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Communicating organic food values: A guide for producers

JUNE 2015



Alice Ridding

David Frost, Organic Centre Wales consultant
 Susanne Padel, Organic Research Centre
 Sophie Wynne-Jones, Aberystwyth University
 Rebecca Sanderson, Public Interest Research Centre
 Jane Powell, Organic Centre Wales

This guide for organic food producers was developed as part of the BOBL Food Values project. The Food Values project was run by Jane Powell of Organic Centre Wales (OCW) and Dr Sophie Wynne-Jones (Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University), working with Rebecca Sanderson and Alice Hooker-Stroud of the Public Interest Research Centre and Sam Packer to evaluate and communicate findings.

The Public Interest Research Centre takes inspiration from a body of work called **Common Cause**, which seeks to apply an understanding of values to strategies for inspiring social change. Common Cause originated within WWF-UK, working in collaboration with several other UK charities. 'Common Cause: The Case for Working with our Cultural Values' was published in 2010 and is available at www.valuesandframes.org, along with many other related publications. A full report of the Food Values project is available at <http://foodvaluesblog.wordpress.com>.

'Food Values' is funded through OCW's Better Organic Business Links (BOBL) project, a six-year initiative designed to support the primary producer in Wales and grow the market for Welsh organic produce in a sustainable way. BOBL's aim is to develop markets for organic produce whilst driving innovation and promoting sustainable behaviours at all levels within the supply chain; to increase consumer demand and thence markets for organic produce, especially in the home market; and to ensure that the primary producers are aware of market demands. It has worked extensively with schools and communities, developing food culture in Wales. BOBL is funded under the **Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013**, in turn funded by the **Welsh Government** and the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development**.

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1 Introduction

Actions to persuade and enable people to buy organic food have often been based on the idea that if we present the facts about organic food, people will weigh them up and make a decision - but people rarely make decisions solely on rational choice.

We all tend to hold a mix of values, prejudices and assumptions that influence us, sometimes without being fully aware of it. This is true for organic food producers as well as consumers and other businesses that process or sell organic food: some values and beliefs are likely to be similar to those of other people, some might be different.

The Common Cause concept (see Crompton, 2010, in Sources, below) aims to develop a better understanding of how values work and use this in support of strategies for inspiring social change. The BOBL project explored the relevance of this framework to food in the Food Values project which was a close collaboration between Organic Centre Wales (OCW), Aberystwyth University and the Public Interest Research Centre. In this guide we have summarised findings from this project for organic producers.



The aim of this guide is to encourage organic producers to be confident in talking about the positive things they do by showing how these relate to Common Cause values that are shared by other socially progressive movements and by many people in the wider population.

1.1 Key recommendations for organic producers presented in this guide

- Explore your own values using the Common Cause value map.
- Promote intrinsic values of Universalism and Benevolence that represent the real benefits of change based on your values and your own story of how you produce food.
- Balance talking about the causes of problems by mentioning the benefits of doing things differently, to avoid making people feel less empowered to work for change.

- Balance talking about the need for a good price with other intrinsic values. Earning a decent living is a means to a good way of farming.
- Avoid referring to 'us and them' and 'othering' those who don't understand organic. This prevents building a common identity for a better future.



Anthony Pugh



Anthony Pugh

2 The Common Cause value concept

Values shape what we do and how we feel, so we need to take them into account if we want to influence food choices and attitudes to organic farming. One way to do this is to adopt the Common Cause approach.

Social science research explains how values work, and how they are expressed in individual behaviour and social structures. From this it is clear that humans do not act in a straightforward way when presented with the facts; and the idea that we are all purely rational beings who act on factual information to make the right choices is flawed. For instance, anyone who has tried to lose weight will know that it is not enough to be told how many calories their food contains. People make decisions based on a complex interaction of values, beliefs, personal identities, social norms, emotional states and environmental pressures.

