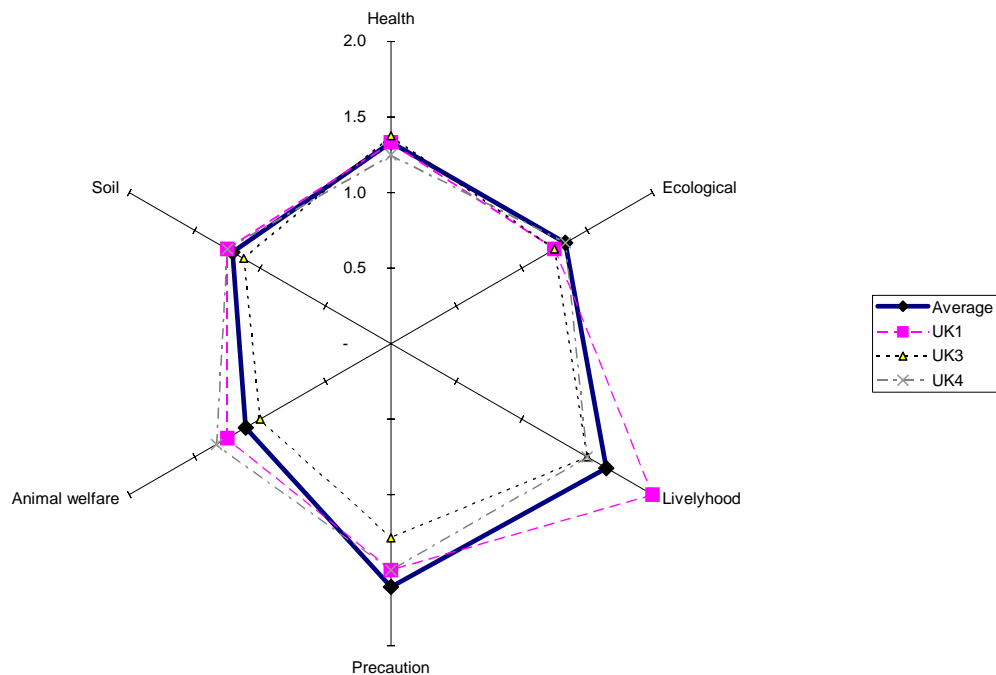


Figure 1: Average scores of importance for Draft IFOAM principles

5 Analysis of context and meaning of values through coding

The following sector contains a more detailed analysis of the values that were discussed by the participants in the focus groups, based on coding of the material. The analysis was carried out using N-vivo, a package for the analysis of unstructured data. The same main codes were used in all countries, but, depending on the discussion in the national groups, each country had the possibility to add extra codes. The codes were grouped in relation to the draft principles presented by the IFOAM task force on "principles of organic production" in May 2005, but contain a number of additional headings that reflect values identified in the literature and in the summary reports of all countries. Important opinions are supported through the inclusion of verbatim quotes, whereby the letters in brackets identify the type (E = Established producers, C= Converting producer, R= Participant in the group of researchers and professionals) and the sex of the participant.

5.1 Values mentioned relation to the proposed "principle of health"

The UK participants considered health to be an important value of the organic sector. This is highlighted both by the high score that related values received in the "voting" (see Table 3 above) and by the time spend and emphasis in the discussions in all groups.

In all four groups health was among the first associations that the participants came up with, when asked to write down a few unprompted keywords in relation to the term

organic. Explaining why he had written noted down health, one established organic producer said.

“Those are the 3 things that I think we’re helping to achieve with organic farming. Those 3 things, health of us, the humans, health of the world, and obviously [health of] the soil (E, m)”.

Health was mentioned as a motive for conversion in two groups, one of established producer group and the converters group. The producers considered how farming organically affected their own, their families and their farms’ health as illustrated by this converting farmer:

“I think it’s a healthier way, I think the animals are healthier now” (C,f).

The UK participants discussed health in varying contexts, relating to their own and consumer’s health through the food quality, the link between soil and health, and the health of the system or even the whole planet, illustrated by examples in the following section. There were also some areas of conflict that the producers identified between the value of health and other organic and societal values, which are included in each section.

5.1.1 Own and family health

Three participants said that they had converted to organic agriculture for health reasons, and because they felt that this was a healthier way to farm.

“I wasn’t born organic but I had a really bad experience with conventional farming during the 70’. My father had chronic poisoning (E, m).

“I became very ill, my husband works away from the farm anyway and we reduced the stock numbers. And then when we started to talk to the organic people, we were kind of there, within all the requirements really” (C,f).

The discussion in the group of converting producers spent more time discussing their own and their family’s health compared with the other UK groups, but covered also a wide range of other environmental risk factors that are not directly related to organic production.

“My cousins father is a conventional arable grower and doesn’t believe in organic at all, but his daughter buys 100% organic for her baby” (C,m).

5.1.2 Consumer’s health and food quality

Participants in all groups felt that organic food, with reduced pesticide use, led to safer food for the consumers worldwide. They considered consumers’ health to be a highly important part of organic values.

“Probably the most important thing is the health, the safe food” (C, m).

