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D21: Focus groups of value concepts of organic producers and other stakeholders

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## Preface

The Organic Revision project was funded by the EU with the aim of supporting the further development of the EU Regulation 2092/91 on organic production. The technical annex to the project contract argues that it is important in this process to improve the understanding, knowledge and communication of the basic ethical values of organic agriculture. The project aims to provide an overview of values held among organic stakeholders, and of similarities and differences among the various national and private organic standards. The work presented in this report contributes to these objectives. It summarises focus group discussions about values among organic and converting producers and other stakeholders that were conducted in five European countries during 2004 and early 2005. It then contrasts these results with other findings, in particular with work about values of organic consumers.

A total of 25 focus groups were conducted, and the results were summarised and analysed at national level. These national reports will be made available on the project website in the near future, some of them in the original language. This report draws the findings together and compares and contrasts them. It would not have been possible without the substantial effort in preparing, carrying out, analysing and reporting the discussions at a national level and without the many that helped in the process.

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Susanne Padel

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## Executive summary

### Objectives

The overall objective of the research project Organic Revision (EEC 2092/91; FP6-502397) is to provide recommendations for development of the EU regulation for organic agriculture. The work reported here is part of a work package (WP2) identifying basic values and value differences related to organic agriculture in Europe and developing a procedure for balancing and integrating the basic values in the development of the EU regulation 2092/91. The empirical work for WP2 consisted of focus groups that aimed to identify the range of value-related attitudes among organic producers, to explore differences among the regions and between established and more recently converted producers, and to contrast the results with studies of other organic stakeholders, especially the values of consumers from the OMIaRD<sup>1</sup> project.

### Methodology and approach

Focus groups are carefully prepared discussions of 90 to 120 minutes, with 6 to 15 participants focusing on the topic of interest. A total of 25 groups with 182 participants were held in five countries: eleven groups (40% of participants) involved established organic producers, five groups (25%) consisted of recently converted producers, seven groups (25 %) were of researchers and staff of organic organisations, and there were two groups (10%) of policy makers and students.

There was a common Discussion Guide for the focus group meetings, which lasted for approximately 2 hours. The Discussion Guide started with introductions and continued with participants' first associations with the word *organic*, and then their personal involvement with the organic sector. This led on to a discussion of values important for the organic sector, potential value-conflicts, and prospective values of organic farming in the future. Each focus group was fully recorded and transcribed.

The analysis was carried out in three stages. First, the key findings and most important observations from each focus group were summarised in the order of the sections in the Discussion Guide. These summaries were then condensed into a series of national reports. In the third stage, the transcripts were coded using a common codebook (available as a separate document at [Organic-Revision.org](http://Organic-Revision.org)). The codes were formulated to represent values. They were based on the literature, on some of focus groups summaries, and on an early draft of principles of the IFOAM Task Force on the review of Principles of Organic Agriculture. New codes could be added when necessary. For the analysis, the statements relating to each code were retrieved and summarised, and differences in the meanings and importance of values were explored. Finally, the values were contrasted with those represented in the four new IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture, which were recently approved by the IFOAM General Assembly.

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<sup>1</sup> Organic Marketing Initiatives and Rural Development (OMIaRD)

### **Description of key findings in the same order as in the group discussions**

When asked for their unprompted first associations with organic farming, producers in all the countries mentioned health, sustainability and professional challenge. In most of the countries, these first associations also included farming naturally and minimal use of external inputs.

Producers' motives for becoming involved in organic farming were broad ranging, and reasons for farm conversions seemed to have been influenced by a mixture of internal and external factors. Motives for organic farm conversion frequently mentioned in each country were as follows:

Austria	Ecological and environmental freedom from GMOs <sup>2</sup> , food quality and health;
Italy	Concern for the environment and for sustainability, followed by product quality, and not having to work with chemicals;
Netherlands	Sustainability, the lifestyle and working environment, working with nature, self-sufficiency, personal freedom, and social issues;
Switzerland	Sustainability, health of the systems, social justice for all partners including fair returns for producers;
UK	Concerns with the direction of conventional agriculture, personal health, passing on the farm to the next generation, and personal challenge.

The widely held view that new entrants convert only for financial reasons and do not engage with the values of organic agriculture could not be confirmed. There were few differences in the motives and values discussed by the recently converted and more established organic farmers. However, the longer-established producers seemed to be more familiar with "organic farming" theories such as the cycle of health or ecosystems health. This suggests a challenge to the organic sector to ensure that all new entrants have access to these ideas.

The subsequent section of the Discussion Guide explored the meanings of the values and investigated which of them were more important to the participants. Values attributed the greatest importance in the focus groups of various countries were as follows.

In all countries, food quality and health, environmental protection, and limiting resource use were among the important values. In addition, the following values were discussed as important in individual countries: in Austria, health, independence, and closed production cycles; in Italy, an alternative organic life model; in the Netherlands, a systems approach, sustainability, fairness, and regional production; in Switzerland, sustainability, authentic production, and farming with nature; and in the UK, health, sustainability, professional challenge, and local production.

Economic pressures and a downward trend for organic prices were seen as preventing producers from realising all of their organic values, especially in larger trading structures and globalised markets. This was illustrated by examples from many areas of production, such as diversity or specialisation, crop rotations in the

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<sup>2</sup> GMO = genetically modified organism

greenhouse, tractors and their impact on the energy balance, and the costs of improved animal welfare. There was a similar reference to the lack of a level playing field for organic producers in relation to energy use and ecological issues.

Values expected to be important in the future of organic farming were:

- Limiting the use of non-renewable resources, particularly energy sources
- Avoiding contamination with GMOs
- Fair or cost-covering prices
- Solidarity among farmers
- Local and regional production
- Closer links between producers and consumers
- Openness, communication and trust throughout the whole organic food chain

### ***Further analysis of the values and contrasting with the new IFOAM principles of health, ecology, fairness and care***

A comparison of the results with consumer studies shows that many stakeholders tended to associate organic farming with health, low residues and healthy products. This is substantiated by the producers' concerns for the health of consumers. Established organic producers and researchers referred further to a concept of systems health or a cycle of health similar to the IFOAM principle of health.

Environmental and ecological values were important to all stakeholders. Established organic producers emphasised closed production cycles to minimise resource use, similar to the emphasis on balanced agro-ecosystems in the IFOAM principle of ecology. Environmental protection and biodiversity conservation were among the values expected to become more important in the future; they were also of greater importance to new entrants and to consumers.

Values represented in both the IFOAM principles of fairness and care were frequently mentioned and intensively discussed. The participants strongly associated organic farming with the sustainability of agriculture, and they considered that social justice will become a more important value in the future.

Values concerned with animal welfare and health were particularly important to some converting producers and other stakeholders. They recognised how important animal welfare is to consumers and expected it to become more important in the future. Animal welfare and health are divided in the two separate IFOAM principles of fairness and health.

Both producers and consumers preferred regional organic networks for reasons including product traceability and freshness, direct producer-consumer communication and trust building, and reduced transport, but they recognised the limitations of local trade.

The systems-oriented approach of organic farming represented a fundamental difference to conventional agriculture to many participants.



## **Recommendations for revision of the EU Regulation 2092/91**

Values very similar to those contained in the four IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture were expressed by producers and other stakeholders and should be considered in the drafting both of the overarching principles and of the area-specific working principles in the revision of the EU Regulation 2092/91 on organic production.

### *Principle of health*

The idea of a core principle of health for organic farming to cover product quality, animal and human health, and the health of the system, appeared well-supported by the values expressed in these focus groups and by consumers, and it should be included in the EU Regulation.

### *Principle of ecology*

Three areas of values are related to this principle: limitation in the use of non-renewable resources; working with nature or in a natural way; and conservation of diversity in crops, species and landscape. Values relating to all three areas appeared well-supported by all types of participants.

### *Principle of fairness*

The desire for fairness in the whole food chain was an important value shared by organic producers and other stakeholders across the countries studied. It therefore seems justified to establish a fairness principle and to consider social justice in the further development of standards and regulations.

### *Principle of care*

The values of sustainability, and of care for the production process, product quality, and the environment were well-supported by the organic producers and other stakeholders of the focus groups and should, therefore, be considered for inclusion in the principles of the EU Regulation. The IFOAM principle of care emphasises the precautionary principle, which is to be exercised when choosing new production technologies or inputs, and prefers processing technologies that are careful to maintain the quality and integrity of the product.

Some values of great importance to producers and other stakeholders in these studies are not covered in detail by the new IFOAM principles or are split between two or more of the principles. These topic areas should also be considered for inclusion in the statements of principles of organic production in the EU Regulation for organic agriculture. They include the following categories of values:

### *Environmental protection and bio-diversity conservation*

The contribution of organic farming to conservation and environmental protection emerged as an important value both to producers and to consumers, and they expected these concerns to become even more important in the future. Given this broad and growing support from a range of stakeholders, a direct mention of the value of nature conservation and bio-diversity in the EU Regulation appears justified, in addition to a more general principle of ecology.

*Animal welfare and animal health*

There seemed to be a mismatch of expectations between consumers and producers in relation to animal welfare. This may be related to the fact that the EC organic standards for animal husbandry were introduced much later than for crops. Representing all issues related to animals in a principle of animal health and welfare in the EU Regulation could encourage more active engagement of all stakeholders with these issues, especially with animal welfare as an area of key importance to consumers and of wider societal benefit.

*Local/regional production*

Both producers and consumers expressed a preference for local and regional organic networks but they also acknowledged the necessity for larger-scale trade. Further work in the project will aim to clarify how these issues may be considered in future development of standards, while recognising the limitations of an exclusive focus on local trade, especially for producers in the more marginal areas.

*Whole systems or holistic approach of agriculture*

Many participants considered that the approach of organic agriculture is holistic, and so involves the need to consider the impacts of any practice on the whole farming system. They thought organic producers need to learn that problems are best dealt with by prevention through identifying the causes within the system and through respecting and learning from natural processes instead of relying on external inputs.

*Professional skills, independence and responsibility*

Many producers saw being an organic farmer as a professional challenge, requiring them to develop specialist skills but providing the benefits of greater independence. They took their responsibilities very seriously towards the consumer and the environment, but they objected to too much bureaucracy in the inspection system. The EU Regulation on organic production should, therefore, remain a framework and not a listing of detailed prescriptions. It should clearly state the need to learn specialist organic farming skills as a requirement of the conversion period and possibly could include a requirement of due diligence in relation to organic food production. More responsibility could be given to organic operators to demonstrate how the basic principles are translated into practice.

# 1 Introduction

The recent development of organic agriculture was characterised by fast growth, large-scale production, involvement of large conventional companies, and global trade. At the end of 2003, organic and in-conversion land area in the enlarged EU (25 countries) reached an estimated 5.8 million hectares (ha) on 155,100 holdings, amounting to 3.5% of the utilisable agricultural area (UAA). This represents substantial growth compared with the middle of the 1980's. In 1985 certified and policy-supported organic production accounted for 103 000 ha in the EU, or less than 0.1% of the UAA on approximately 6 000 holdings. The market for organic products in Europe grew from an estimated 900 million Euros retail sales value in 1989 to approximately 12 billion Euros in 2004.

There is a concern that this fast growth threatens the effectiveness of organic agriculture to function as an alternative, more sustainable development path and as a source of inspiration for mainstream agriculture and for the development of environmental and rural development policies. They may also have a negative impact on offering alternative choices for politically motivated consumers. There is, therefore, renewed interest in values and principles that can guide the future development of organic farming. Existing definitions are not always, in themselves, adequate as a guide for the dynamic development of organic agriculture in a globalising world and in responding to new challenges. The regulations and standards have become more complicated, and changes may be implemented without any firm connection to the values of the organic movements because these common values are not clearly stated.

The overall objective of the research project Organic Revision (EEC 2092/91; FP6-502397) is to provide recommendations for development of the EU regulation for organic agriculture. In setting up the project, the team proposed to include a study of the principles and basic ethical values of organic production in Europe (WP 2), which would entail the following tasks:

- identifying basic ethical values of organic agriculture;
- providing recommendations concerning use of basic ethical values in evaluation and revision of organic standards;
- identifying value differences among different organic stakeholders;
- suggesting a procedure for balancing and integrating basic ethical values and value differences in the development of organic standards; and
- identifying value-based conflicts in the organic regulations.

Some of these aims were addressed by a series of focus groups on current organic values. The participants included organic and converting producers and other stakeholders from fork to farm. Focus groups are carefully prepared discussion of 90 to 120 minutes with 6 to 15 participants focusing on the topic of interest. The focus groups were convened in Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK, as main partner countries of the project, and the results were contrasted with those of the OMIARD investigation on consumer values (see Zanoli *et al.*, 2004).

## 1.1 Background

### 1.1.1 Development of organic farming in the focus group countries

The countries where focus groups were conducted exhibit some differences in relation to the development of their organic sectors. Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and the UK have higher than average uptake of organic farming; whereas the Netherlands is below the EU average (see Figure 1).

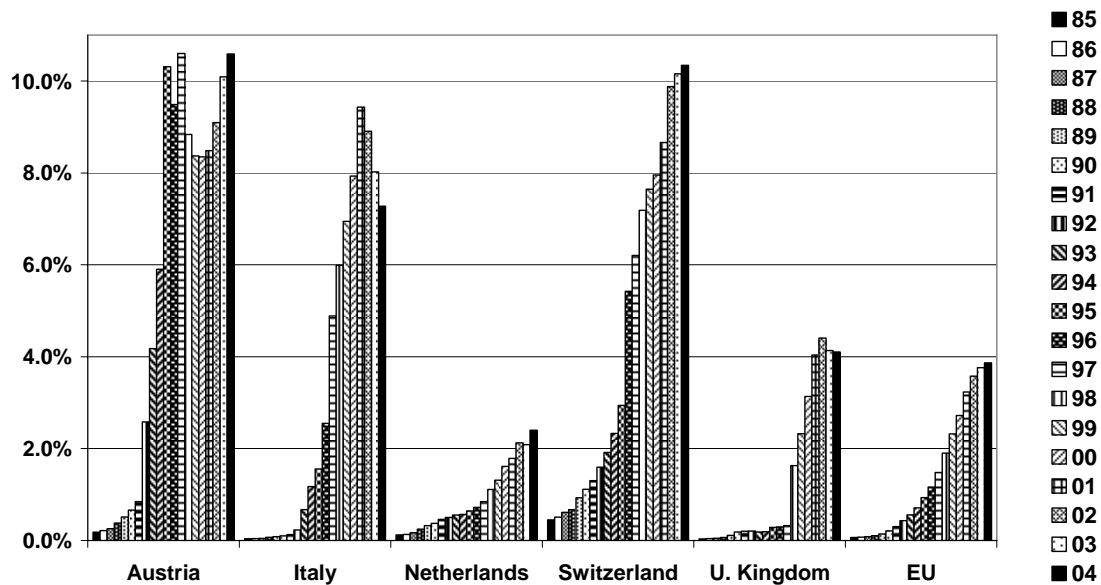


Figure 1: Organic and in-conversion land areas in five countries (% of UAA)

**Austria** has a long tradition of organic and biodynamic farming, and approximately 10% of total UAA is currently organic or in-conversion. Individual organic farms (mainly biodynamic) date back to the 1920's and 1930's. From the 1970's a slow but steady growth in the number of organic farms continued throughout the 1980's. The movement had close contacts with Dr. Hans Müller in Switzerland, the founder of organic-biological agriculture. He visited Austria regularly, and many Austrian farmers attended courses at his school in Switzerland. In the last 15 years, the sector has experienced alternating periods of stagnation and rapid growth. After the introduction of subsidies in the early 1990's, rapid increases in organic land area took place mainly in the grassland and mountain areas, where conversion aid was higher than other no-input programmes in the agri-environment schemes. Until 2000, this was followed by a period of stagnation and decline partly because some farms discontinued organic management after the first 5-year conversion-support period was over. In 2002/03, there was a new period of growth in organic land area with growth rates higher than EU average. This was driven mainly by arable producers in the Eastern provinces of Austria, who were probably influenced by a decline in prices for conventional cereals.