2.1 Underlying principles

Common Cause highlights the importance of values not only for individual choices but also for social change. The approach has five underlying principles:

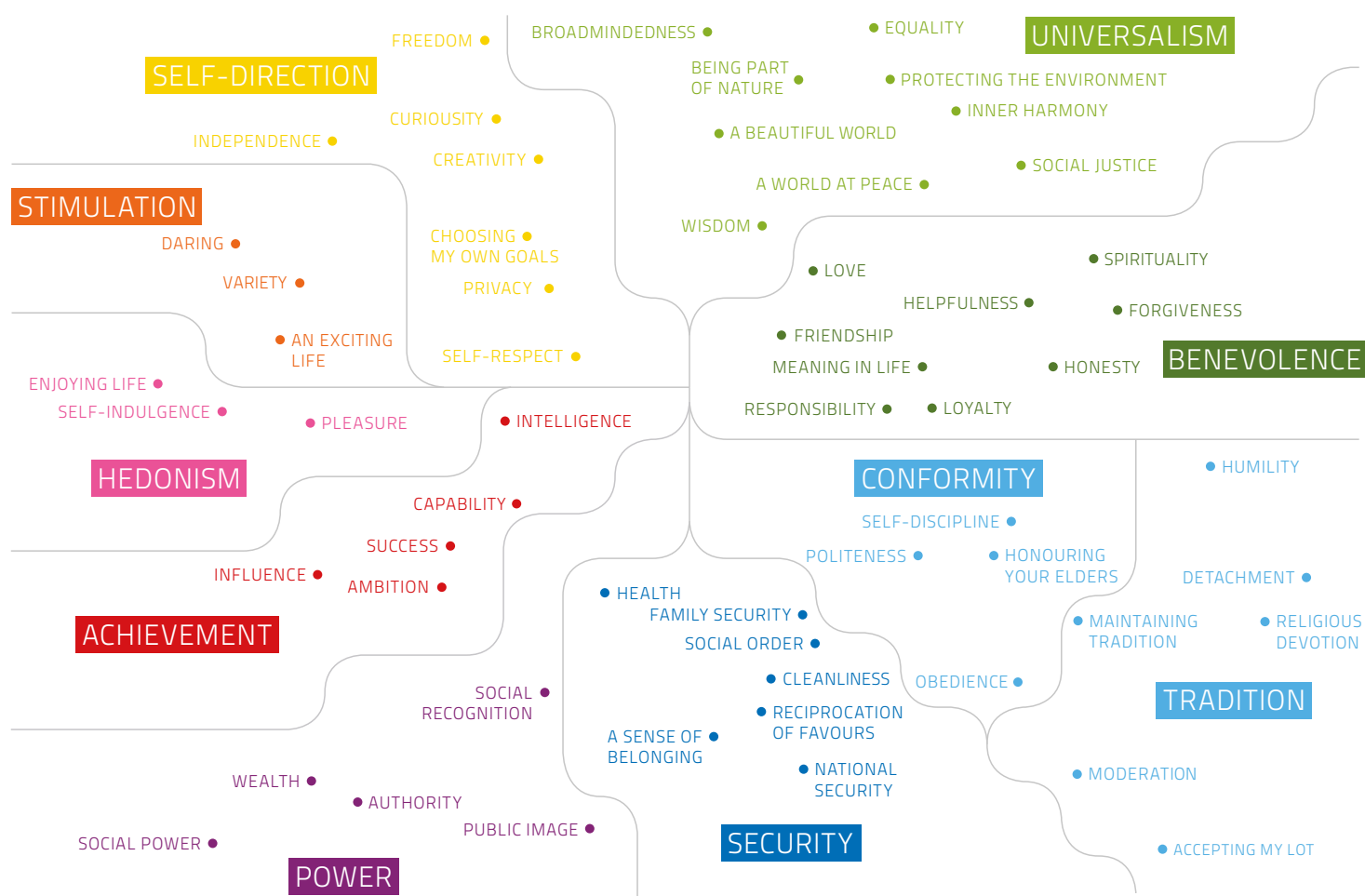
1. **We share values** but differ in how much we think each one is important.
2. **Values matter** because they shape attitudes including how much we care about the food we eat and the environment.
3. **Values can be engaged by language and experience.** Engaging a value can make it seem temporarily more important, shaping how we respond to situations.
4. **Society shapes values through the continual reinforcement of particular messages.** Values grow stronger the more we engage them.
5. **Values connect issues:** everything from food to poverty, inequality and climate change is related to some values.