The researchers agreed that the organic sector should aim for high quality products. Participants noted widespread differences in the understanding of what food quality is, such as covering only the absence of residues, or also including other health giving properties. The organic sector might not achieve all these values at all times. Members in this group also felt, that there was presently too much emphasis placed on food quality in the promotion of organic food which might divert attention away from other important values. Others felt that promoting food quality would lead to higher sales and so would actually help improve these apparently neglected associated issues.

“The whole focus of the food quality, so that people buy the stuff, so that all the other values, the animal welfare benefits, the environmental benefits are more widely applied” (R,f).

Participants in the Welsh group of converting producers, on the other hand, would like to see children fed organic food, both within families and in schools and hospitals. Conventional products were seen as containing pesticide residues, which would negatively impact on the childrens’ health.

“I’d like to see organic food going in to schools and hospitals, and all this, how realistic it is I don’t know” (C,m).

In the discussion revolving around food quality, the producers commented on the absence of research evidence to underpin any claims on health promoting aspects of organic food. A dairy farmer of the newly converted group felt it was difficult to promote the health benefits of organically produced milk without putting them off the specific product.

“It aims for no residues, but how do you inform people without putting them off, without being negative and putting them off that product, as a whole, rather than the conventional product. You don’t want the word antibiotic to be identified with milk at all, do you” (C,m).

They also reported their personal beliefs that lower intensity and slower growth would result in better quality. Not all participants agreed that organic food automatically tastes better.

When encouraged to identify conflicts within organic values, food quality came up in several groups. In the Welsh group of establish farmers, producing good quality food, that had good taste qualities, was seen as standing in direct conflict to the scale of organic production. Further growth of the organic sector might lead to declining quality. The group of researchers saw a potential conflict between producing food of high quality and producing sufficient quantity.

“Quality and quantity tend to be traded of against each other” (R, m).

“As you go for security of supply you risk security of quality” (R ,m.)

Particularly the Welsh group of experienced producers discussed food quality in some detail and felt that organic standards did put enough emphasis on food quality.

“The Organic Standards, don’t actually kind of say anything about food quality, they’re just starting to think about that route, but you know the standards just say how things should be done, it doesn’t actually say anything about the quality of the product” (E,f).

The producers also noted that standards within conventionally produced products were increasing, due to greater regulations. Some participants, especially from smaller farms, felt quite strongly that the need to conform to increasing health and food hygiene regulations was having a negative impact on the diversity of their farm, pushing them towards monoculture and away from what they considered to be true organic farming.

5.1.3 Systems health

For many producers the value of health did not just appear important in relation to their own and the consumers’ health, but also to animals, the farm and the environment. The link between soil and health was mentioned several times among the first associations, especially by established producers. There was strong feeling throughout both established and converting producers that organic agriculture was better for the health of the ecosystem.

“Its self evidently better in every way against the many abuses of the environment and the peoples and the animals and the planet that conventional agriculture is up to” (E,m).

The more recent converters provided examples from their own farms, of how their farming system had improved since their move from conventional agriculture, and how what they called a “natural balance” had returned quicker than they had expected. The examples covered improved animal health, seeing the return of certain species, suffering less from weeds/insect attack than expected and having adequate production of yields.

In the group of researchers the concept of health was even extended to cover social aspects.

“I think health applies to animal, plant, social, right the way through; health as a value; the idea of health as positive thing” (R, f).

5.1.4 Summarising values related to the principles of health

Values related to health included personal and family health, which was a reason for conversion for three participants (two of whom were newly converted), aiming to produce food of high quality including with low residues that would be better for of the consumers’ health, which was considered to be an important organic value.

The researchers were divided as to whether or not there was too much emphasis of product quality in the marketing and promotion of organic food. The Welsh group of experienced producers felt that organic standards did put enough emphasis on food quality. Potential conflicts discussed all related to food quality, such as between the scale of the organic sector and the production of high quality food. There was strong

feeling throughout both established and converting producers that the values of health in organic agriculture was not limited to their own family and to consumers, but extended this to the health of the farming system and that these aspects were linked in a cycle of health.

5.2 Values related to the proposed “principle of ecological integrity”

Ecological values were a very important topic throughout all groups in the UK. Related issues came up in the first associations, as motives for conversion and were followed up further in the discussion of collected values. In all groups sustainability was discussed as a value, which also touches on values related to other proposed principles, such as financial sustainability relating to fairness.

Participants in each group noted environmental terms, such as environmentally sustainable, environmentally benign or minimising man’s impact, semi-natural agriculture, working with nature, balanced system, when asked for first associations with the term organic. The group of researchers and professionals also noted Ecology as a science expressed concerns that issues of environmental impact were currently neglected in the organic debate in the UK.

In several groups environmental awareness and concerns were important motives for conversion or reasons to get involved with the organic sector.

“I got more interested in ecosystems and predators and pests and how it all works” (R,m).

Care of the environment was also frequently expressed as a criticism of the ways of conventional agriculture. One established organic producer summarised this when he said:

“You could see the environmental damage that was being done on those farms if you wanted to look it was clear, so I was very deliberately started from that point trying to work out if there was a better way of doing things” (E,m).

One converting farmer said that when studying horticulture the teaching encouraged chemical use. He became aware of potential conflicts of this with health and environmental issues and realised that his practises on the home farm were more like “organic” ones. One producer felt that there were two kinds of organic farmers; those that were environmentally caring and those that saw it as a good financial market.