**Italy** is characterised by a relatively large organic farming sector, which has grown in an almost explosive manner from 600 farms in 1985 to 42 238 in 1998. Annual growth increased significantly after the 1992 implementation of EC Regulation 2092/91 on organic certification, and continued with the introduction of organic

farming and other agri-environment subsidies from 1993 to 1996 in the various regions of Italy with EC Reg. 2078/92 (Michelsen *et al.*, 2001).

In 2004, there were approximately 36 000 farmers certified as organic on a land area of nearly 950 000 ha, and around 25% of all EU organic producers were in Italy. However, the number of farms had fallen by 7 500 since 2003, and the land area had reduced by nearly 100 000 ha. Italy has the fourth largest retail market for organic products in Europe.

The **Netherlands** has a strong tradition of biodynamic farming, as well as ecological or organic farming. In 2003, organic land area in the Netherlands was 2.2% of UAA, which was below the EU average. This land area declined by 2% from 2002 to 2003 but then increased to 48 155 ha in 2004. The earlier decline was probably a result of policy changes in 2002, when conversion support was suspended in favour of a task force for organic market development (maintenance support continues). Approximately 50% of the Netherlands organic land area was grassland in 2003 with the rest in arable and horticulture production. In contrast to a decline in land area, the market for organic produce continues to increase, especially in the multiple retailer outlets, which account for nearly 50% of all organic sales. Consumers associate organic with fresh food, and most organic sales are of dairy products, fruit and vegetables, meat, and bread.

In **Switzerland** organic farming has a long tradition. The first Swiss biodynamic farm was founded in 1928. In the same year, Minna Hofstetter, inspired by the 'Reform' movement and vegetarianism, started to publish on the subject of organic gardening. After the Second World War, Hans and Marie Müller developed the bio-organic movement, working together with the soil scientist Hanspeter Rusch. They helped to establish the first farmers' marketing cooperative in 1946, mainly for vegetables. By the 1970's, farming practices similar to modern organic farming had evolved (Vogt, 2000).

Over the last ten years, the number of organic farms has increased almost five-fold, but growth is currently stagnating at only 2.3% per year. In early 2005, 11.2% of farms were organic (6 420 farms) on 10.5% of the land area (112 000 ha). The majority of these farms are in the mountains and hills, and produce milk and meat, while fruit, berry, vegetable, and wine production are under-represented due to production difficulties. The average size of organic farms is still small at between 15 and 20 ha, but there is a strong tendency among both organic and other farms for this average size to grow. Originally, most organic products were sold directly by the farmers themselves or in health food stores. The sales volume increased strongly when Coop and Migros, the two large supermarket chains, began to sell organic products in the 1990's. The Swiss Federal Government has supported organic farming with direct payments since 1993. Organic farmers achieve price premia of 20% to 100% compared to conventional farm products. Together with the subsidies, this results in incomes for organic farmers similar to those of conventional farmers (Rudmann and Willer, 2005).

The history of organic farming in the **UK** goes back to Lady Eve Balfour and the founding of the Soil Association in 1946. After many years of trailing behind other European countries, the UK experienced a sharp increase in the number of farmers interested in organic conversion from 1997, shortly after the introduction of subsidies. At the end of 1997, approximately 1 000 producers on nearly 55 000 ha

farmed organically, rising to 4 000 producers on nearly 700 000 ha at the end of 2003. However a decline in land area was reported in 2003 and 2004.

The results of a survey of UK farming community representatives, agricultural policy specialists, and food market experts suggest that increased conversion aid was not the only driver causing rapid development in the 1990's. Other possible drivers included the crisis in conventional agriculture, increased consumer demand for organic food, good organic prices, a relatively high profitability of organic farming, and increased government promotion and support for organic farming under the Labour administration (Michelsen *et al.*, 2001). This period of growth in organic production in the late 1990's was followed by a period of consolidation: there were problems of supply exceeding demand in some key markets, such as milk and red meat, resulting in reduced farm gate prices.

The distribution of organic farms in England and Wales is skewed towards livestock production, and the predominantly grassland regions in the South and West have a relatively large proportion of organic producers (SA, 1999). Compared to conventional agriculture, more mixed farms and fewer specialist dairy and arable farms are managed organically. The reasons for this are not fully understood but are probably mainly technical (e.g. enterprise mix and farm type).

The UK organic food market has historically been quite dependent on imports. In the market as a whole, import dependency has reduced as more UK farms have converted to organic production, but there remains a mismatch between consumer demand and domestic production for some goods such as fruit and vegetables. An above average rate of growth has been noted in direct sales, especially farmers markets. However, the most important outlets for organic food in the UK remain the multiple retailers (approx 80% of all organic sales), and there is significant competition among the supermarkets in organic food retailing. Major retail chains report increasing organic sales and continued investment in expanding their organic ranges, but they have narrowed their focus onto brands and lines that have proven successful. All supermarkets state a commitment to procure domestically produced organic food. However, Firth *et al.* (2004) conclude that price pressure will perhaps be the main threat to the UK organic vegetable industry. The high retail prices are a barrier to consumers purchasing, but lower returns to growers could threaten organic integrity and the livelihoods of producers.

In summary, Austria and Switzerland's history of organic agriculture began with the first biodynamic farms in the 1920's. The roots of the organic-biological agriculture of Mueller and Rusch go back to Switzerland, but these ideas have also significantly influenced the organic movement in Austria. As a result of policy support for organic and sustainable agriculture, both countries have experienced significant growth since the early 1990's. Italy has a relatively young organic sector with dramatic growth since the early 1990's and very strong regional differences. The Netherlands has a strong tradition of biodynamic farming alongside ecological agriculture, but growth since the 2002 has been moderate compared to other countries. The UK has strong and long tradition of organic farming, going back to Lady Eve Balfour and Sir Albert Howard in the mid-1940's. Growth in the 1990's started late compared with other EU countries, but now the UK is above average in percentage land-area farmed organically and one of the largest retail markets for organic food in Europe.

### 1.1.2 Organic producers' motives and values

According to a survey of 47 organic farmers in **Austria**, conducted in 1980/81, original motives for converting to organic farming were ecological (such as improving efficiency by reducing inputs) and concerned with health problems in animal housing or in the family, while higher prices and increased income were less important (Plakolm, 1987). In a survey of 114 livestock producers, Omelko and Schneeberger (2003) found that the main reasons for conversion were related to family health, food quality, soil fertility, and problems with conventional methods on the farm.

Accession to the EU and the introduction of subsidies caused a sharp increase in the number of organic farms mainly in the grassland regions. There is a suggestion that farmers' attitudes have changed due to the official recognition of organic farming and the introduction of subsidies. For example Darnhofer *et al.* (2005b) created a typology of farmers and differentiated between "pragmatic" and "committed" organic producers. Several Austrian farms have left the organic programme. The three most important reasons for their reversion were the high cost of organic grain for feed, the lack of price premia for organic products (mostly beef and milk), and the frequency of changes in organic standards, as well as technical reasons (Darnhofer *et al.*, 2005a). Recently the number of organic farmers has risen in areas characterised mainly by arable farming, which could be related to the organic price premia for arable crops.

A number of **Italian** sources indicate that the average age of organic producers is younger than that of conventional producers; the majority of organic farmers are under 45 years old. A few studies have attempted to classify organic producers according to their commitment to organic values. Organic producers seem more educated than conventional farmers, and most of them had moved from urban areas to follow what they commonly perceived as an "alternative life model". These studies classify the organic producers as belonging either to first or second generations. In this classification system, the first generation producers chose to go into organics to experiment with a more natural and sustainable alternative production model, using farm-based resources and paying more attention to environmental issues. The authors argue that a second generation of producers decided to switch from conventional to organics without a real commitment to its principles but just to pursue a new market.

Piani (1993) carried out socio-economic analysis of organic farms in Friuli region (north-eastern Italy). She classifies the organic producers in three main categories: the *traditional* producers, the *intellectual* producers, and the *pragmatic* producers. Farmers in the traditional category had not really chosen to be organic producers; they were always "organic" without even knowing it because of their close connection to the land. These farms generally earned only moderate revenues: their products were of high quality, but most were for home consumption. The intellectual category consists of farmers of rural origins who had contacts with environmental or solidarity associations and had decided to work in organic agriculture mainly for ideological reasons. Most of these were part-time farmers and had small farms, and their work was contributing to land and environmental protection. The pragmatic category of producers had looked from the start mainly at the economic aspect of organic production. This was described as a diverse, heterogeneous group of people, such as farmers' children with backgrounds in the conventional sector and other types of entrepreneur.

In a qualitative research project carried out in southern Italy, Scardigno (2001) and Pugliese (2001) identify categories similar to most authors but suggest an additional category. The so-called *eco-sly* producers are seen as only interested in EU subsidies and as non-professional in their activities. However, the authors consider that farmers in this group could be persuaded to change their attitudes to organic production.

A regional study conducted in Tuscany by Arsia (1992) shows that many organic producers came originally from other professional sectors and had decided to invest their money in agricultural activities, and that 15% of organic producers came from foreign countries. The average age of organic producers in the region was 42 years old. From Umbria, Chiorri (1993) reports that 23.5% of organic farmers in the region appeared to have a university degree but not in agricultural sciences or related subjects, and almost 40% of the others had a high school diploma. The author concludes from this data that organic producers are motivated by personal ethical values and not by technical considerations.

One of the first sociological studies of motives for conversion was carried out in **Switzerland**. Fischer interviewed 100 pioneer organic farmers in 1982 and concludes that although the motives and opinions of organic farmers varied considerably, they shared common basic characteristics. Decisions by farmers to change to an organic system were motivated principally as follows: (1) external factors, such as negative experiences in applying conventional methods, disease in humans and animals on the farm, and contacts with successful organic farmers; (2) internal factors, such as psychological predisposition, or the search for a new way of life. Fischer also notes that one of the farmers believed that organic farming systems would become widespread in a short time because of the required change of occupational consciousness. However, it appears now that economic motivation to convert has become much more important with the development of markets and conversion aid.

In the first survey of 70 organic farmers in the **UK** (in England and Wales), farmers' most frequently mentioned motivation was improvement of husbandry (approximately 75%), followed by concerns about food quality for the health of humans and livestock (38%), debt reduction (28%), and the risks associated with agro-chemicals (24%) (Vine and Bateman, 1981). Ashmole (1993) reports similar motivations but finds that environmental concerns were more dominant: several farmers 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.* (1997) finds that non-economic aspects were dominant among the considerations on whether to go organic among 237 horticultural producers, of whom 151 were conventional and 86 organic. With the help of factor analysis applied to responses from a survey of 122 organic producers in Scotland, McEachern and Willock (2004) identify their underlying motives as environmental, ethical and societal. Important factors that explain variations in attitude were named as attitude to naturalness, market demand and policy. The study also reports that half of the surveyed producers thought the organic sector might lose its high ethical status in the future because new entrants to the industry were believed not to have the same ethical values as more established organic producers.



Ramsden and Rodgers (1999) attempted to cluster 59 organic producers based on attitudes, and they found differences in attitudes between those producers who supplied supermarkets and those who were only involved in other supply chains. The producers who supplied supermarkets were more business-oriented, whereas the non-supermarket producers were concerned about loss of independence and the lack of compatibility of the supermarket outlets with the organic farming ethos.

An number of studies have looked at farmers' motives for converting to organic production. Based on a review of literature, Padel (2001) summarises motives for conversion to organic farming in four categories: farming related motives, financial motives, personal motives, and general concerns (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Categories of motives for conversion**

<b><i>Farming related motives</i></b>	<b><i>Personal motives</i></b>
Husbandry and technical reasons Animal health problems Soil fertility and erosion problems	Personal health Own and family health problems Ergonomic reasons (does not like spraying)
<b><i>Financial motives</i></b>	<b><i>General concerns</i></b>
Solving existing financial problems Securing the future of the farm Saving costs Premium marketing	Stewardship Food quality Environmental conservation Rural development

Source: Padel (2001)

In the literature there is some indication that motives for conversion in earlier studies differ from those observed in later ones, a trend which would be expected according to the adoption diffusion model (Padel, 2001). Michelsen and co-workers (Michelsen, 2001, Michelsen and Rasmussen, 2003) compare responses from three large-scale surveys in Denmark of organic farmers who converted at different times, and they confirm that there was a shift from more idealistic to utilitarian motives; a higher proportion of respondents in the later surveys mention economics and protecting the environment as important reasons. The later converters were also less critical of conventional agriculture but saw organic farming as a professional challenge. The authors note that the proportion of full-time producers was greater among the later converters, and that despite the observed differences in attitudes between them, both groups strongly identified with organic values.

In contrast, Lund *et al.* (2002) found differences between the values of organic farming pioneers and those of later entrants in semi-structured interviews with 11 organic producers in Norway. The pioneers expressed a more eco-centric view emphasizing a holistic perspective and interpreting questions in larger frameworks, whereas economic reasons appeared more important for later entrants. Although the later entrants appeared to have a more superficial relationship to organic principles, the authors highlight that this could have been a reflection of the shorter time of their exposure to such principles.

Other authors have attempted to classify organic producers based on their values. Vartdal (1993) classifies organic farmers in Norway as *Anthroposophists* (influenced by biodynamic agriculture and Rudolf Steiner, with strong commitment to their ideas), *Ecosophists* (motivated by green ideas and the environmental and back-to-the-land movements), and *Reformists* ("normal" farmers with a pragmatic approach

to organic agriculture). Vartdal compares the latter group with the early majority in the adoption diffusion model and comments on differences between the *Reformists* and the others regarding the proportion who came from a farming background.

A number of studies indicate a shift in the motives for conversion, in which recently converted producers are more motivated by economic reasons. There is concern that newer converters are less committed to core organic values, although the direct empirical evidence for this remains weak. The literature further indicates that a wide range of other factors influences motivation for organic conversion.

In relation to all agricultural producers, Gasson (1973) classifies values into four categories:

- Instrumental values, such as making an income, safeguarding the future
- Social values, such as family tradition, belonging to the community
- Expressive values in farming, such as pride and creativity
- Intrinsic values, such as enjoyment of work

Based on the review of studies looking at personal motives (see 1.1.2 Organic producers' motives and values), these categories seem to hold true for organic producers, but a further category of *altruistic* values may be needed to represent some of the important motives of farmers converting to organic production. These include environmental protection, food quality, food security, social justice, resource-use conservation, and regionalisation of trade.

### 1.1.3 The context of the decision to convert

It is important to note that the decision to convert and the conversion process are complex and are influenced by a broad range of factors. Apart from personal characteristics and attitudes, a range of farm-specific and external factors, mentioned in the literature as influencing the conversion decision and change process, were reviewed by Padel (2002). These include the following:

- availability of organic support payments
- yield variability
- resource use constraints (such as mortgage payments and labour demand)
- farm size
- farm type (and enterprise structure, with conversion more likely on mixed and low intensity farms)
- relative profitability and future market development
- social and institutional contexts (although less important in later surveys)
- availability of information about: weed and pest control, yield development, organic standards requirements, and relative profitability of organic farming compared with conventional
- costs of conversion

These variables can be classified into the three categories of *external*, *farm-specific* and *personal* factors (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Factors influencing the decision to convert to organic farming**

<b>Personal</b>	<b>Farm-specific</b>	<b>External</b>
Personal characteristic	Yield potential and variability	Relative profitability
Background	Farm size	Organic support payments
Age	Farm type and enterprises	Organic market outlets
Social network	Capital resources	Organic premiums
Sex	Labour resources	Input & output prices
Goals, objectives, values	Risk	Subsidies
Lifestyle and health		Institutional factors
Organic farming knowledge		Availability of information
Technical		Research
Profitability		Advisory support
Market development		Loans
Personal attitudes		Social factors
Toward the environment		Acceptability in the farming community
Toward inputs & technology		
Toward business		
Toward challenge and change		

Source: Padel (2002)

## 1.2 Objectives of the focus group work

The work reported here was carried out as part of Work Package 2 (WP2) of the Organic Revision project. The main aims of WP2 are to identify the basic values and the differences in values relating to organic agriculture in Europe and to develop a procedure for integrating these values into further developments of the EU organic regulation.