We can map the values that most people have. The map below represents some 60 main values that recur across cultures. Pretty much everyone holds every one of these values, but to varying degrees. Values that are close together on the map are more likely to be held strongly at the same time by the same person. For example, a person who prioritises protecting the environment is also likely to prioritise Equality. By contrast, the further apart any two values lie, the less likely we are to prioritise both of them at the same time. For example most people are unlikely to prioritise Power and Equality simultaneously. However, it is important to remember that values are not character types and that most of us hold many of these values to some degree.

Whichever value is engaged at a certain time shapes, to some extent, what actions we take. Communication about an issue using particular terms can engage certain values and the associated terms which can promote specific actions (see Section on Frames).

Extensive research on how values matter has shown that Benevolence, Universalism and Self-direction, sometime known as 'intrinsic' values, tend to accompany greater concern about, and action on social and environmental causes. These same intrinsic values are also strongly held by many organic producers, with a corresponding lack of emphasis on the other, 'extrinsic' values. It is important to remember though that there are no fully 'extrinsic' or 'intrinsic' people; we are all a combination of both.

The Common Cause values approach encourages people to connect food with deeply held personal values and encourages active participation in the design and format of the food system, rather than passive 'consumption'.



UNIVERSALISM

UNDERSTANDING, APPRECIATION, TOLERANCE AND PROTECTION FOR THE WELFARE OF ALL PEOPLE AND FOR NATURE.



BENEVOLENCE

PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE WELFARE OF PEOPLE WITH WHOM ONE IS IN FREQUENT PERSONAL CONTACT.



TRADITION

RESPECT, COMMITMENT AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE CUSTOMS AND IDEAS THAT TRADITIONAL CULTURE OR RELIGION PROVIDE THE SELF.



CONFORMITY

RESTRAINT OF ACTIONS, INCLINATIONS AND IMPULSES LIKELY TO UPSET OR HARM OTHERS AND VIOLATE SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS OR NORMS.



SECURITY

SAFETY, HARMONY, AND STABILITY OF SOCIETY, OF RELATIONSHIPS, AND OF SELF.



POWER

SOCIAL STATUS AND PRESTIGE, CONTROL OR DOMINANCE OVER PEOPLE AND RESOURCES.



ACHIEVEMENT

PERSONAL SUCCESS THROUGH DEMONSTRATING COMPETENCE ACCORDING TO SOCIAL STANDARDS.



HEDONISM

PLEASURE AND SENSUOUS GRATIFICATION FOR ONESELF.



STIMULATION

EXCITEMENT, NOVELTY AND CHALLENGE IN LIFE.



SELF-DIRECTION

INDEPENDENT THOUGHT AND ACTION - CHOOSING, CREATING, EXPLORING.

Figure 1 The structure of values found in 82 countries, with over 65,000 people.

Source: Common Cause values <http://valuesandframes.org/handbook/2-how-values-work>

Benevolence, Universalism and Self-direction, the intrinsic values, motivate our compassion towards each other and towards nature. These values are consistently rated the most important but we need to link them up to the work we do and to show how they are relevant to organic food and farming and we need to address barriers that prevent people from expressing their values in their actions.

Research suggests strong links between values and food. People who have greater universalist values and are concerned with the welfare of people and the environment tend to make *more sustainable food choices*, such as choosing organic products; they show *a greater appreciation of health* and choose quality rather than, say, the convenience of microwave meals and they will avoid genetically modified products. They also *consider the provenance of food* - they may boycott untrusted retailers; they are *concerned about waste* and avoid excess packaging and recycle what they can.