The participating organic and converting farmers saw themselves as being amongst the people that develop alternatives. However, for several a combination of aims was important in which environmental concern was amongst others, such as health and maintaining a farm income. Particularly among established producers there was sense of pride that organic farming allowed them to produce an income and at the same time as protecting the environment.

A number of more specific values in relation to the environment were discussed, such as closed production cycles, energy use and global warming and conservation of bio- and genetic diversity which are illustrated in the following section.

5.2.1 Closed production cycles and recycling

The participants of the research group discussed lower input systems in general, for the farmers this was related to self-sufficiency on the farm. Among the researchers there was some discussion about how closely low input, closed cycles and sustainable systems are linked. One researcher felt that low input was not representative of a value as such but was a means to achieve sustainability, the output being more important than the means.

“Low input and closed cycles are part of the goal of sustainability, which to me is value. I never felt there is anything beneficial from low input in itself” (R, m).

One other person suggested that closed cycles were important in developing countries due to the associated lowered dependence on imports. There was consensus of opinion, however, among the researcher that low input systems were a way of minimising impact on the environment and of reducing pollution. The meaning of the word intensity was also discussed, with the reduced intensity of input and the increased intensity of management being seen as more desirable in organic production.

To many producers low input and the use of renewable resources was important. This could be summarised as a value of self-sufficiency of input use, be it feed or fertiliser or energy (see below). Being able to feed the animals that live on the farm with feed produced there represented for one producer a very important part of being organic. Others felt proud of having achieved greater self-sufficiency and saw their farming as more sustainable, compared with the neighbouring farms relying on purchased fertiliser.

“I think one of the most extraordinary things is that organic farming is actually succeeded in showing the way to becoming more sustainable than no other industry has actually achieved, that it is a continuous process of change and evolution.” (E,m).

For some this was related to aspects of costs saving and for others the integrity of organic production.

5.2.2 Saving energy and reduce pollution with green house gases

In all producer groups the discussion touched on the question of energy use. The two groups in Wales, and in particular the group of established producers, discussed global warming and the merits of carbon trading as a policy instrument. The participants felt that this tool would not only help in reducing world pollution and food miles, but also equalise conditions and secure a more level playing field for producers across Europe, and thus strengthen the home markets for UK producers.

The important organic value for this group was thinking about energy as a resource, and the impact of this on their actions. Conversion to organic farming was thought to have the most beneficial effect in the arable sector, where it would greatly reduced tractor work and application of fertiliser. Saving energy and reducing green house gases was an important reason for organic production that would be shared by consumers and producers. Consumers would expect the producers to be more aware

of these issues too. The group felt that heavy reliance on fossil fuel would be uneconomic in the future.

In the other group of established producers the reliance of fossil fuel was discussed in the context of food distribution and the group highlighted in particular the reliance of the supermarket on fossil fuel.

5.2.3 Conservation and bio and genetic diversity

In the participants' view the negative impact of conventional agriculture on the environment was related to biodiversity and conservation.

In both groups of established producers, biodiversity, conservation and wildlife came up as first associations to the term organic. Others mentioned biodiversity as one reason for their conversion.

“After 13 years of conventional farming I just saw dead ants (E, m)”. appropriate quote?

Some participants thought conversion to organic agriculture appeared to be sensible way for agriculture to go, and promoting or increasing diversity an innate value of organic farming.

Also, for several of the professionals, the ecology of agricultural systems and conservation were important drivers to get involved with organic farming.

Not much time was spent discussing farm diversification and mixed enterprise structure in its own right, but producers were concerned about a potential conflict between the scale of the organic movement and diversity, farmers fearing that this trend would lead to more specialised farms.

“I think there should be much more emphasis on production within a locality so we get a diversity of crops, animals, so on, on a farm, or at least within a region. ...I would like to see organic emphasise diversity and get away from what is becoming in many situations one enterprise per farm” (E,f).

One member of the converters group said they had diversified by running an organic pig unit, which acted as an additional attraction for their holiday visitors. They felt that the pig unit wouldn't have been economically viable on its own.

One participant from the converters group saw that policy measure would push all agriculture towards more conservation and paying farmers to look after the environment so that this may no longer be a distinguishing feature of organic systems. However, participants felt that lowering the intensity of production on the whole farm might be a more appropriate way then setting aside certain areas.

5.2.4 Sustainability of food production

Sustainability was an important value discussed in all four groups in the UK, but it is important to note that the term appears to mean different things to different people.

Producers talked about sustainability in the context of the environment, (see above), of recycling within the farm and of local production, of financial sustainability and of the security of food production in the future. For some members environmental sustainability appeared to be the most important aspect, others emphasised other dimensions as illustrated by the following quotes.

“ I have put three things together, sustainability, environment and profit. I am really saying that all of those are important together, without one of them it would not work“ (E,m).

“Security of future production, we need to produce food sustainable and go on into the future... and secure that it hasn't got residues etc.” (E,m).

“Sustainability, that's keeping things within the farm, without bringing too many things in, just moving the cycle around” (E,m).

Sustainability was also associated with long term viability of the family farm and with passing on the land in better condition as it was before. In the context of food security it was considered particularly important in the context of developing countries. Especially for those participants group who had personal experience with working in developing countries this aspect was important, but some questioned what role the certified organic production has to play in the context.