Specific objectives for the Sub-Work Package 2.3 (Focus Groups) are:

- To identify the range of values and related attitudes among organic producers
- To explore differences of values among different groups of organic producers (particularly early and more recently converted) and among different regions
- To explore differences in value-related concepts between producers and other organic stakeholders in particular through comparison with work on organic consumers in the OMIaRD project.

A further aim was to contrast the stakeholders' values with the more general principles of organic production. The work referred to the process of revising the principles of organic production, which has been initiated by IFOAM and was carried out in close cooperation with the Organic Revision Project.

## 1.3 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report includes chapters about methodology, description and analysis of the results, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 2 presents some methodological considerations about the method of focus groups, which was used to study the values of organic producers in this project, including a summary of the procedures for recruitment, moderation and analysis.

Chapter 3 describes the main results from each country, following the same order as the questions discussed in the focus groups, based on the national reports. Sections cover first associations with the word *organic*, the personal organic history, discussion of important values for organic sector now and in the future, and value conflicts.

Chapter 4 presents further analysis of the results, which was conducted using a coding procedure. A common codebook was developed based on the literature review and first summaries of the results in the national reports. Codes were attached to individual values. Each statement from the focus group transcripts could then be assigned codes to reflect the values expressed. The chapter contains summaries of the participants' values. The values are grouped according to the four new IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture.

Chapter 5 compares and contrasts the discussions in the various countries and among focus groups of different types of participants as well as with the results of a previous study on consumer values. This forms the basis for the conclusions and recommendations to the EU on revising the EU Regulation 2092/91, which are presented in Chapter 6.

## 2 Methodology

This chapter sets out some key theories addressing the link between values and behaviour which have influenced the development of the approach in this study. This is followed by a short introduction to the implementation of the focus groups method in this project, including the common procedures for moderation (including the Discussion Guide), recording and analysis. This is followed by a short description of the recruitment, the locations, and the participants of the focus groups conducted for this study.

The main aim of this empirical work was to get a better understanding of the range of values held by organic producers and other stakeholders and of their value differences. Values influence behaviour and much research has been carried out to understand how the influence takes place. In relation to market research in particular two models are of interest.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TORA) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) provides some background on how values and the perception of outcomes are linked to behaviour through behavioural intent. TORA is based on the assumption that decisions are rational and are determined by four factors: the perception of outcome(s), the importance attributed to a particular outcome, which is reflected in the persons attitude, a social referent, and the importance of this referent. The first two factors lead to the formulation of attitude and the latter to subjective norms or values. Both attitudes and subjective norms influence behavioural intent which is considered to be good predictor of behaviour. This theory was developed to predict behaviour through the study of attitudes rather than in the context of studying values themselves. It is, therefore, only of limited relevance to the work here but illustrates that behaviour can provide an indication of underlying values.

The Means-End Chain (MEC) Model forms the basis for study of the values involved in consumer choices by eliciting links between values and product attributes. A means-end chain (or ladder) links consumers' knowledge about product attributes with their knowledge about the consequences of their purchasing choices and with their own values. A means-end chain can be understood as a problem-solving process: the consumer selects a course of action to attain a particular objective, or a means to achieve an end. Product attributes provide a means for consumers to obtain desired ends through the consequences or benefits yielded by purchasing the products (Gutman and Reynolds, 1979; Gutman, 1982). The method proposes a clear procedure on how to study consumers values through one-to-one interviews that follow a particular format of probing questions. However, the model deals with consumption rather than production choices. The simple form of the ladder does not appear to correspond to the complex array of factors identified in the literature as relating to the producer's decision to convert to organic farming.

Both models provide some interesting insights but do not give clear guidance on how to study the values involved in such a complex strategic decision as farming organically. These values are often unconscious and not all people are happy to talk about their values.

In this project, we chose the method of focus groups to study the values of producers and other stakeholders. Alternative methods to study values could have included questionnaire-based surveys with larger samples or in-depth interviews with individuals, for example using the laddering technique. All methods are problematic in studying values because they are often unconscious.

Focus groups are carefully prepared discussions of 90 to 120 minutes with 6 to 15 participants, aiming to learn about the perceptions, feelings, attitudes, values and ideas of the group participants with respect to a defined area of interest (Calder, 1977, cited by Kahan, 2001, Zanolli, 2004). The main advantage of the focus group is that the relaxed atmosphere reduces people's level of discomfort about expressing things that they might withhold in other situations (Anon, 1999). In contrast, the laddering interview may allow deeper probing of cognitive structures of individuals (see Zanolli, 2004), but this deep probing may intimidate interview participants and cause them to answer in a defensive way. Quantitative surveys are often answered at a very superficial level, pressing answers into false categorisations, so they may not be suited to explore the values and value concepts of respondents (Anon, 1999).

A further advantage of the focus group method for this project was it has also been used to study the values of organic consumers in the OMIaRD project (Zanolli, 2004), with which these results were to be compared. Choosing the same method with one identical question in the Discussion Guide allowed a close comparison of the two studies.

Historically, focus groups can be traced back to Merton in the 1930's, who worked with non-directive group interview techniques and soon found that people were most revealing when they found themselves in a safe, comfortable place with individuals like themselves. He is associated with the beginning of the development of qualitative social science research (Saumure, 2001). After that time the method of focus groups was almost exclusively used in market research, but since the mid 1980's it has become more widely used in academic social science research and accepted once again as a valuable method even in policy research (Saumure, 2001; Kahan, 2001).

Differences between academic and market research largely reflect two separate traditions. In academic social science, the use of focus groups is clearly a qualitative method, which gives importance to each individual voice and encourages group dialogue and listening to individual concerns (Saumure, 2001), but it does not aim to obtain statistically representative data.

In focus groups, the interaction among the participants follows the structure outlined by the moderator. Focus groups are not group interviews, nor participant observation, nor a debate (Kahan, 2001). The value of the technique lies in discovering the unexpected, which emerges naturally from a free-flowing group discussion (Calder, 1977, cited by Zanolli (2004) P5. ).

## 2.1 Moderation and the Discussion Guide

Focus group discussions should be moderated by an experienced and trained person, who should follow a discussion guide. To train the staff of the project partners in focus group moderation, a workshop was organised in June 2004 at FiBL in

Switzerland. This was attended by all the focus group moderators from the five countries involved and by the work package co-ordinator. To assist with the workshop, an external expert was subcontracted to assist with the training of the moderators in general focus group techniques and in using the common Discussion Guides, which had been prepared for use in all these focus groups.

The aim of the training was to highlight the role of the moderator in the focus group process in stimulating an honest exchange of views among the participants (Anon, 1999). The moderator should ask questions appropriate to the project objectives, guided by the discussion guide, and should make the participants feel comfortable, and so stimulate an honest exchange. The moderator needs to help generate a situation that favours respect for diverging views and to avoid situations that make participants feel defensive. The moderator may probe further if the discussion is not flowing, using different angles if necessary, but should give all the participants enough space to express their opinion and not rush them through too many questions. In addition to the moderator, each focus group had an observer, whose role was to note the order in which participants spoke and to help with the technical arrangements for each group.

The common Discussion Guide was designed to reveal the range of values among organic producers and other stakeholders, and to establish which values were most important to the participants. The main aims were to explore values through the discussion of personal experiences and past behaviour and to allow a more abstract discussion of the shared values in the organic movement. Two versions of the Discussion Guide were developed, reflecting the different backgrounds of producers and other stakeholders.

The Discussion Guides document was very detailed to assist the less experienced moderators. Each section included an explanation of the aim, a key question to be asked by the moderator, a selection of further probing questions, and an indication of how long the section should take. The sections were ordered as follows:

- Round of personal introductions
- First associations with the word *organic*
- Reasons for personal involvement with organic sector
- Discussion of meaning of values and value conflicts
- Important values of organic sector in the future
- Closing round of issues not covered

The personal introductions were intended to make the participants feel comfortable, get to know one another and the moderator, and to introduce them to the topics. The next section of first associations with the word *organic* was intended to reveal top-of-mind associations. In many groups, participants were asked first to write down two or three keywords before sharing them in the discussion with the others. This question had also been asked in focus groups with consumers as part of the OMIaRD project.

In the next section, participants were asked to share with others their personal involvement in the organic sector. This question was asked to get a better understanding of the participants' own behaviour in relation to organic farming and so to gain some insight into their personal value systems. For producers, this question was phrased to elicit their reasons for becoming interested in converting to

organic production, but for other participants the question was not so specific. The motives and personal values mentioned in this section were written down so that they could be referred to in the subsequent discussions of more abstract values of the organic food and farming sector. Most participants found it very interesting to hear from others about their reasons to get involved.

The participants were then asked to discuss which of the values they considered more personal and which of them were more relevant to the whole organic sector. The aims of this section were to move from the personal level to the organic sector as a whole, to understand the wider meaning of various values and motives, and to hear about their importance to the participants. This was followed by a section on potential conflicts, which aimed to improve the understanding of the relative importance between values and to find further examples of inherent value conflicts for other work in this work package. In the final section, participants were asked what basic values of organic farming they expected would become more important in the future. This section provided another way of revealing the importance of values to the participants. In the closing round, participants were able to add any further points they wished to make and to ask other questions about the project.

The full Discussion Guide is available in the as a separate document on Organic-Revision.org. Key questions asked in each section are shown in Chapter 3, where a summary of the results is presented following the order of the sections in Discussion Guide. The Discussion Guide was tested and discussed in the moderators' training workshop and amended where necessary. The modified version was pre-tested by researchers at FiBL, Switzerland, and then by groups of researchers and staff of organic organisation in each participating country. As there were no major changes to the Discussion Guide resulting from these pre-tests, these have been included in the analysis.

## 2.2 Recording, transcription and analysis

Each discussion was recorded and then fully transcribed after the meeting. During the meeting, the observer noted the order of speech so that each statement could be ascribed to an individual speaker in the transcription. The moderator and observer met shortly after each focus group to share their views and observations in a short debriefing session. They then prepared a short summary to outline the main discussion points and observations.

These summaries formed the basis for the first stage of analysis, in which the main aims were to document the range of values discussed and to indicate the levels of their importance and relevance to the whole organic sector, as expressed by the participants. Each national team prepared a report, which included a description of results, in the order of sections in the Discussion Guide. These national reports were used for a first stage of analysis to compare the results between the countries and between the stakeholders, as presented in Chapter 3 (Summary of results of each section of the Discussion ). The main problem arising with this type of analysis was the overlapping use of terms. For example, one participant or researcher might understand "health" as meaning only the individual human health, whereas others have a broader perception of ecosystem health. The national reports were originally written in a number of different languages, and there are inherent problems in comparing the English translations because of inevitable inconsistencies.



The second stage of a substantive analysis was based on coding. In essence, coding is used to associate each statement to one or more values and so to enable comparisons of various views on each topic. Coding is an effective method of organising the data into common themes, which introduces an element of rigour to the process and allows the researchers to analyse the full transcriptions in a methodical way.

A common codebook was developed to ensure a consistent approach among the various researchers involved in the analysis. A codebook is a list of terms or concepts, in this case a list of values and related concepts. The common codebook for this work was based on the literature review, the work of the IFOAM Task Force to revise the Principles of Organic Agriculture, and the results of the first stage of the analysis. It contained a list of motives and values likely to be mentioned by organic producers and other stakeholders and relevant value conflicts. The codes were grouped, according to a draft of the organic principles proposed by the IFOAM Task Force, to allow a comparison of the stakeholders' values with principles of organic production.

Each national team coded its own data using the common codebook. The teams were encouraged to use computer software to help with the analysis of unstructured data (such as N vivo or Max QDA). Each team could add new codes if values or concepts occurring in the discussion had not been included in the common codebook.

The next step of the analysis was a summary and a further examination of all the statements related to each coded value (and/or group of coded values). At this stage, it is often necessary to split or merge material. The second part of the national reports presented the findings for each code, summarising the range of views expressed and the meaning of each value to the focus group participants, and contrasting the views of different types of participants. These results were illustrated by selected quotes.

These national reports formed the basis for the final stage of analysis across countries, which is presented in Chapter 4 (Further analysis of the meaning of core values and comparison with the new IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture). This provides a deeper analysis of meaning of values to the participants and how these relate the principles of organic production. However, it is important to note that the participants did not discuss the proposed IFOAM principles of organic production, but expressed their own individual and shared values in an unprompted way. The comparison with the IFOAM principles was carried out during the analysis.

## **2.3 Participants and locations of the focus groups**

Between August and December 2005, 26 focus groups were conducted in six countries (see Table 3). The project partnership selected a range of countries with well-developed organic sectors, ensuring an even spread around the EU15 region. However, there is no suggestion that the results are statistically representative for Europe or the EU as a whole.

Each group had a target number of between 6 and 12 participants, but there was a need to remain flexible to meet local conditions. The project partners used existing

contacts in organic sector organisations to identify suitable regions and potential participants. The aims of recruitment in each selected region were to bring together groups of mainly full-time producers with a mixture of locally typical farm types and to avoid long travelling distances. Wherever possible in each of the regions, an additional, separate group of other (non-producer) stakeholders was convened.

**Table 3: Countries and participants of the focus groups**

Group	Date	Type	Participant and farm type	No. of people	No. of full-time producers	No. with position in organic organisation
AT 1	11-Nov-04	R&O	Pre-test, researchers advisors from organic organisations	9	0	?
AT 2	15-Nov-04	E	Producers, mixed livestock	8	8	?
AT 3	17-Nov-04	E	Producers, mixed	9	9	?
AT 4	03-Oct-04	C	Producers, cropping	6	6	?
IT 1	23-Aug-04	R&O	Pre-test, organisations, researchers	4		
IT 2	02-Nov-04	E	Producers,	6	6	1
IT 3	25-Nov-04	C	Producers,	9	9	0
IT 4	13-Dec-04	Po	Policy makers	4		4
NL 1	02-Nov-05	R	Pre-test, researchers	5		
NL 2	22-Nov-04	E	Producers, bio-dynamic	3	3	
NL 3	22-Nov-04	E	Producers, dairy	6	6	
NL 4	15-Dec-04	E	Producers, arable	3	3	
CH 1	23-Nov-04	C	Producers, mixed	6	6	
CH 2	29-Nov-04	E	Producers, mixed	6	6	
CH 3	29-Nov-04	E (C)	Producers, mixed	6	6	1
CH 4	21-Jan-05	C	Producers, livestock	10	10	
CH 5	21-Jan-05	E	Producers, mixed	8	8	
CH 6	24-Nov-04	O	Organic marketing organisation staff	8		8
CH 7	28-Nov-04	S	Agricultural Students	9		
CH 8	28-Jul-04	R&O	Pre-test, researchers, Organisation staff	6		
UK 1	18-Nov-04	E	Producers, mixed (shortened discussion guide)	15	14	3
UK 2	22-Nov-04	R&O	Pre-test, researchers, Organisation staff	8	-	5
UK 3	08-Dec-04	E	Producers, mixed	10	10	2
UK 4	10-Dec-04	C	Producers, mixed	8	8	0
EU	09-Sep-04	O	Organisation staff	10		
<b>Total</b>			<b>25 groups</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>24</b>

Source: own data

Among the 25 focus groups, there was the following representation of stakeholders:

- 16 consisted of producers
  - 11 groups of participants coming mainly from well-established organic farms (E<sup>3</sup>)
  - 5 groups of producers from recently converted holdings (C)
- 19 groups contained other stakeholders in the organic movement
  - 7 groups of people working in research and organic organisations (R&O), including one IFOAM EU group
  - 1 group of policy makers (Po) was held in Italy
  - 1 group of agricultural students (S) in Switzerland

Another focus group, involving processors in Germany, has not been included in this report. In total, 182 participants attended the focus group meetings, 118 of whom were full-time agricultural producers. 41% of all participants were established organic producers who had converted before their nations' organic payment schemes were introduced; another 25% were from farms that had converted recently. The rest were groups of other stakeholder: 24% were researchers and people working in organic organisations, and 10% were policy makers or students.