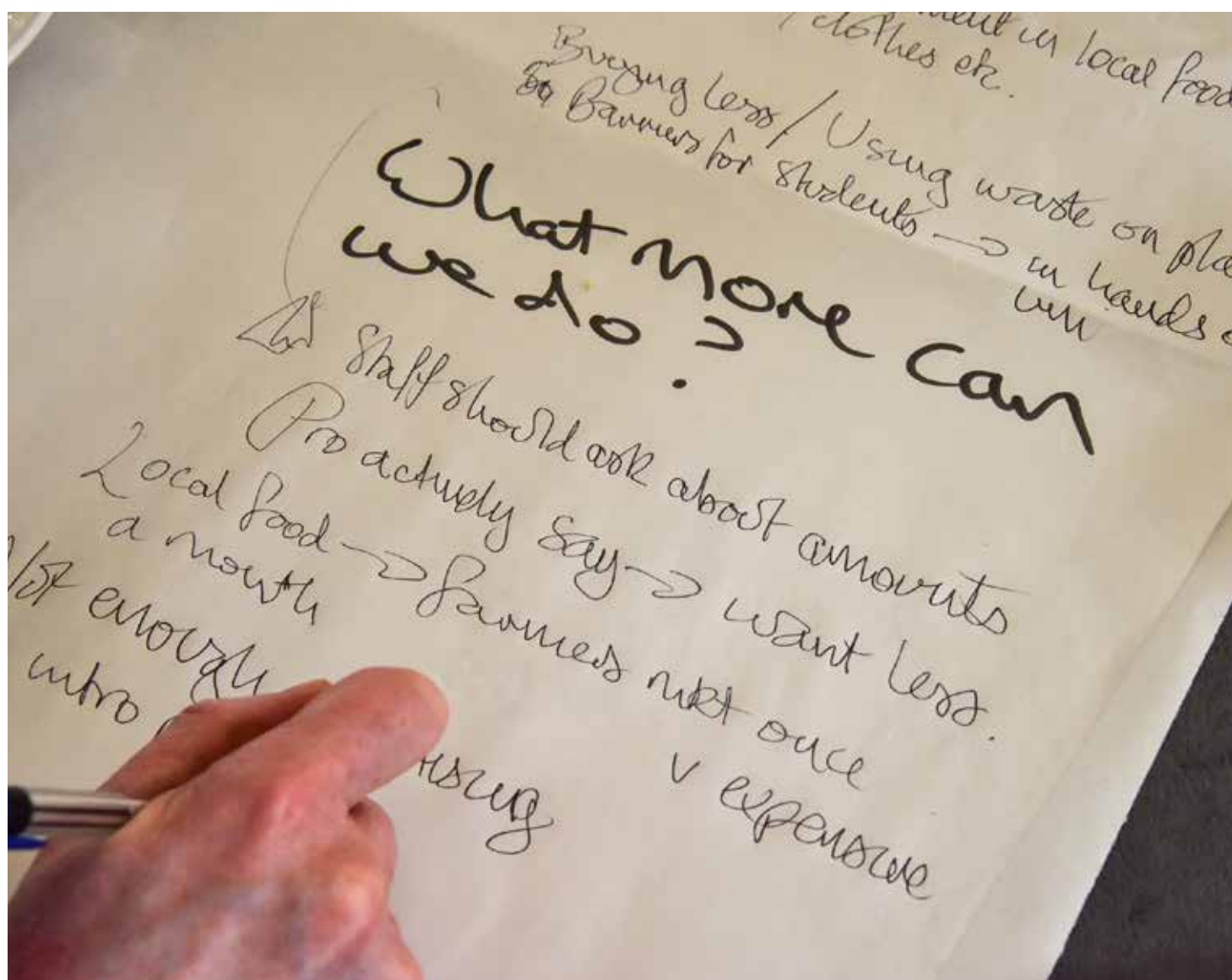
2.2 Framing food: Expressing values in the way we talk about food

Values are sometimes more easily understood when they are considered in connection with frames, or stories. A frame is a collection of associations (ideas, memories, emotions and values) that accompany a given concept. Frames exist in our minds and they play an important role in helping us make sense of the world.

The way that food is framed can engage different values. For instance, framing food as a commodity or a product often appeals to Achievement and Power values, whereas framing it as a human right makes the connection with Equality and Social Justice (Universalism values); and framing it as a focal point for shared mealtimes and human connection appeals to Benevolence values.

Frames repeated over time can strengthen the importance of certain values, and weaken the importance of others. For example, campaigns that associate organic food with celebrities can reinforce concerns about status and wealth (engaging Power values) and at the same time erode concern for Universalism values.