5.2.5 Naturalness

Related to this area is also a concept of “naturalness” that was discussed in the group of researchers. They agreed that the concept is very difficult to define as illustrated by the following argument about “natural” compared with “synthetic” chemicals.

“I think there's another specific thing with the pesticide thing which is actually sort of about avoiding synthetic substances and being pure, or natural, or whatever you want to call it, which is a bit harder to define. This is a specific thing over and above the biodiversity and negative impacts and non-polluting” (R,f).

“The question for me is: Is it better to use a synthetic chemical that has less impact on the environment than a natural one that has a big impact but its natural” (R,m).

Whilst the researchers mainly referred to natural as compared to synthesised chemicals, and in the sense of mimicking natural processes, the producers used “naturalness” in a wider sense, as a general reason for getting into organic production.

“Verbally and mentally we are basically against anything unnatural, organic farmers verbally and aesthetically and in our minds, you want everything to be flowing naturally and organically” (E,m).

5.2.6 Summary of values related to the principle of ecological integrity

Minimising the impact on the environment and integrity of the product, are examples of values related to the ecological principle that were important to UK producers.

Related terms were mentioned in all groups among the first associations, environmental awareness and concerns about the environment were among the reasons to get involved with the organic sector. These were expressed both in making reference to perceived negative impact of conventional and in developing an alternative approach with reduced impact in the organic systems.

Specific organic values that were discussed in greater detail were closed production cycles, saving energy and production of greenhouse gases (also in relation to food miles), bio-diversity and conservation and naturalness of production. The value of sustainability, discussed in all four UK groups, relates also to the proposed principles of fairness and of care.

The researchers and one group of established organic producers, discussed a potential conflict between ecological values and food security. They saw a risk of producing inadequate food for the world's expanding population, if farming systems were to be less productive, aiming to have higher diversity and semi-natural habitats for wildlife.

5.3 Values relate to the proposed "principle of fairness"

Discussions related to the fairness principles covered social well-being in general, the need for profitability or financial sustainability of the farmer, but also affordability to consumers and local/regional structures.

First associations brought up a wide range of issues related to fairness which included the farmers' own livelihood. The professionals of the organic sector came up with sustainable, premiums and quality of life. Sustainability and securing the future were also mentioned several times in all groups that involved producers, both established and recently converted. Other first associations related to this principle were security of food production, quality of life for the people working on farms, benign technology, profitable, enjoyable, supporting local networks, optimising costs of production, and independently verified. There was no obvious difference between established and recently converted producers.

Among the motives for conversion the concerns about the growing commercialisation and dependency on agro-business, alongside job-satisfaction were mentioned.

The group of researchers and professionals spend some time discussing directly the value of fairness. There was agreement throughout the group that food prices had to increase, providing a fair reward for the farmers for a quality product.

"Fairness, I think could be an underpinning value. I think, fair prices would actually enable producers in particular to meet a lot of values. If you get a fair price, it is a lot easier to achieve all these things we have been talking about today" (R,m).

Detailed discussion focused on securing the farm income and profitability, mixed enterprise structure and diversification to minimise risk, issues related to the lifestyle of working on a farm as illustrated in the following sections. A number of conflicts both to other organic and to societal values in general were identified.

5.3.1 Securing farm income and profitability

Many of the producers pointed out that they had to secure an income from the farm and that they had to make a profit. In two groups, both converting and established, producers said that before they converted they became stuck in a vicious circle of having to apply more and more inputs such as veterinary medicines, fertilisers and pesticides. Through conversion they had been able to move away from these short-term solutions, and return some natural balance to their farm which helped to secure income. Referring to some neighbouring farms that had also converted one producer said:

“I think the biggest motivation for them was a great dissolution with the conventional system in what they’re actually doing and what the treadmill that they had got into from the inputs they had to put in to grow a crop, that made them and financially that they weren’t making any money that was the biggest reason that they changed over. And once they’d done it, they then realised it was a far more enjoyable way of farming and they wouldn’t go back” (E,m).

Some established producers thought that they had found their niche in the market, others referred to having had made reasonable amounts of money in the past but were not longer so confident about their income. For the producers aspects of self sufficiency and saved costs on fuels and fertilisers were also important in this context.

On the other hand, the group of established producers in England in particular complained about the current downward pressure on organic prices through the involvement of multiple retailers.

“Their price structure [of the supermarket], in my case the pigs, is no way offering us a life line, not at all. That’s why I try to address our business and that’s the farmers market, our local retailer outlet and one or two butchers they are fighting on my behalf, not the supermarkets. They offer prices for my pigs not high enough to cover my costs” (E,m)

There appears to have been differences between most of the established and the converting producers with respect to the impact of the organic status on their farm income and profit. Established producers saw “profit” as necessary to be sustainable in organic farming, but most did not really like the word.

“It’s a dirty word, profit” (E,m)

They expressed concerns that aiming solely for higher profits could affect other organic values, such as environmental issues and animal welfare and they saw this as a distinguishing feature from conventional agriculture. However, several clearly stated that they were farming to make a living and would like it to continue that way.