The **Austrian** focus groups were held in three regions of different land types: grassland areas, mixed grassland/arable areas, and arable areas. The pre-test group (AT 1) in Austria took place in Vienna and was made up of advisers and researchers. Groups AT 2 and AT 3 consisted mainly of producers from grassland areas or arable-grassland areas who had been practising organic farming for many years, and AT 4 was mainly of producers from recently converted farms without livestock. In total, 32 people took part. Their ages ranged between 29 and 70 years (average 45), and 25 of them were male. The majority of participants in Austria had agricultural training, ranging from practical courses to degrees at agricultural university; three had undergone other (non-agricultural) training.

24 participants were (or had been) active farmers (18 full-time and two part-time); four of them were retired. Three participants were active in advisory services, four in research and one in an agricultural (mainly organic) interest group. Three farmers had had a leading function in organic associations. Three of the four advisers were employed by organic associations.

The pre-test in **Italy** (IT 1) was conducted in Rome and involved the staff of an organic organisation and one researcher. IT 2 was held in Rome among established producers from the Lazio region who had converted their farms between 1990 and 2000. These included cattle and pig farmers, horticultural and fruit producers, and olive tree and oil producers. IT 3 was held in Tuscany with newly converted producers. Half of these participants had only recently started farming, and all had started their conversions since 2001. Two large cereal producers with some cattle had converted in 2004, and the others were variously involved in producing cereals for bread and pasta, vegetables, aromatic herbs, honey, extensive beef, and some processing. IT 4 (also in Rome) included policy makers from institutions that collaborate with the Organic Department in the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, and some researchers.

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<sup>3</sup> See explanation of types of participants in Table 3

The pre-test group in the **Netherlands** (NL 1) included only female organic farming researchers from the participating institutions. NL 2, involving well-established bio-dynamic dairy farmers, turned out to be smaller than intended because some farmers sent late apologies. Those present had converted between 1988 and 1991. NL 3 consisted of established organic dairy farmers, who were all male and had converted their farms between 1987 and 1994. NL 4 was made up of organic arable farmers and again had to be run as a small group, in this case because of poor response to the initial contacts. The group represented a mix of organic and biodynamic farmers who had converted between 1989 and 1995. It was not possible to recruit newly converted producers to a Netherlands focus group.

In **Switzerland** the pre-test (CH 8) was held among staff of the project partner's research institute. Five focus groups involving producers (CH 1-5) were held in three locations. All these groups contained producers with a range of enterprises (livestock, arable crops, and horticultural crops) and a range of farm sizes. The groups were formed of producers who had converted their farms either before or after 1993, the year when nationwide grants were introduced in Switzerland. CH 1 and CH 2 in the Zuerich region consisted mainly of the pre-1993 converters. The majority of the participants of CH 3 in the town of Olten had converted since 1993. CH 4 and CH 5 were held in the mountainous canton of Grison. CH 4 involved only pre-1993 converting producers, and CH 5 included only post-1993 converters. There were two additional groups in Switzerland: CH 6 included the staff of the nationwide producer organisation and certification body (Bio Suisse), and CH 7 consisted of agricultural university students who were relatively new to the subject of organic farming.

In the **UK**, the first group (UK 1) was conducted as part of a regular 6-monthly meeting of a group of experienced organic producers and demonstration farms in England. The meeting was held on a participating farm in Gloucestershire, and the Discussion Guide had to be shortened to fit in with the larger meeting. The producers came from a wide variety of farms throughout England with arable enterprises, horticulture, and dairy and other livestock. A further focus group with recently converted producers in the same region had been planned, but it proved impossible to recruit because there is no contract database of such producers in the area. UK 2 was held at the project partner institution in Wales and included researchers and organic sector professionals. UK 3 involved established organic producers, and UK 4 consisted of producers who had converted their farms after 1999; both these groups were in South Wales, with a mixture of farm types including arable, livestock and horticulture.

## **2.4 Summary of methodology**

Focus groups are prepared discussions of 90 to 120 minutes involving 6 to 15 participants and focusing on the topic of interest. As part of this work package, 25 focus groups on the subject of organic values were held in five European countries between August 2004 and January 2005. Of these, 16 focus groups consisted of producers mostly farming full-time, and 9 were of other stakeholders in the organic movement, mainly organic researchers and organisation staff.

Each group lasted approximately 2 hours and covered the following topics:

- Introduction followed by first associations with the word *organic*
- Personal involvement with the organic farming and food sector
- Discussion of motives, values and potential value conflicts
- The basic values of organic farming in the future

The focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed, and a first summary of the data was prepared shortly after each meeting. Analysis of the data was conducted using codes contained in a common codebook, which could be amended to include new categories when necessary. In the following chapter, the key findings and most important observations from each country are summarised in the same order as the sections in the Discussion Guide, followed by a further analysis chapter based on the common coding procedure.

### 3 Summary of results of each section of the Discussion Guide

This chapter summarises the results of the focus group discussions in each country in the same order as the main sections in the Discussion Guide. The national report for each country contained a summary of all the focus group discussions and the most important observations of the person(s) responsible for the work. This chapter summarises the national reports and identifies common themes. Direct quotations have been kept to a minimum here, but they have been used where appropriate to illustrate some important points in particular countries.

The following codes have been used to characterise participants quoted:

- C = converting producers
- E = established organic producer
- R = Researcher or organic organisation staff
- Po = Policy maker
- m = male
- f = female

For example, "UK, Cm" would indicate a quote from a male converting producer in the UK.

The first section of the Discussion Guide entailed a round of short personal introductions, so that participants could get to know the moderator and one another, and start to feel comfortable in talking to one another. It was not the intention in these introductions to cover anything directly relevant to the subject so they are not reported here. However, participants in some groups immediately mentioned their personal involvement with the organic sector. Where this happened, the material is included in this summary under the relevant Discussion Guide section heading.

#### 3.1 First associations with the word *organic*

The second Discussion Guide section, after the introductions, asked participants for their first associations with the word *organic*; this was intended to provide a warm-up to the subject and to reveal unprompted, top-of-the-mind issues related to organic food and farming. Furthermore it helped the participants to "open up" to discuss the later underlying values.

The key question asked by the moderators in all groups was:

***Please take a moment to write down the issues that first come to your mind when you hear the term 'organic'.***

The aim of this question was to get an idea of the respondents' overall perceptions of the organic sector and a first idea of their personal relationships to organic farming. They were asked to write down their initial word associations (both positive and negative) on paper to allow them to gather their own thoughts before sharing

them with the group. Consumers had been asked a very similar question in focus groups conducted as part of the OMIaRD project, and the two sets of results are contrasted in a later chapter.

In all countries, many of these first associations were later discussed in more detail as they represented some of the participants' values. Many of these initial statements appeared to be well-reflected positions rather than top-of-the-mind associations probably because most participants were professionally involved with the subject. Table 4 provides an overview of the common themes of the participants' first associations with the word *organic* in each country. The terms are sorted according to the number of countries from which they were reported. Some of the themes are interrelated, so some of the first associations are overlapping. The section nevertheless provides a good overview of the range of themes that were covered in these first associations of organic producers and other stakeholders across Europe.

In **Austria** the first associations with organic farming were both positive and negative. Positive aspects included ecology, working in close contact with nature, closed production cycles, holistic thinking and action, and sustainability. Participants gave some reasons for working organically, such as good yields, the feeling of challenge and personal freedom, love for the profession, personal development, quality of life, production of food without harmful residues, acting responsibly, the appreciation of nature, and enjoyment and satisfaction with direct marketing. Negative first associations included disagreement with aspects of the EEC Regulation 2092/91 (e.g. treatment of organic seed is not allowed), difficulties in collaboration among farmers and among organisations, and concern about the possibly conventional direction of the organic farming sector.

In **Italy** the topic of food quality was an important first association shared among participants of all groups. The concept of food quality included aspects such as healthiness (meaning *safety* and *high nutritional content*) for both producers and consumers, followed by *freshness*, *taste* and *being typical* (i.e. strict local/regional connection). The second theme shared by all groups was environmental protection, which included items such as natural resource conservation and sustainability, biodiversity, land protection and management, beauty of landscapes, reduction of pollution, and saving energy. First associations mentioned by established organic producers included personal freedom and independence, personal satisfaction and challenge. Producers also mentioned trust and reliability, associated both with a direct relationship between farmer and consumer and with a more abstract idea of balance and harmony. Negative aspects mentioned in Italy included problems of co-operation between the organic and conventional sectors, technical problems (e.g. plant protection, shelf life), and consumers' understanding of taste was thought to be too variable.

**Table 4: First associations with the word organic among producers and other stakeholders in each country**

<b>First associations (positive)</b>	<b>AT</b>	<b>IT</b>	<b>NL</b>	<b>CH</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>No.*</b>
Sustainability	x	x	x	x	x	5
Professional challenge (more fantasy)	x	x	x	x	x	5
Health and healthy product	x	x	x	x	x	5
Closed production cycles/ low external input	x		x	x	x	4
Working with nature/ appreciation of nature	x		x	x	x	4
Ecology and environmental protection	x	x			x	3
Acting responsibly	x	x	x			3
Protection of resources		x	x		x	3
Personal freedom and independence	x	x			x	3
Personal development	x		x		x	3
Quality of life	x			x	x	3
Food/ product quality		x		x	x	3
Financial and social justice	x		x		x	3
Regional/ local production	x		x		x	3
Systems approach / holistic thinking	x		x		x	3
Animal welfare				x	x	2
Self regulation			x		x	2
Saving energy		x	x			2
Freshness and taste		x	x			2
Trust between consumer and producers		x			x	2
Bio-diversity and conservation		x			x	2
Farm diversity/ mixed enterprise structure			x		x	2
Soil, health link			x		x	2
Pioneers			x			1
Traceability					x	1
GM free					x	1
Good nutrition/ pesticide free	X					1
Landscape beauty		x				1
Careful soil management				x		1
Good yields	x					1
Equity between people			x			1
Satisfaction with direct marketing	x					1
Profitability					x	1
Small scale/ self-sufficiency			x			1
Integration of animals			x			1
Balanced development			x			1
Working in harmony			x			1
<b>Negative first associations</b>	<b>AT</b>	<b>IT</b>	<b>NL</b>	<b>CH</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>No.</b>
Conventional market development	x			x		2
Too bureaucratic, too many rules				x	x	2
Problem areas in the standards	x			x		2
Too high selling price for consumers				x		1
Problems working together	x					1
More labour, high workload				x		1
Decreasing or insufficient trust				x		1

\*No. of countries in which related first associations were mentioned



The first associations among the organic producers in the **Netherlands** included issues related to their daily work, and challenges such as needing more “vision and imagination” to solve problems and the need to think outside the box. Other associations were made with the following concepts: harmony, naturalness, working as naturally as possible, relying on self-regulation and using as few external inputs as possible, closed production cycles, regional production, the pioneering character and diversity of organic farms and small-scale production, social justice and equity among people, and personal development. Organic agriculture was seen as being a system of production that can achieve almost complete future sustainability, doing justice to humans, animals, the environment, and future generations. The focus group of researchers in the Netherlands added other first associations, including working with life processes, balance, growth, and the connection between soils, animals, and people. This group also had some negative first associations, such as the high proportion of imported organic food and the use of plastic in organic food packaging.

In **Switzerland**, positive associations shared among all groups included health and product quality, quality of life and professional pride, careful soil management, sustainability, and animal welfare. Also mentioned in one or more groups were natural farming, closed production cycles, and the absence of synthetic inputs, this latter association mentioned mainly in the group of agricultural students. Common negative first associations in Switzerland with the terms *bio* or *organic* were the frequent rule changes in standards/regulations and too much bureaucracy. The high workload, additional labour, and higher costs were also seen as main problems.

Common first associations with the word *organic* in all groups in the **UK** included caring for the environment, health, and product quality/safety. Producers mentioned sustainability, and experienced organic producers mentioned working with nature, local production and trust, and traceability. Both groups of experienced organic producers gave very considered views rather than top-of-the-mind associations, suggesting that these professionals have to deal with similar enquiries on a regular basis. Their views related to a wide range of issues, such as conservation and wildlife, production quality, integrity of the system, working in balance with and minimising man’s impact on nature, health, the links between soil and health and the cycle of health, GMO free, farm assurance, trust and external verification, minimal resource use, animal welfare, sustainability, diversity, health, profit, self-sufficiency and self reliance, farm recycling, and local production. The group of newly converted producers (UK4) responded more quickly with shorter keywords but mentioned similar issues, including sustainability, the environment, and health/safety. The researchers and organic professionals mentioned quality of life, traceability of production, trust, environment, health, animal welfare, safety and mixed enterprises. A negative aspect mentioned by researchers in the UK was high premiums. Problems mentioned by experienced organic producers included a perception of being on the fringe of society, hating the paperwork, concern about global trade and profits of large companies. The converting producers brought up a negative image of typical consumers as middle class and affluent.

The **IFOAM EU** group’s first associations included a wide range of the same issues as those in the national reports. This focus group discussion moved early to a quite abstract level probably due to the strong professional involvement with organic agriculture, the high level of preparation for the discussion among some participants, and their awareness of the work of the IFOAM Task Force on organic principles.

Issues raised here that were not so well covered in other groups included the connection to the land, systems health, connection to biological processes, holism, a special relationship with organic companies, taking care, innovation, and value-driven development.

In many groups, the first associations suggest that participants had spent time thinking about their views on organic farming in advance rather than expressing the top-of-the-mind associations more typical of market research focus groups, in which participants are confronted with a particular topic for the first time. However, it is important to note that all focus groups were conducted in the national language and that the material had to be translated into English for comparison and that is not possible to group the statements in an objective way. It is therefore difficult to draw firm conclusions in relation to differences in the meaning of the statements made in different countries.

Nevertheless, their first associations with organic agriculture or the term *organic* provide some interesting insights. Spontaneous links to health and to sustainability were predominant in all countries. In most of the countries, the issue of farming naturally was frequently mentioned. These associations were also central among consumers (see Chapter 5.2). The issue of personal professional challenge was mentioned as a first association in all countries.

### 3.2 The participant's own "organic history" and further development

In the next section of the Discussion Guide, participants were asked to share with the others their own personal history in developing an interested or converting to organic farming. The key question was:

***Now, I would like to ask you to look back over the past. I would like to hear from you, why you got interested in (conversion to) organic farming.***

The question was phrased differently for groups of producers and non-producers. Differences between the responses of farmers and other professionals were expected because of their different types of professional involvement. The discussions were more reflective regarding the underlying personal values of motives for organic conversion or involvement with the organic sector and the particular interest in organic agriculture compared with the first round, where associations that are more spontaneous were collected. Motives and values were written down on a flip chart to be used in the subsequent discussions.

#### 3.2.1 Austria

Reasons for interest in organic farming and motives for conversion mentioned by participants in Austria included ecological aspects and environmental aspects, such as close contact to nature, environmental protection, sustainability, and closed production cycles, as well as freedom from GMOs<sup>4</sup>. Other important motives included

<sup>4</sup> GMO = genetically modified organism

food quality, healthy nutrition, and health care. Organic farming was seen as a financial alternative for producers, reducing their dependence on industrial input suppliers, providing fair prices, and allowing farmers greater financial independence. Organic sales through wholesalers and supermarkets were seen as less desirable developments. Social and ethical aspects were also considered important, e.g. the commitment to people, small-scale agriculture, and responsibility towards the next generation. The rules for organic farming were accepted as a prerequisite but felt to be too restrictive in many cases. Further motives were political, such as the dislike of conventional agriculture and of chemical crop protection. Organic farmers were seen as pioneers, and organic values and ideals were considered essential in providing a good example to others. Other issues listed included ethical behaviour and the need to take into account global problems as well as regional ones. In some cases very personal experiences had triggered interest in organic production, such as the wish to do something meaningful, the challenges of the work, the possibility to become creatively involved, the quality of life, and the quality of organic products.