When communicating about food, it is important to reinforce values that align with the vision. If we are aiming for a sustainable, healthy and fair food system, Universalism and Benevolence are likely to be the most effective values to talk about in the long term. On the other hand, strongly negative messages can evoke feelings of terror or dismay —focusing our attention, and conveying a sense of importance, but also leaving us feeling disempowered. This suggests that stressing the faults and shortcomings of conventional agriculture, an approach often used among organic producers, may backfire in the long-term.



3 Values important to organic farmers

Universalism, Benevolence, Self-Direction, Achievement, Security, Tradition, Reciprocity, Ambition, Pleasure, Contentment, Broad-Mindedness

Everyone knows that a farm is land where crops are grown and livestock are reared, except this simple picture is now far removed from reality. Much of today's food is produced using intensive methods that rely on external inputs and emphasise the profitability of farming. Organic farmers strive to be sustainable, with nutrient cycling, maintenance of soil fertility, high animal welfare, biodiversity, low energy use, high soil, air and food quality and more people working the land. So what propels organic farmers to work in a way that embraces not just the values of the market but also ecological, social, ethical, resource-orientated and health-oriented values?

Working with organic farmers and growers, Organic Centre Wales has found that values of Universalism and Benevolence rate highly among organic producers, such as seeking greater unity with nature. These are the values that are needed to address the key challenges that we face in the world. For example, some organic farmers

expressed the view that to achieve true food security we need to develop a global vision that is equitable and based on reciprocity and social justice (a Universalism value). Organic farmers also talk about the need to protect the environment. Many have found, almost counter-intuitively, that this value can be combined with the need to run a financially viable enterprise. Turning to more sustainable farming methods and giving up synthetic nitrogen and pesticides can turn out to be as good for the bank balance as it is for the environment by reducing costs for inputs and getting a price that reflects the effort that has been made to produce the food. However, for many organic producers social justice is also very important, so they care about fair prices that work both for the farmer and the consumer. Tradition is important in terms of seed heritage and maintaining knowledge and skills, some of which have been handed down through generations but which can easily be lost with the introduction of mechanisation and automation on the farm. Tradition is also connected with the value of





Siwan Adams



a sense of belonging and unity with nature. But for some organic farmers, conventional farming represents the 'traditional' way of farming and they feel that sometimes tradition needs shaking up!

We found that a sense of connection was also highly valued and organic farmers wanted to promote this through the educational activities they engage with. This also reflected the values of self-direction and greater independence, both of which manifest themselves in a move away from some of the realities of the current food system.

Another value rated highly by organic farmers is pleasure and contentment which is a Hedonism value. Enjoying food is important, and so is inner harmony. Everywhere we hear about people's anxieties: how they are unhappy in themselves, with their bodies, with their image, health,

Please! leave blue box on scales to weigh exact amounts out
 100gms = 0.1 Kg
 Collect by Mon' + tick your name off

33-37
 COCA SHARES

	BOUGHT IN	
	ONIONS - NETHERLANDS	CARROTS - SPAIN
	BROAD BEANS - UK	
13th JULY	Full SHARE	HALF SHARE
Carrots	600g	300g
Onions (half bought in / half new season!)	600g	300g
* Peas Small handful		
* Sprouting Broccoli	30gr	15gr
* Potatoes	1kg	500g
* Lettuce	1 head	1 head
Broad Beans	300gr	150gr
Eggs	- £3 doz	

performance and so on. For organic farmers and growers a better relationship with food can be a fundamental part of changing all that. When we are more attuned to the environmental impacts of our food and see that our eating practices are more aligned with a wider set of values and ethics it's likely that we feel more comfortable in ourselves - more in control, more just, more balanced.

The organic community also tends to agree that broad-mindedness (a Universalism value) is fundamental because a lot of the other important values require people to work together, and it also means that you stay open to new ideas. In our Food Values meetings, some participants spoke about the people - 'they' - 'the public', who need to change because, 'they don't understand organics'. Avoiding the process of 'othering' - marking some people as the out-group, is important in terms of framing a collective identity.