The converting producers did not have the same aversion to the word profit. In this group the consensus of opinion was:

“It’s not a hobby we’ve got to make a profit. If we don’t make a profit, we’ve not got a God given right to be on these farms. If we don’t make a profit, we’re out,

aren't we. So if you didn't know, we've got to make sure we make a profit, so yes we do it for the money don't we" (C,m).

At least for one of the converting producers being able to maintain farm income was an important part of his decision to go organic.

"The final thing that pushed me into it was financial. You could hardly be making less could you, it wasn't working conventional. It's not worth working 50 weeks a year, 51 weeks for £4000. ... It was quite a big decision" (C,m).

However, challenged directly whether they were only farming for profit they all disagreed and were eager to point out that they had farmed in a way very similar to organic before hand. For most converting producers, the conversion grant was important in giving them the financial security to be able to convert. One producer used their grants to develop milk processing facilities to be able to sell directly to retailers. Some were disappointed that the market did not appear to be as strong, as it had been suggested when they started to convert, both in relation to milk and lamb, which was felt to be not significantly better than conventional but none was considering re-converting.

5.3.2 Quality of life and job satisfaction

For some participants organic farming also had a dimension of quality of life and conversion was associated with some lifestyle changes. Of the participants in the researchers group, one saw her entry to organic agriculture connected to her interest in gardening, the environment and the way people live and work on farms, and a search for a wholesome way of living. Others referred to social well-being as an important value of organic farming. Similarly, several established producers, particularly in the Welsh group had been attracted to organic farming through their interest in developing self-sufficiency on a small holding and gardening, which developed into growing vegetables for market. Several producers mentioned their job satisfaction with this way of farming and saw organic farming as a challenge.

A change in lifestyle related to conversion was also noted by members of the converters group. Also in this group one participant had started market gardening on his retirement, realising one of his lifetime ambitions. Two producers had converted due to their own health constraints and the conversion had allowed them to reduce stock numbers and workload.

Experiencing problems with conventional agriculture or becoming disillusioned with it, was an important driver for many producers and also for the research in looking for alternatives. The producers mentioned observing that their systems were out of balance, that there was a spiral of increasing inputs, and they had a general dislike of spraying, and in one case even had chemical poisoning in the family.

"I did never spraying after the first time I did it and it upset me, and it can't be right as a basic principle, it can't be right to just spray poison all over the countryside, but I didn't really connect to anything, and I worried about it for about 30 years (C, m)".

Several said that they came to realise that farming without external inputs of fertilisers and sprays was possible, that there was a different way and that this also allowed them greater personal development. Once they had taken the step to convert, several expressed enthusiasm for how well the new system was working and that it allowed them room for personal development. They also felt that organic farming in a way forced them improve themselves, that organic farming was professionally challenging because they needed to develop it for their own farm without following blueprint solutions. In the group of converting producers several farmers described the hostility that they had experienced towards their new systems, but also that other farmers acknowledged that the system appeared to be working well.

5.3.3 Conflicts between “profitability” and other organic values

In several groups a perceived conflict between profitability and ethical values received considerable attention. UK 1 saw lobbying for organic farming as a very political issue, taking a stand against agri-business and for environment and nature, thus indicating conflicts with other values of society. In particular shareholders desire to make a profit was seen as standing in conflict to a more “sustainable” development. Both groups of experienced organic producers saw the need for low prices that the supermarkets pursue as standing in direct conflict with their desire to make a profit.

However, in the group of researchers it was pointed out that it was not so much the values that were conflicting with each other (e.g. sustainability and fair trade) but that conflicts would be encountered in achieving the values. The experience of many dairy producers of not been able to make a living with what was considered to be a sustainable systems was used as an example.

Most of the established producers in both groups were concerned that being financially sustainable could conflict with many other organic values, because producing organically costs more financially. The researchers saw the fair price as a way to enable many producers to meet many of the other values that organic farming stands for.

One way this is expressed is in the need to rationalise. The costs of complying with current regulations (also ones affecting conventional agriculture, such as food hygiene) limit the number of enterprises that normal farms can have and forces farmers towards greater specialisation.

However, they were also concerned that “*making a profit*” should not be allowed to have negative impact on other organic values, in particular should not lead to compromises in food quality, but they also saw that the value of “fairness” should also apply to the fair income of producers.

“I think, fair income for all producers, and fair income for all businesses involved in the food chain ... encompasses a profit value. I think what it reflects is that the problem of any of those values if they become the only one for focus of attention” (E,m).

5.3.4 Conflicts between “fairness” and societal values

For many producers this was the most important area of conflict. They felt that the economic climate of agriculture was standing in conflict with their desire to make a living from their organic farm. The current economic environment of agriculture was seen as being in conflict with a value driven approach, such as organic farming. In particular, the established producers were very critical of the supermarkets, which made decisions on the basis of their own values, thus ignoring the values of organic farming. One producer highlighted a need to better define organic as an alternative to conventional, because the conventional sector is very strongly driven by profit.

5.3.5 Summary of values related to the proposed principle of fairness

Maintaining their income was of concern to all the participating farmers, but all felt that this should not be allowed to dominate over other values. The converting farmers were especially clear about the fact that they were farming to make a living and financial considerations had been important in making the decision to convert. Established producers, on the other hand, felt that the growing involvement of multiple retailers and resulting in downward pressure on prices could endanger their livelihood in the long term and many, especially vegetable producers, talked about developing alternative marketing outlets.