### 3.2.2 Italy

The principal reason for involvement in organic farming cited by nearly all participants in Italy was their concern for the environment. Everyone agreed they should be directly involved with environmental conservation and improvement. Most participants saw the organic system as a natural evolution of agriculture, as the only sustainable method of production, and as the way to produce food in future.

For producers, whose work was more directly involved in managing the land, non-use of agro-chemicals was very important to improve their own working environment and their product quality.

*I felt guilty [before organic conversion] in giving my products to people when I knew they were treated with toxic substances (IT, Cm).*

There were some differences between early and recently converted producers. Established organic producers had a family history of farming and this appears to have influenced their choices, whereas many of the participants among newly converted producers came from a range of different backgrounds often not related to agriculture.

Among the non-producers, reasons to get involved were related to doing something new, and finding "an alternative life model" not only for agriculture. However, some also admitted they had become involved in organic farming more by accident.

### 3.2.3 Netherlands

There were many reasons for conversion to organic or biodynamic farming mentioned by producers in the Netherlands, such as the sustainability of the system, the lifestyle and working environment, being part of nature, self-sufficiency, personal freedom, and other personal values but also about doing something for other people.

Many of the farmers had previously worked in developing countries and this experience had influenced how they wanted to farm for themselves. They saw the closing of production cycles and systems as important, in relation not only to

nutrients but also to the social aspects; they were trying to avoid producing at the expense of other people. Like Italian producers they saw organic farming as a sustainable alternative, which might allow farming to continue perpetually.

Many of the established producers emphasised that their views had changed gradually through working with natural cycles. One arable farmer explained that his first concern had been to avoid polluting the environment with chemicals, but the concern for non-renewable resources had become important later. The producers saw the organic principles as encouraging them to become ever more organic; to use natural (homeopathic) treatments instead of antibiotics; to prevent diseases by increasing the animals' resistance; and to maintain healthy, biologically active soil without artificial additives, etc. The concept of the production cycle was discussed in relation to the origin of farm resources and to the destinations of farm products. The established organic producers felt that the values of the organic system had given them the freedom to develop their own vision for their farm.

*You need your own strategy on how to develop your farm. To have your own vision, that is what makes you strong. Authenticity is extremely important (NL, Em).*

The established organic producers were worried that new converters might have a negative impact on the credibility of organic agriculture because they were not taking the time to develop their systems. These worries were further exacerbated by the increasingly conventional market structures.

*Nowadays, new converters have no feeling or patience for development of their systems and are using increasing amounts of inputs, and once you start with this, there seems to be no way back (NL, Em).*

However, they also recognised that their own personal development had taken time. The established organic farmers saw rules and regulations as necessary to set minimum standards and to act as guidance for new converters who, they believed, were more likely to have converted solely for economic reasons.

*The organic rules do not restrict you; you can always do more (NL, Ef).*

In the group of researchers, the personal reasons for getting involved with organic farming research had already been covered in the introductions. They mentioned human-animal interactions, product quality in a broad sense (sustainable, tasty and healthy), nature, respect for complexity of plants, pollution, wanting to show another way, and a systems approach. One person described starting to work in organic farming research as a turning point in her life.

### 3.2.4 Switzerland

For many participants the environmental and sustainability issues were central personal motivations for involvement in organic agriculture.

*My motivation was that I like nature, the plants. I have a high respect for nature. The conventional/chemical agriculture is without respect. Organic farming has the vision of sustainability; therefore, I can identify myself with it (CH, Rf).*

A conviction was frequently expressed that working with organic farming makes it possible to realise a more ideal world. Another important motive was the production of healthy food without residues.

*My personal conscience told me that I cannot go on with a lot of spraying and afterwards eating the residues of it. (CH, Em).*

Further important motives were the health of the ecosystems and the cycle of health (particularly among lowland farmers and organic professionals), social justice and fair returns for producers (particularly for mountain farmers), and a better social quality for all partners in the market, including the consumers.

Organic farming was seen as a strategy for farm survival. For some farmers, particularly in mountain areas, the growing demand for organic products was a strong incentive to convert their farms. The direct payments and the better prices were seen as very helpful to improve or at least maintain the farm income. Farmers mainly in the lowland area mentioned that to convert to organic farming was a new challenge for them and a source of professional pride. Other motives were to improve animal husbandry and health, careful soil management, ecological integrity, "care for the creation of god", and a personal good feeling. One farmer group in the mountain area had converted their whole village cheese cooperative; for them conversion was a social challenge and an act of solidarity.

### 3.2.5 UK

In the UK the mixture of personal and professional reasons common to all the producers' focus groups ranged from concerns about the direction of conventional agriculture to personal reasons such as personal health, passing on the farm to the next generation, and personal challenge.

Among the experienced organic producers in the UK, the reasons for going organic had included environmental concerns, and belief that this represents a better way of farming, that farming activities should work with rather than against nature, that high-input farming was not successful, and that inputs should be reduced. There was also identification with the self-sufficiency and real food movements. These positive motives were combined with varying degrees of opposition and concern regarding conventional agriculture, such as personal health problems from exposure to sprays, animal health problems, or concerns about the increasing commercialisation and dependency on agro-business.

Personal development and "a challenge" were mentioned, as well as commercial considerations such as securing the future of the farm. The newly converted farmers mentioned that they saw their method of farming as almost organic anyway, so they had entered certification without needing to change their practices. These participants also mentioned personal reasons, such as the need to reduce stock numbers for health reasons, expansion of the hobby of organic gardening into a small business, or generation-change on the farm. Entry points into organic agriculture of researchers and organic organisation staff were quite different from producers'; mostly social and ecological/environmental issues were mentioned, as well as family background.

### 3.2.6 IFOAM EU Group

The IFOAM EU group expressed a number of the common themes, such as personal illness or allergies, you have to see the system working to believe in it, training programmes on bio-dynamic farms (especially in Germany), ecology and environmental science, learning from nature and from observation, “unlearning” after traditional university-training in agriculture, and overcoming a prejudice of seeing organic as “snobbish” and elitist. It also became clear that learning about organic farming was experienced as a process.

*Once you get involved it becomes the most logical way to do things..., everything fell into place (IFOAM, Rm).*

## 3.3 Further discussions on the values and their importance

During the discussion on personal motives, the key points had been written down by the moderating team. In the next section of the Discussion Guide, the participants were invited to discuss the relevance of their motives to the organic food and farming sector, moving the discussion from the personal to a more abstract level. The key question was:

***If you take another look at this list, which motives do you think represent personal values or values of organic farming?***

The moderators asked participants to divide their motives and values into the personal ones and those that they considered of wider relevance. This was a substantial step in the discussion moving from the level of personal motives to a more abstract level of values relevant to the organic sector as a whole. However, in most groups the participants had no problem with this level of abstraction and continued with very interesting discussions. In a second step in three countries, the participants were finally invited to award points to indicate the importance of each of the values for the organic sector. In the Netherlands the participants sorted values into clusters of importance, and in Italy the importance of values to the participants was judged later on analysis of the intensity of the discussions.

The main objective of this part of the discussion was to gain a fuller understanding of the meanings of the values/motives already mentioned and of their importance to the participants. The reporting of the section focuses on the importance of each value or category in each country; the meanings of the values to the participants are further discussed in the next chapter, where the discussions about particular values are contrasted with each other and compared with the new IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture (see Chapter 4).

### 3.3.1 Austria

As shown in Table 5, the Austrian focus groups all attached importance to food quality and health, followed by the desire for independence. Ecology and environmental protection were mentioned in three groups and came third in the order of importance, followed by closed production cycles. The values of diversity,

regionality, economics, sustainability, and responsibility were followed in the ratings of importance by freedom from GMOs, quality of life and social issues.

Although mentioned before in two focus groups, the topics of animal health, a separate organic identity, and social culture in a broad sense (fairness, cooperation, consumer protection) did not receive points directly as one of the three most important values and so seemed less important to the participants. However, another explanation could be that participants felt that these values were included in other more overarching concepts, such as the general concept of health in production.

**Table 5: Importance of values in the focus groups in Austria**

Values as summarised by the moderators	Groups	Type	Importance*
Food quality, healthy food, healthy nutrition, health in production, health care	all AT	All	16
Independence of the farm, independence from industry (freedom, low degree of dependence)	all AT	All	15
Nature protection, ecology	AT 1,3,4	All	10
Closed cycles	AT 2, 3	E	9
Appreciation of nature (creation)	AT 2	E	6
Diversity	AT 1, 4	R&O,C	5
Regionality	AT 1	R&O	4
Wanting to change something	AT 1, 2	R&O,E	4
Economic survival (of the farm), fair prices	AT 2, 3,4	E,C	4
Sustainability (future)	AT 2	E	3
To restrict use of inputs	AT 3	E	3
Responsibility toward generations	AT 4	C	3
No GMOs	AT 1	R&O	2
Organic farming needs values	AT 2	E	2
Quality of life on the farm	AT 2	E	2
Saving resources	AT 3	E	2
No driven by profit maximisation	AT 4	C	2
Individual deliberation, changes	AT 1	R&O	1
Social network	AT 2	E	1
No exploitation of the Third World	AT 3	E	1
New way(s) – alternative	AT 4	C	1

\* Total number of points\* (each participant could give up to three points to indicate importance)

### 3.3.2 Italy

All Italian groups discussed the two values of concern for environmental conservation and protection, and food quality and human health (see Table 6) as important. There was no “voting” of the values according to importance, but the importance levels of other values were rated variably among the groups.

**Table 6: Importance of values to focus groups participants in Italy**

Main values	Type of participant	Groups
Environmental conservation and improvement	All	all IT
Food quality and human health	All	all IT
Alternative agriculture model, alternative life model	R&O, C	IT 1, 3
Professional pride of producing good quality	C	IT 3
Animal welfare	C	IT 3

The social/ethical value of an alternative production model or alternative life model was considered important by all participants in the pre-test group and by some producers in two groups. One researcher said:

*I feel that the fundamental value of organic farming is its suggestion of a different life model that involves not only the agricultural sector (IT, Rm).*

The established organic producers attached importance to their own job satisfaction in producing good quality products without relying on pesticides and chemicals, and to the value of *animal welfare*, which was mentioned by the two cattle farmers.

### 3.3.3 Netherlands – clustering of values

In the Netherlands, the participants were asked to classify the values into clusters rather than voting on their importance. In all groups, between four and eight value clusters were formed. Several clusters appeared in more than one group. Table 7 summarises these value clusters and classifies them into themes for the summary provided here.



**Table 7: Clusters of values in the Netherlands focus groups**

Theme	Value cluster	Type	Groups
Environment	Care for nature and the surroundings	R	NL1
	Working as naturally as possible	E	NL 2
	Conservation of the earth and nature	E	NL 3
	Healthy soil	E	NL 4
Systems sustainability	The systems balance and sustainability	R	NL1
	Harmonious agro-ecosystem	E	NL 2
	Sustainability- ability to produce endlessly	E	NL 4
Quality & health	Product quality, naturalness and health	R	NL1
	Healthy food with good taste	E	NL 4
	Holistic product quality	E	NL 2
Fairness	Fairness in the whole food chain	R	NL1
	Harmonious system for the people	E	NL 2
	Economic and social justice	E	NL 3
Respect	Attitude of respect to plant and animal integrity	R	NL1
	Care (respect) for human beings, animals and plants	E	NL 3
Global interdependence	Inter-dependence at macro/ global level	E	NL 2
	Global Inter-connectedness, global systems	E	NL 3
Animals	Animal welfare	E	NL 2
	Good animal husbandry- preventing problems through good management and welfare	E	NL 2
Profession	Craftsmanship	E	NL 4
	Being a farmer rather than a businessman	E	NL 2
Regional production	Social aspects: co-operation with others	E	NL 4
	Therapeutic effect of working with the land, plants and animals		
	Connection to the land	E	NL 2

The researcher group (NL 1) discussed agriculture as the basic foundation of society. Sustainability had different meanings to the participants, depending on personal background. For some it was only concerned with the environment; for others it had also to do with animal welfare or how people treat each other. In addition to the production system, they identified a cluster of values related to the food chain, to which they assigned values concerning fair trade and humanity. The cluster of values referred to as *Attitude of respect to plant and animal integrity* includes those values concerned with respecting the integrity of plants, animals and soil.

The biodynamic farmers (NL 2) grouped values into eight main clusters, and considered all of them all as equally important, indicating that all aspects are interdependent and should be in balance. The cluster called *Interdependence at macro level* reflects the commonly known phrase - think globally, act locally. The

clusters relating to *Animal welfare* and *Harmonious system for the people* refer to the need to do justice to all other living organisms that are part of the system. The farmers' love for their profession is illustrated by the cluster named *Being a farmer rather than a businessman*. The *Sustainability* cluster has the specific meaning of providing an income as a precondition to continue in farming, but profits were not seen as the leading principle in farm activities. *Healthy soil* received a separate cluster, which is classified under the Environment theme along with *Working as naturally as possible*. A special cluster was made in the relation to the *quality of milk* that the producers referred to its intrinsic value.

The organic dairy farmers intensively discussed global interconnectedness and the connection between continents. Social aspects were a dominant aspect in the discussions and are present in three of the four value clusters. *Conservation of the earth* is a cluster with aspects such as recycling, saving energy, and the environment. Their cluster *Care (respect) for human beings, animals and plants* is a good reflection of their attitude concerning all living creatures.

The arable farmers in the Netherlands grouped values into five main areas. In addition to *Sustainability* of the system, *Craftsmanship* came up as important. This was considered to be about the human factors and the development of the farmer, including the management of production system and the practical skills. One farmer explained the development of his craftsmanship in relation to taking care of the environment and food quality:

*You are not the creator of the ecosystem as a farmer, but you take care of living processes so that they develop in the right (desirable) direction. You learn to work with nature. This feeling gets stronger with experience. And when it all fits, you believe that the product will be healthy (NL, Em).*

*Regional production* was explained as, "*working for people you know, not for an anonymous market*". A value of *therapeutic effect* came up in discussing the question of why so many "therapeutic (care) farms" are organic. The absence of pesticides was seen as one possible explanation. For all arable farmers, *healthy soil* was a central value. Illustrating the importance of the value cluster of *healthy food with good taste*, one person said:

*"That is what you do it all for!" (NL, Em).*

### 3.3.4 Switzerland

In Switzerland, the values were written down using the terms mentioned by the participants, so the terminology in each group differs. At the end of the discussion, the participants of most groups (except the pre-test group) were asked to indicate which values they considered as particularly important by sticking 3 "vote" points onto the flipchart. Table 8 shows the values mentioned in each group and the results of the "voting". By far the most important value was *ecological sustainability*, which was the most important value in four groups. This was followed by *authentic* (most important in three groups) and *health* and *farming with nature* (both important in three groups). *The family farm* was very important in one group of converting producers. A considerable number of values were discussed in each group but then received a lower number of votes or were not "voted" at all as important.

**Table 8: Importance of values to focus group participants in Switzerland**

	Group No	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Group type	C	E	E	C	E	P	St	R
	Total Points								
Ecological sustainability	29	4		6		4	7	6	2
Authentic	12	4	3			5			
Health in general	9		3	3		3			X
Farming with nature	9	3		X		2	4		
Family farm	8				8				
Livelihood	6		1			5			
Integrity	6		3						3
Holistic/ Systems approach	6						3	3	
Soil fertility	6		3		3				
Bio-diversity promotion	5				4	X			1
Social justice	5						3	2	x
Food quality	5		X					5	
Animal welfare/Ethology	5				4				1
Use of renewable resources	4							4	
Landscape diversity	4				3	1			
Social sustainability	4			4					x
Innovative approach	4						1		3
Economic sustainability	3			3					
Rural employment	3				3				x
Fair price	3		1			2			x
Careful processing	3	2	1						
Involvement/Engagement	3	X							3
Multi-functionality	3		2					1	
Lower energy use	2							2	
Self-reliance/Independence	2	X	1	1					X
Healthy food	2	2							
Solidarity	2	2							X
Consumer-oriented approach	2					2			
Ecosystem health	1						X	1	
Cycling principle	1		X		1	X			
Fair direct payments	1				1				
Reaction to market & customers' needs	1			1					
Low Input animal husbandry	1	X				1			
Human health	0			X					X
Avoidance of residues	0								X
Traditional farming	0						X		
Cooperation & networking	0			X					
Whole system management	0						X		
Soil conservation	0							X	

\*X = value mentioned in discussion but allocated no level of importance

### 3.3.5 UK

Table 9 shows the values mentioned in each group and the “points” allocated by voting in three of the four groups, using the same terms as used by the participants. In one group in the UK, it was not possible to do any voting. In all focus groups the value of *health* was important; it was the most important value in two of the three producers groups. The second most important value was *sustainability*, and this was the most important one in the group of researchers. These were followed by *food quality*, *minimising the negative impact on the environment* and *low energy use*, which were together mentioned by all groups. *Low food miles* and *local production* were together important in all groups; these values have both ecological (reduced CO<sup>2</sup> emissions) and social sustainability dimensions.