4 Common values important to stakeholders in the food system

Benevolence, Universalism, Health, Care For The Environment, Social Justice, Independence, Wisdom, Honesty, Tradition, Community, Belonging, Unity With Nature, Food Quality

4.1 Values of organic consumers

The way we talk about organic food should resonate with consumers. Research commissioned as part of the BOBL project showed that organic consumers consistently mention the more direct benefits for the individual, such as health and better taste / flavour as their prime reasons for buying organic. Environmental and animal welfare benefits are prominent attributes positively associated with organic produce, but they are less often mentioned as key motives to buy organic food (see Figure 2) (Timmins & Blunt, 2013).

Whilst it is important to understand consumers and motives and barriers, the food values work highlights that there is a need to look beyond individualistic concerns and promote the broader attributes as they are likely to lead to more long-lasting social change towards a more sustainable, healthy and fair food system.

Consumers also hold values of self-direction – they don't really want to be told what they should do or believe.

	2010 %	2013 %
Healthier / better for you / better for your body	21	23
Will buy organic if it is on offer / depends on the price	16	19
Better taste / flavour	21	14
No chemicals / fewer chemicals / toxins etc.	11	11
Better quality	6	7
Better for animals / animal welfare	6	5
Organic food looks better / more appealing	4	5
Fresh / fresher produce	5	4
Locally produced / supports the local economy	3	4
Expensive / too expensive / overpriced	6	3
Depends on what is available / just buy what is on the shelf	6	3
Better for the environment	3	3
Convenient / easily available	3	3
Grown / bred naturally	2	3
Better (unspecified)	2	3
I know where it comes from / traceability	*	3
Only buy organic when it takes my fancy – don't normally buy organic	5	2
Buy organic produce for children	5	2

Base: Those buy organic produce in any category (555)

Reasons spontaneously given for buying organic produce. Source: Timmins and Blunt (2013).

4.2 Common conversations among food system stakeholders

In several events held as part of the Food Values project we found certain common conversations among groups drawn from many walks of life. Participants included farmers and community growers but also students, elderly people, children, caterers, town councillors, teachers, church groups, migrant communities and scientists. The concerns about food connect to a care for the environment and for social justice and future generations; this is related to the values of Benevolence and Universalism and to specific frames that illustrate how people feel about food.

Good food should be available to everyone.

Participants rejected a sense of elitism. This was prompted by discussions of the perceived barriers to buying organic or fresh and local food; as well as conversations around food festivals and tourism which have become associated with niche forms of consumerism.

Knowing where our food comes from. The provenance of food was a commonly cited concern. From a values perspective, this is connected with Self-direction, the participants wanted to be able to make informed and independent decisions; with Security, as they wanted to know that their food was safe and healthy; and with a Sense of Belonging (also a Security value), as they sought connection with people (growers and suppliers) and with the land.

Food as pleasure, not indulgence. Taste and the physical experience of eating is important and enjoying food means you appreciate where it comes from. But participants also noted that too much indulgence can lead to unhealthy, unfair and unsustainable behaviours in which food is treated solely as a commodity. This demonstrates the need for a careful balancing of Hedonism values with wider concerns.



Looking beyond money. People do talk about money but it didn't dominate the conversations. The values approach allows a much broader discussion. Irrationalities were also noted, such as the inconsistency between economic concerns with the expense of food and then throwing it away. People also emphasised issues like social justice which they factor into their 'economic' decision making. For example, retailers in the Organic event held in Aberystwyth framed their interactions with suppliers in the following terms "we want to make sure everyone in the chain gets what they need to get..." Elsewhere, participants connected economic priorities with concerns for local resilience and the need for strong communities. This was framed in terms of Universalism, bringing about social value through meaningful jobs, and a sense of pride and confidence associated with Self-direction rather than Wealth or Power. Consequently, we see that money per se isn't the primary concern or motivator.

A shortage of skills. Digging deeper into the perceived lack of food education noted above, participants emphasised that skills were in greater demand than simply information. This included cooking, preserving, composting, gardening and foraging, and there was a strong sense that these were a precious link to older generations. Skills were therefore often connected with values of Tradition and Self-direction. Some organic producers might be able to offer events that allow such learning and create lasting connections across issues:

*"if we grow, we know where food comes from,
we appreciate it more and we learn..."
(Participant at food values event)*

Getting back in touch with food. The need for skills was also presented as a desire to develop Unity with Nature and Meaning in Life, through greater sensitivity to things that have been forgotten and are squeezed out by the current food system. Participants wanted to become more aware of what is in season and how the soil system works to affect the quality of food. This is not just education but a different way of engaging with the world.

