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Otto Schmid – 'Speech summary for Proceedings'

New ways of regulating organic food and farming in Europe

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Summary: There is a paradigm shift needed in standard setting towards assessing progress rather than failure. Such systems need good subject-related principles and objectives (e.g. for good animal housing). These need to be linked to decision criteria and suitable indicators, possibly more outcome- and development-oriented. Assessment systems and Code(s) of (best) Practices should be developed by researchers, advisers and practitioners as complementary tools for re-oriented progress certification.

Key words: standards, progress, development, certification, assessment, outcome, codes of practice,

Introduction

Many producers and processors do not understand the relationship between organic principles and values and the detailed standards they are required to conform to. Without being involved in their development organic operators experience ever-increasing complexity, and constantly changing standards with a steady climb in inspection costs and burgeoning bureaucracy. But how is it possible to get out of this dead end street? In which way could organic regulations and standards adopt? And how can organic operator's own responsibility for organic quality and integrity be strengthened by introducing a development element to organic certification, which is also found in some other food control schemes (Padel 2010, CERTCOST report D11). How can we deal with the current prohibition that inspectors are not supposed to give advice?

There is a paradigm shift in standard setting and certification needed (Schmid 2010; The Organic Standard 106/2010). A successful re-orientation should consider the following main (symbolic) elements to achieve the long-term visions and goals of organic food and farming:

1. Guiding models and images (matching with personal images and pioneer ideas);
2. Supporting basic sustainability principles (e.g. principles of IFOAM & EC Regulation 834/2007);
3. Signposts (possible options and choices, e.g. charters, Codes of Practice);
4. Tools for self-evaluation and for external progress assessment (checklists, point systems)
5. Lighthouses or beacons (practical forerunner farms/operations, innovative pilot farms, etc.);
6. Barricades or safety nets (precautionary principle for new technology, e.g. a moratorium);
7. Guide barriers (essential rules differentiating organic, fail criteria below operators cannot fall).

Process

What are the key challenges for a re-orientation? Basically most of the elements are existent, but they have to be more consistently linked together with another orientation towards more self-responsibility, continuous development and outcome. This does not necessarily mean to give up the system approach of organic farming; on the contrary it would even strengthen it. The biggest challenge is to come from the basic principles to useful and supportive signposts (Codes of Practices) and "mirrors" (assessment tools or monitoring systems). The first step is to interpret the overarching principles for specific areas and set specific principles and objectives (e.g. good animal housing). Then criteria for assessment have to be found with a stronger emphasis on outcome and progress of the farm/operation. Suitable indicators need to be detracted from the criteria, taking account of regional variation/contexts and available evidence. The aim must be that for each of the focus areas only a limited set of key indicators (or at least control points) are outlined, as a result of a participatory process with expert advice (but not dictate!). Once this has been introduced a simplification and prioritization of some of the norms is possible.

The case of animal welfare

Standards for animal production are often very detailed and contain a lot of details about stables, stocking densities, feeding, etc. However this does not necessarily result in an improvement of the

animal health and welfare. For several years animal scientists and ethologists tried to develop mainly animal-related and not technical indicators. Although this still early development (on-going debate about appropriate indicators), this approach is quite interesting for organic farming. The starting point is to translate ethological needs of the animals in different operational principles and related criteria. Then these criteria can be integrated in standards requirements, if possible with a prioritization in major and minor points as well as recommendations (laid down in Codes). Such approaches were developed e.g. in the EU project "WelfareQuality" (see below).

Welfare Quality PRINCIPLES	Welfare Quality CRITERIA (based on an EU funded research project)	Most important major* or minor aspects in standards, e.g. for pigs
Good feeding	- Absence of prolonged hunger - Absence of prolonged thirst	- Facilities to avoid competition for feed and water on farm* - Minimum age of weaning
Good housing	- Comfort around resting - Thermal comfort - Ease of movement	- Allowance & quality of bedding material* - Prevention of cold/heat stress / light - Space allowance* (stocking densities)
Good health	- Absence of injuries - Absence of diseases - Absence of pain induced by management	- Limitation of slatted floors* - No or very limited use of veterinary drugs / choice of breeds - Avoidance of mutilations (e.g. teeth clipping/grinding, tail docking, castration)
Appropriate behaviour	- Expression of social behaviour - Expression other behaviour - Good human-animal relationship	- Stable groups to avoid aggressive behaviour - Environmental enrichment (manipulable material) - Regular visits

How can such more animal-oriented approaches be translated in practise? A good example is the Bioland Animal Health Management Handbook (2007). The work started because of problems with animal health on some farms. Therefore for cattle, pigs and poultry lists of check points were developed, well document with pictures, supported with an traffic light system based on objective criteria: good practise (indicated with green), average practise with potential for improvement (indicated with yellow) and below average practise and urgent need for improvement (red). The checkpoints cover: different observations of health status, stable and feeding aspects. The assessment system is coupled to the inspection of farms. If a farm regularly gets red points then the farm needs an advice. The handbook is made in such a way that the farmer alone can make a self-assessment of the state of the animal husbandry system.

Other examples of complementary tools to standards in this area are: e.g. the ANI-system applied by Bio-Austria, which is an overall animal welfare assessment system with points on farm level, starting also animal behaviour principles (5 freedoms of thirst/hunger, housing, diseases/injuries, behaviour and fear/stress). The system is linked both to inspection and to advisory work.

Conclusion: re-adaption of standard setting and certification approaches

Also in other areas, new more-outcome assessment systems are being developed for organic farms and other operators, e.g. for biodiversity (e.g. project of FiBL and Swiss Bird Protection) or for processors in EU projects the QACCP-System (quality control points) and codes of practice for wine (www.orwine.org). Similar approaches are tested for social standards linked to certification. Certifiers can, with the aid of a self-assessment and an external evaluation, understand how the farmer or processor can implement improvements. Currently, certification examines in fine detail to check whether boundaries have been overstepped; in future it could rather determine where this farm is along a path and what can be optimised. Admittedly this may mean an increased requirement for process documentation and evaluation from applicants. Also research and advisory institutions will be required to develop the necessary tools and instruments and simplify standards.