Discussions also covered values relating to social well-being, the need for profitability or financial sustainability, affordability to consumers, and local/regional structures. Participants in two groups, the experienced organic producers in England and the newly converted producers in Wales, saw their livelihoods endangered by the growing involvement of multiple retailers with the resulting downward pressure on prices. Many of them were developing alternative marketing outlets. Although financial sustainability was very important in the discussions of most groups, participants felt that profits should not be allowed to dominate other values. There were differences in emphasis among the four groups. For some members of the UK 2 group, social issues had been an important motive to work in organic farming. Both groups in Wales (UK 3 and UK 4) discussed issues of education, consumer awareness, and local provenance and food miles.

**Table 9: Values important to producers in the UK focus groups**

	Points	UK1*	UK2	UK3	UK4
Type of participant		E	R&O	E	C
Health	19	X	4	10	5
Sustainability	10	X	5	X	5
Food quality	5		X	5	
Environment	5	X	X		5
Local/regional	4	X	X	2	2
Personal and job/challenge	4	X		4	
Social well-being	3		3		
Animal welfare/Ethology	3	X	1		2
Minimising negative impact on environment	2		2		
Bio-diversity promotion	2		2		
Farm diversity/ mixed enterprise structure	2	X		2	
Non-polluting	2			2	
Education	2			X	2
Lower energy use	1	X		X	1
Genetic diversity	1		1		
Self-reliance/Independence	1	X		1	
Low food miles	1			1	
Traditional farming	1		X		1
Connect to soil/land/growing	1		1		X
Integrity	1		1		
Trust	1			1	
Nutrition	0				
Better taste	0				x
Safe food	0				x
Schools and hospitals	0				x
Closed cycles	0		x		
Ecological issues	0		x		
Economic/profit/ commercial	0	X	X	X	X
Food security	0		X		
Financially sustainable	0			X	
Affordable for consumers	0				X
Inform about risks	0			X	
Positive future	0				X
Rural communities	0		X		
Animal health	0	X			
Animal nutrition	0		X		
Transparency	0		X	X	X
Trace-ability	0		X		X
Authentic	0		X		
Farming with nature	0	X	X	X	
Holistic/ Systems approach	0		X		
Soil fertility	0	X		X	

\*There was no "voting" in the group UK 1

X = value mentioned in discussion but allocated no level of importance

### 3.3.6 IFOAM EU group

Issues mentioned initially and considered important were summarised on cards, as follows:

- Connection to the land, connection to nature, connection to rural areas, the landscape, value the land
- Science of ecology, systems thinking, considering the wider impact
- Ecological rules leading to practical steps, safe for the environment
- Sustainability of rural areas: rural livelihood and social security, rural employment and rural development
- Food quality and safety
- Duty of care, responsibility for the world around us, sovereignty

### 3.3.7 Scoring of the an earlier draft of IFOAM principles

After the discussion, participants were given the opportunity to score the first set of draft principles of the IFOAM Task Force (draft of November 2004) on a scale between 1 (important) and 5 (not important). None of the principles received average scores lower than 3, so they were all considered important, and the differences between the scoring of the principles were very small (not more than 0.3 points different from the average). Table 10 shows the outcome of the scoring for four of the countries (it was not done in the Netherlands).

**Table 10: Results of the scoring of an earlier draft of IFOAM principles**

Proposed principle	Average	AT	CH	IT	UK
Health	1.3	1.1	1.0	1.5	1.3
Soil	1.5	1.5	2.0	1.2	1.2
Ecological	1.5	1.5	1.8	1.5	1.3
Livelihood	1.6	1.5	1.3	1.9	1.6
Animal welfare	1.6	1.7	2.4	1.2	1.1
Precaution	1.8	1.7	2.8	1.2	1.6

Overall, and especially in Austria and Switzerland, the proposed principle of health was considered most important, whereas in Italy and the UK, animal welfare scored higher. In all countries except Italy, the precautionary or care principle received the lowest score.

Further analysis and contrasting of the values of the various types of participants is presented in Section 5.1.

## 3.4 Value conflicts and priorities

Under the next heading of the discussion guide, the participants were invited to discuss potential areas of conflict between the values. The key question was:

*Can all of these values be realised at the same time?*

The aim of the section was to find areas that participants had experienced as problematic in organic farming and to improve the understanding of the meanings, relevance, and importance of the values discussed so far. To stimulate discussion, the Discussion Guide contained a number of examples of potential conflicts (e.g. negative impact of free-range areas on the environment, the need to treat with antibiotics to avoid suffering of the animal). Awareness of conflicting areas was important to allow the relevance of these ethical principles to be tested within the “real life” examples of day-to-day problems faced by producers.

### 3.4.1 Austria

In Austria value conflicts were identified only in the three focus groups of producers (see Table 11). A common theme was the conflict involving economic success for farm survival against a strong identification with organic farming, appreciation of nature, ecology and diversity. In one group, the *quality of life* value was seen as often being in conflict with the *new developments* (innovation) because of the intrinsic workload involved in changes.

**Table 11: Value conflicts discussed in the focus groups in Austria**

These values are...	.. in conflict ..	... with these
responsibility toward consumers	AT 2 (E)	appreciation of nature (creation) sustainability (future) animal health closed production cycles
change	AT 2 (E)	quality of life on the farm
independence of industry economic survival	AT 2 (E)	organic farming needs values, identification with organic farming
survival of the farm	AT 3 (E)	closed production cycles environmental protection to save resources animal health healthy food healthy nutrition
economic survival – fair prices no economisation independence of the farm (freedom, low degree of dependence)	AT 4 (C)	Diversity

### 3.4.2 Italy

In Italy, all participants, with slight differences in emphasis, saw conflicting values mainly as being external to the organic production sector and relating to the issue of commercialisation and to the expectations of markets and consumers. Participants also saw a general conflict between agricultural production and environment conservation, and two of the established organic producers saw a conflict between welfare-friendly livestock housing systems and high productivity.

### 3.4.3 Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the discussions included many examples of conflicts between organic values and the profitability of production, such as:

- Conflicts related to animal husbandry, such as keeping calves with the mother, dehorning of cattle to fit the housing systems, castration of pigs to satisfy the market
- Grazing of cows on land with high commercial value
- Costs of high animal welfare
- Crop rotation in greenhouse
- Use of labour saving technologies (such as tractors) vs. energy saving
- Use of fertiliser input in arable rotations

Eco-taxes were suggested as a possible solution to conflicts between organic values and profitability. Participants also mentioned some conflicts arising from the need for monitoring and the growing regulation of agriculture and organic values, such as ear tagging and disinfection.

The focus group of researchers in the Netherlands discussed many potential conflicts in the wider organic sector, such as the following:

- Imports of organic food vs. seasonal domestic production
- How organic are processing practices, such as in extracting caffeine from coffee, or excessive or unsustainable types of packaging?
- Should all consumer demands be met; for example, should there be organic coca cola?
- Animal welfare versus human welfare
- What to do with male chicks of egg-laying breeds?
- The impact of free-range animal husbandry on the environment

Some focus groups considered that all values should be seen as equally important but that protection of the planet and its natural resources should be the basic guiding principle. The group of arable farmers (NL4) suggested that consideration of the impact of each action on the whole system and an aim for long-term sustainability of the farming system would give guidance in dealing with these conflicts.

### 3.4.4 Switzerland

In Switzerland, the discussion covered areas of conflict as well as synergies between values. Many positive interactions between the values were identified, for example, that a healthy soil promotes health for animals. Most of the identified conflicts were between the values of organic agriculture and general societal values, rather than between different values of organic agriculture.

The majority of farmers in the discussion groups saw the main threat to the organic movement coming from current world-wide economic developments, resulting in more centralization in a globalised market, increased pressure on prices and cost-efficiency, and bigger and more anonymous trade structures (with greater dependence on powerful buyers). The participants felt that these factors make the (re)cycling principle and fair prices more difficult to achieve.



Another conflict was seen to exist between consumer behaviour and the values of organic agriculture. The current trends in consumer lifestyles and eating habits, in particular the trends to more convenience food, fast food, and cheap prices (e.g. discount retailers), make it difficult to maintain a high-quality product profile with fair prices for organic produce. For example, some participants mentioned that the BIO SUISSE strict organic processing standards were undermined by such factors as UHT milk being sold as organic and that, as a result, the organic movement might lose credibility among more committed consumers.

Other conflicts mentioned included the following:

- Cheap energy and long transport distances (food miles), which contradict the ecology principle.
- The growing workload resulting from inspection and certification, which conflicts with the social principles.

Further conflicts were seen to arise among the three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic, and social), illustrated by the following examples:

- The necessity of economic sustainability leads to more specialisation, potentially reducing farm biodiversity.
- The need to earn a living results in large farm structures and causes a higher workload, which conflicts with social sustainability as well as with the cyclical principle (opening of nutrient cycles) and/or with the ecology principle (reduction of biodiversity on farms).

### 3.4.5 UK

In the focus group of experienced organic producers in England (UK 1), the integrity of organic systems was discussed. The majority of participants felt that failure to implement standards requiring 100% organic diets after August 2005 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 producers.

Further value conflicts identified by the focus group of experienced organic producers in Wales (UK 3) included the following:

- Conflicts between food quality and the scale of the organic sector, e.g. productivity vs. taste
- Trust in the individual producers vs. the increasing scale of the organic sector
- High soil fertility and nutrient levels were seen as conflicting with conservation aims
- Increasing regulation vs. enterprise diversity: the financial burden placed on producers by more regulations makes it impossible to maintain enterprise diversity, especially for small-scale businesses.

Some of the groups gave considerable attention to a perceived conflict between profitability and ethical values. UK 1 producers saw lobbying for organic farming as a very political issue, taking a stand against agri-business and for the environment and nature, thus indicating conflicts with external values in society. Shareholders' desire to make a profit was seen as conflicting with sustainable development. Both of the

focus groups of experienced organic producers saw the supermarkets' pursuit of low prices as being in direct conflict with their desire to make a profit as producers.

A number of participants 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 account to be taken of the external costs of agriculture as a whole, which would generate a more level playing field for all agricultural producers.

### **3.4.6 IFOAM EU group**

The IFOAM EU group participants were at first very reluctant to talk about value conflicts because they felt that one of the main values in the organic framework is to be holistic. They felt that holism implies that no area of values can be maximised at the expense of all others, and they considered that organic values can provide a "realistic" understanding of the world as it could be.

### **3.4.7 Summary of value conflicts**

The most important area of conflict identified in all countries was the one arising between profitability and other values. External economic pressures were seen as preventing producers from realising all of their organic values because of the downward pressure on prices for organic products, especially in larger trading structures and globalised markets. Examples were quoted from various areas of organic production, such as crop rotations in the greenhouse, use of labour saving technologies (tractors) and their impact on the energy balance, and the costs of improved animal welfare. There was also a reference to the lack of a level playing field in relation to ecological issues in agriculture.

A number of other conflicts were mentioned (see Table 12 for a full summary). A number of groups considered a range of organic values as important and concluded that a defining characteristic of organic farming is that the whole systems approach prevents one value dominating others. Some groups suggested that environmental values such as the protection of the planet and the conservation of natural resources should be the basic guiding principle of organic farming.

**Table 12: Further examples of value conflicts**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Value conflicting with</b>	<b>Other values</b>
AT	Farm survival and income	Many other values
IT, NL, CH	Consumer expectations in relation to products and processing	Other organic values
NL, CH,	Responsibility towards consumers	Sustainability, animal health
UK	Consumers health and food safety	Farm and Bio-diversity
NL	Higher yields and productivity	Product quality
IT	Higher yields and productivity	Environment and lower biodiversity
CH	Non-use of copper (lower production, but also lower residues in product and environment)	Affordable prices for consumers
NL	Tractor use (labour saving)	Energy use
AT	Higher farm diversity	Greater farmer workload and lower health
AT	Innovation	Human welfare and workload
CH	Access to markets further a field with better income	Energy saving
CH, UK	Commercialisation and globalization of the organic sector	Many other values, in particular: closing of production cycles, food quality
CH, UK	Anonymity in the trading structures	Consumer trust, closing production cycles
NL	Local trade	International trade, access to markets for developing countries
NL	Animal welfare	Human health and welfare
IT, NL	Animal welfare	Productivity and farm income
NL	Damage and leaching from outdoor runs & pastures	Animal welfare – free range conditions
CH	Improved consumer guarantees through inspections and regulation	Social values
UK	Integrity (reduced conventional inputs)	Practicality (use of inputs where necessary)

### 3.5 What values will be important in the future?

The final section of the Discussion Guide covered the future importance of values in organic farming. The key question to be asked by moderators was:

***What values will be important in relation to organic farming in 10 years time?***

The main objective of this section was to explore which of the values discussed were seen to be of a more long-term nature and therefore more important for guiding organic agriculture into the future.

In **Austria** the values mentioned in this section were similar to those discussed before. However, more of the ideas here related to the organic standards and their administration, especially including values relating to nature or sustainability. The topics of energy and energy crops were mentioned for the first time. Under food quality and health, the freedom from GMOs was particularly discussed. In relation to economics and finances, cost-covering prices were mentioned as important in the future as well as the independence of farms, and there was a wish for openness in relation to social aspects.

In **Italy** the topics discussed in relation to the future were quite diverse. A common point raised by non-producers and producers alike was the need for a more direct and deeper connection between organic producers and consumers in the future, which allows the development of trust and reliability, and the communication of broader organic values. All of the participants hoped that the organic sector could carry ethical and social values into the future, and in the group of researchers, food quality was considered likely to become more important in the future. There was some discussion as to whether greater environmental awareness might cause conventional agriculture to become more organic in the future and what this would mean for organic agriculture. This suggests a conflict between the maintenance of organic market differentiation and the need to spread sustainable methods to all sectors of agriculture.

In the **Netherlands** the researchers saw consistency in the organic approach as being particularly important in the future, as well as the need for better communication with consumers and among all stakeholders in the organic chain, including the multiple retailers. The need to consider the question of energy in relation to the transport of organic food was directly mentioned. The bio-dynamic farmers were worried that a "simple" organic approach might emerge that does not include the principal organic values, reflecting their concern that new converters do not share all their values. In contrast to some participants in Italy, who expected conventional farming to move towards organic agriculture, the Dutch dairy farmers were not worried about this, but saw other threats coming from outside the sector, such as widespread use of GMOs. The arable producers considered soil conservation as becoming particularly important in the future.

In **Switzerland** four main thematic areas were discussed by most of the participants under this topic of future values: fair prices, truthful communication/information for the public, solidarity, and regionality. All groups agreed that social justice and

fairness would be very important in the future; most groups saw a major future challenge in developing more effective communication strategies and appropriate behaviour in the market place. Producers saw a need for solidarity among farmers as well as a need for organic social values to extend to other stakeholders in the food chain. Participants in all groups found that regionality and local marketing of products would become more important. Other issues that had already been discussed were considered likely to remain important, such as product quality and health, careful management of the ecosystem, protection of resources, a holistic approach, the diversity of farms and farmed species, and animal welfare.