Producers also expressed the belief that farming organically gave them greater flexibility and independence, especially from the agro-business sector.

“[When] they farm organically they’re regaining a sense of independence over their own operation even though they are highly regulated by standards and so on” (E,m).

“You could say it re-empowerment” (E,m).

Overall, producers were proud to be able to make a living whilst practising what they considered a more environmentally benign approach, but saw this as standing in conflict with societal values at large.

5.4 Values relate to the principle of care

Experienced producers and the professionals in the UK mentioned phrases like “*working in balance with nature*”, “*minimising man’s impact on nature*” as well as avoiding residues of pesticides and GM contamination among the first associations.

This was followed up later on the discussion with phrases like “*minimising impact on the planet*” (E,m) that can be related to the concept of taking care. One established producer expressed what she saw as a different approach in organic farming, compared with conventional, similar to what others described as farming with rather than against nature. When asked for first associations with the term organic she said:

“I’ve got one word which is different which is non-aggressive, or benign, to me its very important that we hand on a world that is better than the one we inherited

rather than one that has been scarred by our existence on it, and I don't believe that one can do that unless one is non-aggressive within the world" (E,f)

In three groups the concept of “safe” was discussed, implying that the safety of the production systems should apply to those that work in it, for consumers and for the system (in one case even the world) as a whole. For several producers an important aspect of organic farming was that they were not using certain inputs, which they perceived to be carrying some form of risk.

“What is going to happen in the next 10 years, nobody knows, but we are trying to not be involved in a health scare, because we haven't good GM, we don't use things” (E,m).

Several members of the group of experienced producers in Wales very keenly discussed the threat that GM technology might pose to organic farming. Related to the principle of taking care are also the discussions about “sustainability” that took place in all groups in the UK (see above).

In summary, the two areas discussed in the UK groups can be related to the principle of care: working in balance with nature and increasing the safety of production by not using pesticides and GM inputs. Arguable also issues of sustainability, trust and openness could also be related to a principle of taking care.

5.5 Other values

5.5.1 Values related to animals

Animal welfare and animal health were both mentioned among the first associations together with other health issues and the cycle of health (see above). The issue of animal health was also mentioned as a motive for conversion by several of the established producers who had experienced animal health problems whilst farming conventionally. Animal welfare was later discussed as an aim that organic farming should deliver.

“Animal welfare is something which clearly delivered in organic farming, and is a major reason for motivating many people both at the production and consumer end” (E,m).

One of the established producer expressed his strong believe that animal welfare would improve when a farming system was brought back into balance, but one of converting producers was convinced that the practises on her hill sheep farm had not changed. She felt organic farmers really had no reason to claim improved welfare.

The first group of established producers discussed that because of the integrity of organic production there was a need to reduce the reliance on conventional feed inputs, although one participant pointed out that the standards had to be practical.

“There is an integrity issue with these derogations. We need to move away from that. The perception of people who are buying this food is that it is organic and that means all natural and wholesome, not that a defined percentage has come from a different system. That is a huge issue in taking things forward” (E,m).

One of researchers referred to Ethology as a discipline in relation to animal welfare, but others saw this as a scientific discipline rather than a value and were talking about the lower intensity of animal production in organic systems. It was pointed out, however, that intensity of management was positive feature of organic systems. One of the researchers had become a vegetarian, because she strongly disagreed with the treatment of animals in conventional agriculture, eating organic meat again many years later. The researchers were concerned that the organic movement does not pay enough attention to animal welfare (alongside environmental and social issues) compared with product quality and health, because the latter are seen as major motives for consumers to buy organic food. However, there was a danger that if agriculture in general improved on welfare, this issue may no longer be relevant.

5.5.2 Soil

“Good for the soil” was among the first association of researchers, producers also referred to soil condition and the link between soil management and human health in their first associations. One experienced producer mentioned that improving the soils structure was one of the motives for conversion and in one producer group soil fertility was discussed alongside soil health. One of the researchers felt that organic farming allowed people to connect with the soil, knowing that their food came from a particular farm.

In one of the groups with established producers a potential conflict between soil fertility, food security and conservation was discussed. Production of food requires soil to be fertile but this may have a negative impact on bio-diversity. One of the English established growers used a conflict related to soil cultivation as an example to illustrate that too many organic values could be too prescriptive. He used ploughing to control disease, but had been faced criticism from others because this was seen as wasting energy.

5.5.3 Nearness, local food production and trust

The issue of local food production and short supply chains achieved considerable attention in most groups, particularly among the producers, both during first associations and in the discussion of collected values. Two important dimensions to the value of local production became apparent in the discussions:

- Traceability or authenticity of food;
- Sustainability of food production in terms of food miles and energy use.

A third dimension of support for local networks was only touched on in one group.

Trust and openness towards the public were mentioned as first associations, consumers should be able to know where their organic food comes from; there should be assurance or independent verification of the production. Producers were clear that having earned the “trust” of the consumers was an important achievement that the organic sector had to protect. However, one of the established producers felt that the direct trust between producers and consumer had been replaced by regulations, which were based less on organic principles but more on legalistic concerns. This led to a discussion about the bureaucracy involved in the organic sector that the producers

clearly did not like, but others found it important the organic production implies a process of external verification through inspection. In the group of researchers this was discussed in the context of communication of the organic sector, letting everybody know what is going on.

