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ORGANIC MOVEMENT

Agroecology, Regenerative, Natural and Organics *Competition or one harmonic family? A controversial debate*

Organic is not alone anymore. Various movements have similar principles and strategies. This BIOFACH discusses the scientific (FiBL) and political perspectives (IFOAM Organics International, Regeneration International and Agroecology Europe/FAO).

Agroecology is based on many definitions in its history of about 100 years. Most commonly, the definitions of Glissmann, the 10 elements of FAO and the 13 principles of Agroecology by the High-Level-Panel-of-Experts (HLPE) of food security are used. The use of terms and the understanding and definitions of the various stakeholders vary in various parts of the globe with usually civil society organizations being more demanding in terms of requirements and interpretation of principles to call concrete systems agroecological in practice. With the recent efforts of the stakeholders and the international community, the



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degree of description, common understanding and consensus has increased. There are no minimal standards nor predefined verification requirements, but tools (e.g. TAPE of FAO) have been or are being developed to assess the fulfilment of the principles in concrete cases. The term agroecology is not very commonly used in the market and there are no comprehensive statistics about e.g. areas of imple-

mentation. In recent years, international debates and governments have promoted agroecology more and more as a paradigm for food system transformation on global, regional and national levels and the momentum and recognition is growing fast year by year.

Organic Agriculture is also about 100 years old and started its work with the so-called organic pioneers. IFOAM Organics International is the global umbrella organisation since 1972. It defines Organic with member legitimated principles, definitions, standards, best practises, tools and visions such as Organic 3.0 (all being so-called organic landmarks). Organic is very descriptive through the standards and regulations of about 100 countries that define what can be called and labelled “organic”, “ecological”, “bio”, “biological” (or other terms in other languages) in food products and what kind of conformity assessment processes have to be installed. There are governmental, private national (e.g. Switzerland) and regional (e.g. EU, East Africa or ASEAN) standards and regulations and there are international reference standards (e.g. Codex Alimentarius of WHO/FAO or the IFOAM Standard). Most of the countries have own definitions but there are harmonization efforts (e.g. of UNCTAD, or of UNFSS) and international trade agreements for the recognition of each other (e.g. between US and EU or between EU or UK and CH and Tunisia).

Regenerative Agriculture is less old in its concept and goes back to the Rodale Institute in the US in the 1980s, which recently introduced a certification system. It gained very fast momentum in policy and market uptake in recent years. In essence, it promotes similar values to agroecology and organic as a holistic land management

practice with a focus on soil and its organic matter. It promotes the benefits mostly about issues of climate change, desertification, and biodiversity.

Natural farming: Natural farming promotes resilient low- and ideally no-input farming system going back to the Japanese pioneer M. Fukuoka who combined the mimicking of nature with spiritual elements. The biggest initiative for natural farming is in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh targeting 6 million farmers to transition to natural farming. Recently, India started a process to regulate natural farming. Internationally, the term “Natural” is often used on products with the idea of promising production processes that are closer to nature, which are however not well defined and leave space for interpretation. The two “Natural” directions have however very few in common.

Other terms and schools include e.g. Biodynamic, Biocyclic (vegan), Permaculture, Low External Input Sustainable Agriculture (LEISA), Agro-For-estry, and Fair Trade. All have their own definitions, promoters, practitioners and benchmarks. They are all similar to organic in some ways and different in others.

My opinion statement

Organic and Agroecology philosophy and principles overlap in their nature and differences inside the movements are often bigger than between the movements. The success of the Organic movement is that its paradigm is more and more recognized. Due to its market affinity and its rigidity (e.g. no synthetic inputs or no GMO in all cases) it is not so attractive to international policymakers. International policy debates avoid promoting it. However, the values are carried in the term Agroecology, which on the other hand can't demonstrate a broad market uptake. Together, we can be successful. IFOAM Organics International is part of the international Agroecology Coalition. Farmers that identify themselves as agroecological, market with organic labels. So, let us be smart, let us use a diversity of terms and concepts and let us follow synergistic strategies to achieve our overall purpose of truly sustainable agriculture and food systems. Interested in the topic? Visit the BIOFACH conference event with the same name. ■

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