In the **UK** the experienced producers saw the question of energy and the reduction of greenhouse gases as becoming more important in the future and felt that organic farmers should seek alternative solutions to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels. Other values considered likely to become or remain important were food security, food safety, product quality in relation to health, fair prices to maintain producers' incomes, and environmental conservation ("custodians of the countryside"). The participants also emphasised that future development of organic values will be influenced by the development of the conventional sector, such as raised standards in relation to animal welfare and the environment.

To summarise the discussion, in all countries nearly all values considered likely to be important in the future had already been discussed in previous sections, but in some cases the emphasis changed. Values expected to be important in the future of organic farming were as follows:

- Limiting the use of non-renewable resources, in particular energy
- Avoiding contamination with GMOs
- Fair or cost-covering prices
- Solidarity among farmers
- Local and regional production
- Closer links between producers and consumers
- Openness, communication and trust throughout the whole organic food chain

In addition to these values, the participants in a number of countries also used this section to express what they would prefer to see in the future. In Austria participants mentioned the need for practical research, education, respect for the diversity of farms, and inclusion of the basic values of organic farming in the EU Regulation. Participants in the Netherlands wanted to see improvement of the standards in relation to environmental protection and to animal health, especially dealing with infectious diseases. Swiss focus groups (mainly the farmers) felt that the standards/regulations for organic agriculture should be made easier to understand, be more focused, change less frequently, and in some ways be made more practicable. They also saw a need for the self-confidence of the farmers to be strengthened. UK participants wanted to see a more level playing field in terms of the regulations both in general and for organic farming, for example in relation to the external costs of agriculture, and they hoped for a greater harmonisation of organic standards worldwide.

## **4 Further analysis of the meaning of core values and comparison with the new IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture**

The focus group discussions were analysed by the national teams with the help of coding, using a common codebook developed after an initial examination of the national summary reports (see 2.2 Recording, transcription and analysis). During coding, each statement was associated with one or more themes or topics. Computer software for the analysis of unstructured data was used for the retrieval of the data attached to each code. These code retrievals allowed the national researchers to search for similar or different views of participants, explore the context in which statements were made, and thus improve their understanding of the meanings of values and of their importance to the participants. During the analysis, the national teams could add additional codes where topics had not been included in the common codebook.

This section presents the analysis of the coding. Each code represents one value or related concept. These values are grouped according to the four Principles of Organic Agriculture developed by the IFOAM Task Force in collaboration with the Organic Revision Project (see 4.1) and recently approved by the IFOAM General Assembly. As well as presenting the material in a more structured way, classifying the values in this way helped in comparing the values of producers with those covered in the four new principles.

This chapter continues with a short summary of the process of revising principles. The four new IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture are the principles of health, ecology, fairness and care, and each of these principles is the subject of one of the four subsequent sub-sections. Each of these begins with a short table showing the key values and the countries where they were the subject of discussion. These discussions are then reported as they occurred in each of the relevant countries. Each sub-section concludes with summaries of the relevant value conflicts and key discussion points related to the principle concerned.

This is followed by a section on other values important to the participants that relate directly either to none of the four new principles or to more than one of them, such as animal health and welfare (related to two principles), proximity and local networks, holism and systems thinking, and values related to organic farming as a profession. Wherever values indirectly relate to more than one principle, cross-references have been included. It is important to note that the association of values with the four IFOAM principles was not made by the participants themselves but was carried out later during the coding, analysis and reporting.

### **4.1 The IFOAM Task Force and the four new principles of organic agriculture**

The IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture are intended to represent the basic tenets of organic agriculture, and they have recently undergone review. The IFOAM World Board formed a small Task Force, with eight members representing the

organic movement around the world, to lead the process during 2004/2005, as well as a larger Consultative Group. The outcome was a draft of four principles that were approved by the members of IFOAM at the General Assembly in Adelaide, Australia in September 2005. The Organic Revision project was represented in the Task Force through Hugo Alrøe from the Danish Research Centre for Organic Food and Farming (DARCOF) and in the Consultative group by Henk Verhoog, Lois Bolk Institute, as a part of the tasks of Work Package 2 in the Organic Revision project.

The formulation of the four principles involved a number of procedures. A first questionnaire concerning the purpose, function and form of the Principles of Organic Agriculture was sent out to the Consultative Group. The respondents wanted principles to be the foundation and framework of Organic Agriculture, to lead and unite the organic movement, to give guidance for the development of standards and policies, and to be an inspiration for the organic movement and for wider processes of change. They thought that the principles should be universal but regionally applicable and able to provide organic identity; they should be simple and ethically normative.

A second questionnaire asked the members of the Consultative Group for input on 'thematic areas' on which principles needed to be developed. The thematic areas identified were:

- Holistic health
- Livelihood - equity
- Biodiversity
- Soil
- Cyclical systems
- Animals
- Local markets / accessibility
- Precaution

The third round of consultation elaborated further on this and tested a first rough draft of six principles. In this draft, the thematic areas "Local markets / accessibility" and "Biodiversity" were not allocated separate principles but were included as subsets of other principles. In reviewing the responses to this third questionnaire, the Task Force reduced the number of principles to four and these were sent for a fourth round to the Consultative Group, and at the same time, for open consultation to all members of the organic movement until March 25th 2005.

In their final deliberations, the Task Force on the review of the Principles of Organic Agriculture studied the comments and took due consideration of all the suggestions, resulting in their final recommendation to the IFOAM World Board. This recommendation was accompanied by information on the consultation feedback and explained with the rationale of the Task Force for its proposal. At its June 2005 meeting, the World Board decided on the wording of the Principles of Organic Agriculture to be put in a motion to the IFOAM General Assembly at Adelaide, Australia in September 2005.

During a further interactive session at the General Assembly, the so-called motion bazaar, further amendments to the World Board's wording were suggested. The General Assembly approved the final version of the Principles of Organic Agriculture

with a large majority. For further information on the consultative process see [http://www.ifoam.org/organic\\_facts/principles/index.html](http://www.ifoam.org/organic_facts/principles/index.html)

In the preface to the new principles, IFOAM (2005) says:

*These Principles are the roots from which organic agriculture grows and develops. They express the contribution that organic agriculture can make to the world, and a vision to improve all agriculture in a global context.*

*Agriculture is one of humankind's most basic activities because all people need to nourish themselves daily. History, culture and community values are embedded in agriculture. The Principles apply to agriculture in the broadest sense, including the way people tend soils, water, plants and animals in order to produce, prepare and distribute food and other goods. They concern the way people interact with living landscapes, relate to one another and shape the legacy of future generations.*

*The Principles of Organic Agriculture serve to inspire the organic movement in its full diversity. They guide IFOAM's development of positions, programs and standards. Furthermore, they are presented with a vision of their world-wide adoption.*

*Organic agriculture is based on:*

- *The principle of health*
- *The principle of ecology*
- *The principle of fairness*
- *The principle of care.*

Each principle is articulated through an initial statement, followed by an explanation of the principle. The full text (statement and explanation) of each principle in the version approved by IFOAM members is included in the following sections.



## 4.2 Values related to the principle of health

### Box 1: The principle of health

*Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, humans and planet as one and indivisible.*

This principle points out that the health of individuals and communities cannot be separated from the health of ecosystems - healthy soils produce healthy crops that foster the health of animals and people. Health is the wholeness and integrity of living systems. It is not simply the absence of illness, but the maintenance of physical, mental, social and ecological well-being. Immunity, resilience and regeneration are key characteristics of health.

The role of organic agriculture, whether in farming, processing, distribution, or consumption, is to sustain and enhance the health of ecosystems and organisms from the smallest in the soil to human beings. In particular, organic agriculture is intended to produce high quality nutritious food that contributes to preventive health care and well being. In view of this, it should avoid the use of fertilizers, pesticides, animal drugs and food additives that may have adverse health effects.

Table 13 shows core values that were discussed in focus groups in each of the countries and that can be directly related to the proposed principle of health. Discussion topics related to the principle of health included animal health, soil fertility, and the need for a systemic perspective on organic farming (holism) covered in separate sections (4.3.2; 4.6.1; 4.6.3).

**Table 13: Coverage of values related to the principle of health in all countries**

	AT	IT	NL	CH	UK
Personal health	✓	✓		✓	✓
Family health	✓			✓	
Food quality & health	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Soil-health link and ecosystems health	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Conflicts related to health	✓	✓		✓	✓

In **Austria**, values related to the principle of health were among the first associations with the word *organic* in all of the producer focus groups. Health and food quality were together the most important values across all groups in Austria. Farmer health and family health were important motives for conversion among established and converting organic producers, who discussed health in a broadly defined way. This clearly included aspects of disease prevention for plants and animals as well as for people, but producers also felt that this broad definition was difficult to apply and implement in the organic standards. The cycle of health was particularly important to the established organic farmers and was seen as the reason for the superior quality of organic products. The converting producers saw the avoidance of agro-chemical inputs as the best guarantee to prevent residues in food. With the holistic and regional perspectives in organic farming, it was considered as

the only farming system that could provide healthy food and lifestyles (including food culture).

In Austria some participants were concerned about the negative impact that detailed consumer protection regulations could have on organic values such as farm diversity. An emphasis on product quality rather than process quality was considered problematic in organic production: the researchers saw the highlighting of residue-free food as one-sided, and they felt that this would improve food safety only superficially but would also ignore the more holistic aspects of food quality.

In **Italy** values related to the principle of health came up both at the first associations stage of the focus groups and later on in the discussions, referring to the farmers' own health, food quality, and the health of the ecosystem. The value of *food quality* was attributed particular importance, and the discussions on this topic included a wide range of meanings among different participants. For the groups of policy makers and researchers, the concept of food quality was mainly related to nutritional content and organoleptic quality, while for producers (both experienced organic and recently converted) the aspects of safety and uncontaminated food were most predominant. The main perceived conflict was between farm income and the implementation of organic rules to guarantee food quality.

In the **Netherlands** values related to the principle of health were discussed relatively little compared with other values, except within the focus group of researchers. The arable farmers mentioned health as a first association with the word *organic*; in other groups the issue arose in other parts of the discussion, but the importance of health was indicated in a number of focus groups through their value clusters related to health.

In **Switzerland** all major value dimensions have been mentioned in the majority of the discussion groups. Health was considered as an important value of organic agriculture. In particular, health related to food quality and ecosystem health were discussed in great detail.

The **UK** participants considered health to be an important value in the organic sector, indicated by the high score it received in the votes, the time and emphasis given to the related topics by all the focus groups, and the fact that health itself was among the first associations in all groups. Health was discussed in varying contexts, relating to participants' own and consumers' health with reference to food quality, the link between soil and health (health cycle), and the health of the system or even the whole planet. It was among producers' motives for conversion; however, there was concern among researchers that too much emphasis on product quality in the marketing and promotion of organic food could lead to other issues being forgotten. Potential health-related conflicts discussed all related to food quality, such as those arising between the increasing scale of the organic sector and the production of high quality food.

#### 4.2.1 The individual health of the participants

Conventional agricultural practices often put farmers' health in danger, and organic farmers in Italy, Switzerland, and the UK cited their own health (or in some cases health in the family) as one major reason for conversion.

In the discussions about personal health, two dimensions emerged:

1. ergonomic aspects of workplace safety (trying to avoid personal exposure to agro-chemicals)
2. quality of the food eaten by the farming family

In relation to the aspect No. 1. above, a recent converter in Austria mentioned that he had started to consider alternatives after feeling ill having inhaled spray drift whilst spraying potatoes. A number of established organic producers knew of cases of pesticide poisoning among other producers in their areas. In Italy one established organic producer referred to personal health problems as a trigger for change:

*Another thing that made me reflect a lot is that I got a digestive system disease, and in my opinion it was probably caused by something hideous I had eaten. It is something I've experienced directly and so... I saw my neighbour putting pesticides on his vegetables, and he died of leukaemia very quickly. At that point I decided; these are things that make you think a lot (IT, Ef).*

In the UK, both recently converted and established organic producers referred to ergonomic aspects of working in farming in relation to conversion, but with a slightly different emphasis.

*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 (UK, Cf).*

Producers (mostly established organic) in Switzerland and Italy referred to the No. 2 dimension of product quality (above) in relation to personal health. One Swiss producer defined organic products as "good for health" (CH, Em); another one referred to this as his main motivation for conversion. In Italy established organic producers referred to their own health in the context of the product quality, but the discussion also covered wider aspects such as the environment, and the health of others using the countryside such as joggers in the fields.

Among other stakeholders only the second dimension (No. 2) was discussed. One participant in Switzerland referred to her intolerance of food processed with artificial "stuff" (additives), and others linked individual health to the benefits of organic production. In some cases, the discussions moved on to include examples of health problems in the family, and in Switzerland concerns for family health appeared to have been quite a strong motive among the established organic farmers, who had turned to organic production in order to assure long-lasting children's health. The discussions frequently moved on to consumer health and food quality whilst in some cases also covering a range of other environmental risk factors not directly related to organic production.

#### **4.2.2 Food quality**

Food quality was among the most intensively debated subjects among all types of participants in all countries and was seen as being strongly related to health, as illustrated by the following quotes:

*Organic should also be giving the chance to the consumer to choose the healthiest food (IT, Rm).*

*The value of a product today is not really paid. We should have the right to declare organic products as healthy (CH, Em).*

*When all values are in balance, you can be sure the result will be a healthy product (NL, Em).*

*I'd like to see organic food going into schools and hospitals, and all this. How realistic it is, I don't know (UK, Cm).*

In Austria food quality was clearly seen as one of the most important core values of the organic movement; this seemed to be coupled with a strong desire to improve the nutrition of the farming family particularly among established organic producers. The researchers and organic organisation staff attributed importance to food quality and the link to the region. The established organic producers saw a causal relationship between healthy soils, healthy animals and healthy products, clearly reflecting the teaching of Dr. Hans Müller, whereas the more recently converted farmers saw improved food quality arising from the absence of residues and wanted to highlight more the health-giving aspects of organic food in product marketing.

*The cycle begins with the healthy soil and leads (automatically) to healthier products (AT, Em).*

In **Italy** all the focus groups considered food quality to be one of most important values of organic agriculture, along with environmental conservation, and their discussions revealed various meanings and concerns. All farmers expressed care regarding their contribution to consumers' welfare and health, feeling responsible for what people eat. In addition to food safety and the absence of residues, eating organic food was considered a pleasant experience compared with conventional food, needing fewer additional ingredients (e.g. salt) to bring out the full flavour and taste. Organic products were considered to be of high quality in terms of taste, organoleptic characteristics, and nutritional content. The farmers saw it as a continuous challenge to maintain the high quality of organic products in all respects.

Other dimensions that were covered when discussing food quality included a link to soils and the environment, certification (organic production is inspected, and provides a guarantee for consumers), and the direct personal relationship that builds trust between producer and consumer. Authenticity was mentioned, referring to the link to a specific region or area of production. Products typical to a region were considered to demonstrate a link between food quality and the environment in which they are produced. A couple of policy makers pointed out the importance of agreeing a common concept of food quality among the various stakeholders to enable effective communication of the benefits of organic food.

In the **Netherlands** both producers and researchers discussed product quality. The researchers covered quality in its aspects of taste and the enjoyment of food. For the biodynamic farmers, the intrinsic quality of milk was more important. Like the experienced producers in Austria, they saw an important link between the farming system's health, animal health, and product quality, which was also related to

sustainability (see also 4.2.3 and 4.6.1). The organic arable producers also mentioned this health cycle, but were more concerned about the trade requirements, product quality specifications, and the strong influence that supermarkets have on quality aspects such as the choice of crop varieties.

In **Switzerland** the established organic farmers saw food quality as one of the core values of the organic movement and discussed this in the context of respect for organic principles. These producers tended to see organic products as safe products, characterised by absence of residues, which is particularly important to some sensitive groups such as people with allergies. They would have appreciated the right to declare organic products as healthy, but there was also concern that these values of food quality are no longer respected. Among recent converters and researchers, the production of healthy food of high quality was seen as meeting consumer expectations, which the converting producers perceived as mainly concerned with personal health.