The discussions related to food miles centred on transport and energy use. One of the experienced producers mentioned self-sufficiency in this context, giving preference to local food. Several participants were convinced that the growth of the organic sector implied that organic food would now travel longer distances and that increasing food miles (and globalisation) was one of the biggest threats to organic. One group spend considerable time discussing carbon trading as a policy instrument. Imported food would have to carry the costs of the negative impact on climate change (see saving energy above). In other groups a tax on food miles was suggested or that organic standards should somehow address this issue.

Only one of the converting producers mentioned support for local networks as a first association and one researcher also mentioned working with local breeds in the context of regionality of production.

Although local production was an important value in all four UK groups, it is not clear what the participants considered to be local. Asked directly what local production meant to them, the opinion of experienced producers varied considerable, ranging from the parts of their own county to the UK as a whole. It became clear that the topic of local food is not unique to the organic movement and that conventional producers also complain about imported food, and encourage consumers to buy British or local.

5.5.4 Balanced system, holism

'Systems approach', 'balanced system', 'systems integrity', 'all-roundness', and 'holism' were all among the first associations with the term organic in all groups. Several participants expressed that they were struggling to find the right word that described best what they wanted to say. Producers felt that pursuing such a balanced system would enhance the durability of it and that they were already seeing the benefits of this approach on their own farms.

"We certainly don't have the problems with insects any more that we used to have (C,f)".

This included the dimension of optimising resource use and minimising the costs of production. For some producers and researchers adopting such a systems approach, and the focus on management of the whole system rather than on specific parts. The balance of values within the system was seen as the main defining difference of organic farming.

"[It] is that philosophy of having a system that is, that has integrity, however you want to phrase it.... Something that is integral in itself" (E,m).

"I think that the values, the balance of values is important to maintain" (R,m).

However, there were also critical comments about the lack of integrity of the current organic system, particularly in relation to the feed derogations and there was concern that the organic regulations should not be too prescriptive and be allowed to evolve so that they could be adapted and applied to different situations.

5.5.5 Education

For some participants educating consumers and society about the links between food and health was an important, and the fundamentally different approach of organic farming. This also had wider implications for product quality, consumer health etc. Several group members had worked as teachers or adult educators in projects in the developing world. Coming home they felt that they could not return to “normal” agriculture. Others were working with local schools in raising the awareness of organic farming. Some producers saw improved sales of organic food as direct benefit of their education work, or increasing the willingness of consumers to pay a fair price for food that allowed farmers to make a decent living. Informing about potential risks and negative side of non-organic food was seen as an important part of this education, but also as a way of criticising your own neighbours. Producers found it difficult to find the right way to inform people about the benefits of organic food without putting them off the product as a whole.

Both producers and professionals felt that they should be open to their consumers, and that the organic sector should be involved in education, but opinions varied whether this should include information about risks that conventional food might carry. This illustrates that it appears difficult to differentiate between the generic publicity for organic movement and specific promotion.

Pioneering something new, not being in the mainstream and having different views to society at large was a first association of one of the established producers in Wales. Sentence difficult to understand but couldn't work out how to re-write it!

6 Summary and conclusions

In all UK groups of producers the discussions ranged from very personal to quite political issues. In three groups (UK1-3, E & R) first associations with the term organic were very considered and reflected. Most participants appeared prepared for the discussion group and had spent time thinking about what organic farming meant to them beforehand.

Common first association in all UK groups were terms referring to:

- Environmental care (all groups);
- Health and product quality/safety (all groups);
- Sustainability (all producer groups)
- Working with nature, local production and trust (experienced producers)
- Traceability (researcher group).

Reasons for going organic included opposition to the way conventional agriculture was developing including increasing dependency, personal health considerations, animal health problems, commitment to farming “naturally” and with low inputs, and

as a way to increase the financial security of their farms. Many producers saw conversion and the organic method as a great challenge, but also as professionally satisfying and offering greater independence and flexibility. For the recently converted producers the grant had helped to reduce the risk of conversion and they were more inclined to say that they were farming for profit. However, several mentioned that they had already farmed in a similar way before officially entering into conversion.

It was discussed which of the mentioned personal motives for conversion represented important values of the organic movement. The following values were considered important in more than one group.

- Health (all groups),
- Sustainability (all groups)
- Environmental and ecological issues (all groups)*,
- Financial viability (all groups)
- Local production (all groups)
- Reduced energy use (all 3 producer groups)
- Farming with nature, in a natural way (3 groups)
- Animal welfare and ethology (3 groups, producers and researchers)
- Diversity of enterprises, soil fertility, job satisfaction, independence (2 groups of established producers)

* in three groups the term Environment was chosen, whereas one group used ecological issues.

A further detailed analysis of the values illustrated their meaning to the participants. The value of health was related to personal, family and consumers' health, product quality and also to a wider cycle of health that covered soils, animals and the whole systems.

The three dimensions of sustainability were discussed, financial, environmental and social. Closed production cycles, saving energy and reducing the production of greenhouse gases, biodiversity and conservation and naturalness of production were the specific organic values discussed in greater detail that related to ecological or environmental issues. The financial viability of organic was discussed in all groups, but there were differences between the individual producers to how important they considered it to secure an income from farming. Producers were concerned about falling prices for organic products resulting from the dependency of the organic sector on multiple retailers. They were also eager to point out that profit should not be allowed to dominate over all other values, describing this as a distinguishing feature of organic compared with other agriculture.