An information deficit? There was a great emphasis among our participants on the need for 'awareness raising'. This is based on an assumption that lack of information is the cause of the problem and people (including many organic producers) talk about education as the answer to address the problems of the food system. The values approach suggests that lack of information is not the main cause of inaction. Instead we need to consider a range of social factors and make use of the value framework to talk about food issues.



4.3 Opportunities to talk about food values

Having direct contact between producers and consumers at farmers markets, farm shops and other direct outlets and the opportunity to talk about the way food is produced is sometimes contrasted with experiences of shopping in more anonymous supermarkets where the sheer physicality of the retail environment makes it more difficult to learn about the values of the farmer or the natural environment in which the food was produced.

"...you very often have the opportunity to ask your stallholder, farmers markets or box scheme deliverer about things. Very often recipes are included to promote the seasonal use of food..." (Organic Grower interview)

Here, the value of Tradition links to place, people and community, and to the values of belonging and unity with nature. As the Welsh writer Raymond Williams argued, most people in the developed world are urban consumers yet they still experience the pull of the rural idyll, a pull towards older human and natural ways of living. A recent report on Welsh Narratives (Marshall and Darnton, 2013) suggested that the Welsh landscape is by far the strongest single point of reference to which people in Wales attach a sense of identity. Identification with the landscape also presents an opportunity to create a compelling visual narrative which many Welsh organic producers should be able to use when talking about where the food is produced.

Values associated with cost, price and food quality are very important for the organic stakeholder community. The meetings held illustrate that organic stakeholders understand the complex nature of sustainability and appreciate how it involves concern for local economies, Fairtrade, carbon emissions and wider ecological issues. Many feel that whether organic produce is actually more expensive than conventional in all instances could be more a question of perception. Sometimes organic produce is less expensive, depending on what's in season and where it's sold. Some producers argue that they don't want to compete on price alone, because they believe that the organic price reflects the true cost of food. However, such arguments have to be carefully balanced with the need to ensure that good food should be available for all and with avoiding "us and them" frames.

"I think [an organic premium] is acknowledging that there is a cost to any production of good quality products, and that cheap food is not a true value because I don't know where cheap food should come from."
(Organic Grower interview)



5 Key recommendations for organic producers

The Common Cause values approach encourages people to connect food with deeply held personal values and encourages active participation in the design and format of the food system, rather than passive 'consumption'. It also challenges people to understand food issues such as sustainability or security in the context of broader social and environmental issues.

Important values groupings - related to positive changes that are also held by many stakeholders and producers of organic food - are Benevolence, Universalism and Self-direction.

Organic farming is well suited to developing a vision of long-term systematic change to the food system and summaries of the benefits of organic farming can now be found in several key publications (see Box).

So there should be enough common ground for a conversation between organic producers and people concerned about the long-term future of our food system. In preparing for these conversations we encourage organic producers to follow these essential steps.

1. Explore your own values and how they relate to the values map. Talk about the people on your farm and the values they hold and why you feel they are important and how this relates to your way of farming.
2. Promote intrinsic values based on your own story. Food is universal and we all eat. Referring to values and frames that enhance Universalism and Benevolence in talking about food is relatively easy, but every organic farmer has a specific and personal story to tell, so it seems to good develop your own statements. Here are some suggestions:
 - o Many people identify with local food, with building communities and with sharing mealtimes.
 - o People also care about improving our shared environment and about animals.

- o A food event on a farm could be a great way to build connections between people, and foster a shared sense of identity, motivation and care for one another.
- o Promote working together and motivate people by portraying them as active and involved, not just passive customers of a product. Farmers and consumers (or maybe better, citizens) can work together as equal partners in changing the food system.

Examples of organic producers talking about their values

"I'm very fond of my animals... and the same goes for the soil. I can remember.... nitrogen used to come in blue bags in those days and we were putting it on until the grass was as blue as the bags and you just thought this can't be, and it stings your fingers, doesn't it? And you think what's it doing to everything..."