Discussions about the value of local production revealed two important dimensions, the reduced use of energy for transport (food miles) and the traceability (or nearness) and communication throughout a food chain. The latter was seen as an important trust builder for organics. Support for local networks was mentioned in one group. Other social issues that were important, especially to the established producers were independence and personal job satisfaction with organic farming, which allowed them to look more optimistically into the future than conventional farmers.

Participants in one group of established producers perceived the growing amount of organic regulation as undermining the trust in them as honest organic producers. They seemed to separate themselves from later converters, seeing their reasons for farming organically as being the “right” ones, and therefore they were the more trustworthy. In several groups educating consumers and school children about the link between food and health, and also about local food production was discussed at some, showing the importance of education to the participants. Several farmers were registered demonstration farms or had built facilities for housing groups on their farms.

Participants referred to organic as a more natural way of farming. The researchers discussed the value of naturally occurring compared with synthetic chemicals. For farmers this meant farming through copying natural processes, such as farming with low use of external or artificial inputs.

Animal welfare and health were seen as important reasons for the consumers, but some doubts were expressed as to whether the treatment of animals in organic farms was substantially different from practises on many conventional farms and hence whether the organic movement paid enough attention in this area.

Participants were asked to point out conflicts between organic values and with society at large. The following conflicts between specific organic values were discussed

- Integrity of the organic system versus the need for derogations
- Food quality conflicting with food security
- Scale conflicting with food quality
- Scale of the organic sector conflicting with trust of the consumers,
- Scale conflicting with diversity of farms
- Soil fertility and food security conflicting with bio-diversity
- Growing regulation of agriculture conflicting with farm diversity

The majority of conflicts discussed by participants in this section were hypothetical rather than practically experienced conflicts encountered in trying to achieve each of the mentioned organic values.

The conflict that appeared to be based on direct experience that was widely mentioned was between profitability of the organic system and other values. This could be considered as conflict between organic values, but also as conflicts between the organic sector and society at large; the current economic environment of agriculture stands in conflict with a value driven approach, such as organic farming.

Future challenges for the organic sector were considered to be:

- Energy use and the reduction of greenhouse gases,
- Raising standards in the conventional industry that make it more difficult to explain the benefits of organic products
- Need to have a level playing field in terms of regulation and policy support throughout Europe.

Various measures were suggested to facilitate a more widespread change to sustainable agriculture and a more level playing field for organic producers, such as pesticide tax, tax on aviation fuel etc, carbon trading.

There were some notable differences between the UK groups. Particularly in the first associations, but also in the discussion of values the group of researchers appeared to give answers similar to those they were required to give as part of their work within the sector. To the established producers job satisfaction and independence were very important. They were very critical towards the involvement of supermarkets in the organic sector, which had resulted in downward pressure on prices. The group of new producers suggested similar values to the established producers, but more clearly expressed that they were farming for a living and not as a hobby. Members of the group expressed strong opposition when challenged with the opinion that 'they were only in it for the money', but many considered the grant aid as having been essential during their conversion periods.

The values expressed and discussed in all four UK groups showed strong similarities to the four proposed principles of organic agriculture of IFOAM, but the intensity of discussion was greater in some areas. The value of health was clearly important to the participants in the UK groups, referring to a cycle of health in production including soil and animal health, and in terms of the personal and family health and also via product quality the consumers' health. Environmental and ecological concerns were among the reasons for many producers to convert, covering both the dimension of reduced input use (re-cycling with the production) and of benefits to biodiversity and conservation. The discussions illustrated the producers concern about securing their income from farming in the future. They saw a conflict between the profitability and other organic values. Concerns for affordable prices for consumers were only expressed in one group. Other values important to the producers that could be related to the proposed principle of fairness are personal job satisfaction and independence from agro-business. The values important to the UK producers that can be directly related to the principle of care referred to the safety and quality of production. Other important values for UK producers that are more difficult to directly relate to any of the proposed principles were the sustainability of production, a systems approach to agricultural production, the welfare of animals, local production and the need for the education of consumers and society.

The UK organic producers in this survey consider a wide range of values important to the organic movement now and in future, related to health and safety of the production systems, concern for the environment and conservation, animal welfare, education of consumers in relation to food and health and for localised production. The results confirm indications that motives for organic producers have changed to some degree over time, with financial considerations appearing more important among the later converters. However, the later converting producers did express a broad range of values in relation to organic farming and participants referred to the fact that they had already farmed in a similar way before entering conversion.

The results also need to be seen in the context of the general situation of the UK organic sector at the time of the group discussion and how this might have impacted on the individual farm situation. Particularly the groups of established producers appear influenced by the negative impact on farm gate prices resulting from a

relatively high reliance of the UK on multiple retailers with considerable competition between major outlets. However, there appeared to be a culture of not talking about profits among these more established producers, influenced by the critical position against agro-business, but the discussion about a conflict between the income of their farms profitability and other organic values highlights the importance of “making a living from the farm” to most, established or newly converting, but some appear more willing to talk about it than others.

7 References

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