"We weren't sure how we'd manage on the nutrient levels, but we've proven that you can do it [without chemical fertilisers] by good management of grass leys, clover leys, particularly in using farmyard manure. So we were anxious that we may not be able to keep going at the level we were farming before, but in fact it's been the opposite... it's been a boon for us..."

"What I feel needs doing is to tap into inspiring people to think a bit more about the food they eat... There is a very large percentage of the population that could not care less about food; growing food in schools with children learning to taste/cook it has to be a way out of this for the next generation. Cookery demos, recipes, celebrity chefs help address these issues."

3. Balance talking about the causes of problems with mentioning the real benefits. It can be good to explain where and why things are going wrong (e.g. the problems with modern farming) but in order to avoid engaging values of Power alone this should also be balanced with talking about intrinsic values and positive solutions. Focusing only on, or relying on, messages that emphasize threat and loss (e.g. through conventional agriculture) can make us feel helpless. Such framing is likely to backfire, by making us more materialistic and less concerned about the environment. So it does not support the long-term vision of a sustainable, healthy and fair food system.
4. Balance talking about the need for a good price with other intrinsic values. There is a potential

What is organic food?

Organic food is produced

- by protecting and enhancing natural soil fertility
- using natural fertilisers and biological nitrogen fixation of clovers and other legumes
- closing nutrient cycles through use of manures and crop residues
- controlling pests and diseases through husbandry methods and beneficial insects rather than pesticides
- with mechanical weed control without herbicides
- promoting high biodiversity
- keeping animals free-range with regular access to pasture for foraging
- rearing animals without the routine use of antibiotics and growth promoters
- with little negative impact on the climate
- with much reduced risk of water pollution
- without genetically modified organisms.

Compared to processed conventional food, processed organic food contains:

- Fewer additives
- No artificial sweeteners, stabilisers, preservatives
- No addition of glutamate as a flavour enhancer
- No colouring
- No artificial flavours
- No hydrogenated fats
- No or only traces of pesticides

Source: Bickel and Rossier (2015)

contradiction between the producer wanting to earn a fair reward for their farming (and having a professional pride in doing so) and engaging too strongly the values and frames of Power and Achievement when talking about it. This can be avoided by highlighting the link between farming and the benefits to society and the environment, and making it clear that earning a living is means to a good way of farming - so making a link between Achievement and Universalism.

5. Avoid 'us and them'. It is easy to think that consumers need to be told what to do, because 'they don't understand organics'. In terms of building a joint identity of producers and consumers working together to change the food system such in/out grouping should be avoided. People like to learn, but most of us also like to be allowed to make our own choices and not to be told what we should and should not do. The same is true for all citizens, farmers and growers and consumers alike.

A focus on values should not stop us from questioning all aspects of the world in which we live, and the reflective learning which it encourages should be grounded in action and experience. And there also some challenges that we need to think about when using the Common Cause value framework to talk about organic food products.

The first relates to the price of organic food. The high price can be seen as relating to Power and Achievement values. These are not bad things to want, particularly if they are in service to higher ideals and not ends in themselves. It is a difficult task for all of us to balance our need to earn enough for a decent way of life on the one hand, with our desire to create a better world on the other. It is important to let people choose their own way here, neither dismissing those who prefer job satisfaction over income as 'romantic idealists' nor those who want to make a good living out of farming as greedy. Idealism can be combined with a good business plan and the examples illustrate that many organic producers can aim to balance doing good things for nature with earning a fair living.

The other challenge relates to trying talk about issues that engage the commonly recognised motives behind why consumers buy organic food (such as personal health, taste) without engaging too much in the extrinsic values of Security and Sense of belonging at the expense of Universalism and Benevolence. This can be avoided by phrasing messages so that they empower. Trusting people to make independent decisions and providing them with space to explore ideas will enhance their motivation and overall effectiveness because promoting autonomy can reinforce intrinsic self-direction values.

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Quotations in this guide come from interviews and workshops undertaken as part of the Food Values Project. More information at <https://foodvaluesblog.wordpress.com>

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