*It is important to me that Bio is an assurance to have healthy food without harmful residues (CH, Cf).*

*[Food quality] is the soul of organic production (CH, Rf).*

In the **UK**, participants in all groups considered safe food and the consumers' health to be highly important organic values.

*Probably the most important thing is the health, the safe food (UK, Cm).*

They felt that organic methods involving lower intensity, slower growth characteristics, and reduced pesticide use would lead to better and safer food for consumers worldwide. In some groups, children and hospitals were specifically mentioned. However, not all participants agreed that organic food automatically tastes better. As in Switzerland, the UK producers commented on the absence of research evidence to underpin any claims on health-promoting aspects of organic food. Recently converted producers were worried that promoting the health benefits of organic food might detract from those of conventional food.

In the discussions of the value of *food quality*, the following dimensions can be identified:

- Absence of residues and food safety
- Nutritional content
- The potential benefits of organic food for vulnerable groups in society, such as children
- Taste and enjoyment of organic food
- Certification
- Direct relationship between consumer and producer
- Authenticity of organic food
- Quality requirements of the trade

Discussions also referred to a link between soil health and food quality, which is discussed further below, and the health (or sustainability) of the eco-system, which is covered in the next section.

### 4.2.3 Eco-systems health and cycle of health

For many participants, a value of *health* was important not only in relation to their own and the consumers' health, but also to the environment, to farms, and to animals. For example, in **Italy** organic farming with its innovative cultivation methods was seen as contributing to the maintenance of a healthy environment.

*If we could stop throwing pesticides in the field, we hope to recover the environment, maybe not for us but for those who shall come afterwards... for the world to go ahead (IT, Cm).*

There were focus group discussions related to broader perspectives on health, such as the link between the soil and health. This was a topic discussed mainly among established organic producers; in **Austria** it was discussed only by the established producers, of whom some would have attended the courses of Dr. Hans Müller, an important supporter and promoter of this idea. In Italy only about one participant in each group talked about a link between organic methods and health, but with no specific reference to a "health cycle".

*The cycle begins with the healthy soil and leads (automatically) to healthier products (AT, Em).*

In the **Netherlands** a number of groups identified a value-cluster related to systems health. The biodynamic group referred to the intrinsic quality of milk arising from the overall system, whereas soil fertility was of central importance for the arable producers and was linked to product quality.

In **Switzerland**, general concerns about societal benefits represented the starting point for many converting farmers as in this description:

*... positive, conservative, animal friendly and conforming to societal needs. (CH, Cm)*

One reason for converting to organic production was the abuse of agro-chemicals, which were seen as destroying the environment:

*We have to protect the environment and respect nature and not to destroy everything (CH, Cm).*

In Switzerland this link between system health and food quality was mainly discussed by the staff of one organic organisation. However, the link between food and "healthy body, healthy mind and healthy soil" was associated with right-wing historical roots of the organic movement and felt to be less important now than in the past. The focus group of students considered that the main arguments for organic farming involved the intention to reduce environmental damage and to conserve natural resources.

In the **UK**, the value of health was seen as important to animals, the farm, and the environment. A link between soil and health was mentioned a number of times among the first associations, especially by established organic producers. There was

strong feeling among both established and converting producers that organic agriculture was better for the health of the ecosystem.

*It's 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 (UK, Em).*

The more recent converters did not use the same terminology, but they provided examples of how their own farming systems had improved since conversion and a "natural balance" had returned more quickly than they had expected. These examples included improved animal health, the return of certain species, suffering less than expected from weeds/insect attack, and achieving adequate production yields. The UK researchers extended the concept of health 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 (UK, Rf).*

#### **4.2.4 Value conflicts related to the principle of health**

A number of concerns and value conflicts in relation to the principle of health were discussed. They represent conflicts between health-related and other organic values, conflicts arising from the general economic climate, and instances of incompatibility between health-related organic values and other societal values or factors.

The Swiss participants perceived one conflict in this area: this related to plant protection and referred to the ending of the derogation to use copper-based products, which have been considered dangerous from a health and environmental point of view but necessary to control outbreaks of disease.

*Technical problems are so many! Next year if there is a season like this one, without copper, what should I do (CH, Em)?*

Converting producers in Switzerland and researchers in the UK expressed concerns that too much emphasis on health and food quality may result in the neglect of other important values in organic agriculture such as those concerning the environment.

*For me, healthy food was not the primarily motive [for conversion]; the environment was always more important (CH, Cm).*

In both countries, converting and experienced organic producers expressed concerns that the further growth of the organic sector could have a negative impact on the quality and taste of organic foods. Organic organisation staff in Switzerland claimed that the expansion of the organic market had led to a loss of the "original character" of organic agriculture (CH, Of). One early converter in Switzerland raised a concern about food chains involving processing, in which farmers lose the responsibility for quality and become anonymous.

The researchers in the UK saw a potential conflict between producing food of high quality and producing sufficient quantity, entailing a potential problem for food security.

*As you go for security of supply, you risk security of quality (UK, Rm).*

However, a UK focus group of producers raised concerns that organic standards did not put enough emphasis on food quality.

The main perceived conflict involving health was perceived as occurring between farm incomes and health-related organic farming values. Austrian participants were particularly concerned about the negative impact that detailed consumer protection regulations could have on organic values such as farm diversity. Established organic farmers in Switzerland were concerned about certain conflicts between organic and general consumer values, in particular the facts that organic products cannot be promoted as healthy and that consumers prefer convenience food, which is difficult to process under organic rules. Arable producers in the Netherlands were concerned that the quality requirements of an anonymous market driven by multiple retailers are in conflict with other organic values, for example the fear of bacterial contamination of salad crops may prohibit the use of manure, despite composting that is likely to reduce the bacterial load.

#### 4.2.5 Summary of discussions relating to the principle of health

Health and related subjects (e.g. food quality) were among first associations with the word *organic* and were discussed in greater detail in many focus groups. Most participants appeared to consider health as an important value of the organic sector. The following summary is a result of an analysis of the various meanings and dimensions involved in the health-related discussions.

The producer's **own health** was mentioned as a motive for conversion among the producers; it was particularly important for established organic farmers, but also mentioned by some converting producers. A direct link to the farming family's nutrition was mentioned only in Austria.

Discussions relating to **food quality** revealed a wide range of dimensions: consumer health; improved food safety through the absence of residues; the nutritional content of organic food; the potential benefits of organic food for vulnerable groups in society, such as children; taste and enjoyment; interaction between consumer and producer; the guarantee provided to consumers by producers through certification; the authenticity and regionality of organic food; and the quality requirements of the trade.

A link between the **soil and systems health** and the **health of the product** or **product quality** was discussed in all countries, but particularly among established organic producers in Austria, the Netherlands and the UK. Mainly in Austria this appears to be a reflection of the training courses that the earlier entrants into organic farming would have attended. Reference was made less consistently to this concept among other stakeholders and among converting producers in Italy, who had not had the same exposure to the early organic movement. The observations raise the question of how strongly the views of organic producers are influenced by their exposure to training courses on organic farming and by discussions within the movement. The often-criticised lack of "core" values among more recently converted producers could be partly a result of their lesser exposure to such issues due to the reduced availability of training events.



The principle of health is relevant to **the value of animal health** that is covered in more detail together with animal welfare under heading 4.6.1.

**Conflicts** in values relating to health related to a range of subject areas, including plant protection; a negative correlation between the scale of the sector and product quality; growing anonymity throughout the food chain, which may reduce trust between the producer and consumer; and the increasing burden of consumer protection regulation, which makes other organic values more difficult to realise.

### 4.3 Values related to the principle of ecology

#### Box 2: The principle of ecology

*Organic Agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.*

This principle roots organic agriculture within living ecological systems. It states that production is to be based on ecological processes, and recycling. Nourishment and well-being are achieved through the ecology of the specific production environment. For example, in the case of crops this is the living soil; for animals it is the farm ecosystem; for fish and marine organisms, the aquatic environment.

Organic farming, pastoral and wild harvest systems should fit the cycles and ecological balances in nature. These cycles are universal but their operation is site-specific. Organic management must be adapted to local conditions, ecology, culture and scale. Inputs should be reduced by reuse, recycling and efficient management of materials and energy in order to maintain and improve environmental quality and conserve resources.

Organic agriculture should attain ecological balance through the design of farming systems, establishment of habitats and maintenance of genetic and agricultural diversity. Those who produce, process, trade, or consume organic products should protect and benefit the common environment including landscapes, climate, habitats, biodiversity, air and water.

Values related to the principle of ecology were discussed intensively in all countries. In the Netherlands and Switzerland, the national teams reported that values related to environmental protection were among the most widely discussed concepts. In Austria, Italy and the UK, environmental protection or ecology/closed cycles were amongst the three categories of values that were attributed the most importance.

Some differences in emphasis in relation to this principle may be related to the meanings of words in different languages. For example, in German the words 'nature' and 'environment' are sometimes used almost interchangeably, whereas in the Netherlands discussions about nature and naturalness seemed unrelated to environmental protection.

In **Austria** the main ecological concept discussed was that of production in a "cycle" or "closed material cycle"; it was addressed intensively in the focus groups of established organic producers and once in the group of recently converted farmers.

Saving resources was considered an advantage of organic methods, but there was some criticism that the standards were allowing too many exceptions to this principle. Researchers considered that resources are saved by alternative energy sources and by improved efficiency. Producers (mainly recent converters) talked about the benefits of diversifying, which may have been due to their more specialist farm structures. Researchers saw a much larger spectrum of diversity (multiplicity); they discussed sustainability as being the sum of a number of single values. Sustainable agriculture was seen as symbolising a long-term and sustainable way of thinking, which considers the impact on future generations (see under heading 4.5.1).

In **Italy** participants from every group associated organic with aspects of the ecology principle, including energy, respect for natural cycles, naturalness, and the environment. However, specific values in this category, such as sustainability, production in cycles, energy saving, and biodiversity conservation were discussed less frequently than other topics. The participants wanted these values communicated to consumers to make a difference to their choices. Environmental protection was considered a public good and a service for the whole community both locally and nationally, which should be recognised as such by policy makers.

In the **Netherlands** values related to the principle of ecology were represented among the first associations in all focus groups and were among the most discussed in all groups except one; the group of Biodynamic farmers discussed values concerning animal welfare more frequently than those related to ecology. The farmers in the Netherlands reflected on the problematic practices of Dutch conventional agriculture, such as the nutrient pollution resulting from the dependence on inputs of imported feed, and the high energy losses involved in transport and in manure combustion installations. Organic farmers' efforts to be self-supporting at farm level and sector level and to close the cycle of production were frequently mentioned. Other relevant values mentioned included *naturalness* and of *integrity of soil and plants*.

In **Switzerland** recycling was the most often mentioned issue related to the principle of ecology. Genetic diversity and landscape diversity were mentioned mainly by mountain farmers and researchers. Other related issues such as mixed farming or minimising the use of energy were not mentioned.

In the **UK**, all groups discussed sustainability as a value, which is reported in more detail in the section on the principle of care (see 4.5.1). First associations with the term *organic* in all groups included benefits to the environment with a variety of terms used, such as *environmentally sustainable*, *environmentally benign* or *minimising man's impact*, *semi-natural agriculture*, *working with nature*, and *balanced system*. The group of researchers and professionals also noted ecology as a science and expressed concerns that issues of environmental impact are currently neglected in the organic debate in the UK. In a number of groups, environmental awareness and concerns were important motives for farm conversion or reasons to get involved with the organic sector. Lack of care for the environment was also frequently expressed as a criticism of the conduct of conventional agriculture, and there was a sense of pride that organic farming allowed producers to make an income 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, as shown in Table 14, which are illustrated in the following sections.

**Table 14: Coverage of values related to the principle of ecology in all countries**

	AT	IT	NL	CH	UK
Closed production cycles	✓		✓	✓	✓
Minimising energy use		✓			✓
Renewable energy sources	✓			✓	
Soil fertility	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Diversity	✓	✓		✓	
Environmental or nature protection	✓	✓	✓		
Conservation of biodiversity		✓		✓	✓
Farming in with nature/ Naturalness			✓		✓

#### 4.3.1 Closed production cycles, resource use and re-cycling

In **Austria**, in all but the focus group of recently converted farms, there was some discussion centred around closed production cycles with reference to the cycle of health (referred to under heading 4.2.3), which in some groups included the saving of resources. Some critical comments were made about the EU Regulation that allows organic farmers to make use of the derogation allowing food production based on external inputs and, therefore, not to attempt to close the production cycle.

In **Italy** researchers and policy makers saw important benefits of organic farming in the saving of energy and the re-use of by-products such as organic matter. Producers did not discuss the issue in detail apart from the converting producers who referred to the benefits of livestock in providing fertility for cereals.

*I have never fertilised; I never considered [bought in] organic fertilisers, only a good rotation, well-prepare manure. To me, being organic and growing extensive cereals must be done together with livestock production. (IT, Cm)*

For producers, cultivating without chemical inputs also entailed ceasing the farm's reliance on external inputs and regaining greater independence.

In the Netherlands, the UK, and Switzerland, independence from inputs was also discussed mainly in relation to livestock production. For the established organic Dutch and UK producers, growing the feed for all their livestock was seen as practising an organic value, and as very different to conventional agriculture's reliance on imported feed grown in developing countries, where it occupies valuable fertile land.

**Dutch** farmers extensively discussed cyclical production and advocated that organic farmers who could not close the production cycle on their own farm should co-operate with others in the same region. In **Switzerland**, the discussions covered feed production for animals and the integration of animals into the farming system. In the UK and Switzerland, closed nutrient cycles and restricted use of external

inputs were seen as ways to achieve the overall goal of sustainability, but not as aims in themselves.

*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 (UK, Rm).*

In the **UK** producers discussed low-input systems as a way to minimise the impact on the environment and to reduce pollution, and there was a sense of pride in having achieved greater sustainability.

*I think one of the most extraordinary things is that organic farming has 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 (UK, Em).*

In all UK producer focus groups, the discussion also touched on the question of energy use. The two Welsh groups discussed global warming and the merits of carbon trading as a policy instrument. In one group, thinking about energy as a resource was seen as core organic value, and the group felt that heavy reliance on fossil fuel would become uneconomic in the future. In the other group of established organic producers, reliance on fossil fuel was discussed in the context of food distribution; the group highlighted the reliance of the supermarkets on fossil fuel, and the discussion touched on the possibilities for producers to use alternative energy sources on their farms.

### 4.3.2 Soil fertility

Care and interest regarding fertile and living soil was mentioned frequently by the well-established organic producers in **Austria**, and healthy soil was seen as the basis for health in the production cycle. The need for soil protection was discussed, and organic farmers were seen as considering the impact of their actions on the soil rather than only treating it with large machinery. The national team in Austria interprets the fact that soil was not intensively discussed as an indication of a “silent” and obvious value which did not need to be much discussed.

In **Italy** not many values related to soil were discussed, but the topic appears to have been encompassed in the more general discussion of the value of protecting the environment. Soil fertility and soil organic matter were seen as important resources for farmers, which need to be preserved for future generations.

In the **Netherlands** soil fertility was among the first associations of established organic livestock producers, and was seen as the basis for all life. It was mentioned frequently in the context of the balance and health of whole systems, and the preservation of water quality. The group of arable farmers discussed soil in greater detail, and they agreed on a value-cluster relating to *Soil health* (see heading 3.3.3).

*Soil is the source from which you produce. Organic agriculture starts with soil, and soil is the most important factor and always will be (NL, Em).*

The perspectives of the Dutch farmers varied depending on their farm type, but all agreed that soils should be handled with care. The importance attributed to soil was also illustrated by the opposition to landless production.

In **Switzerland** the maintenance of soil fertility represented a relevant concern and a factor for success in farming. Established organic farmers talked about their concern and sense of responsibility for long-term soil fertility. Soil conservation in the sense of avoiding damage to the soil was mentioned mainly by newly converted organic farmers.

In the **UK** *good for the soil* was among the first associations of researchers; producers' first associations referred to soil condition and the link between soil management and human health. Improving the soil structure was mentioned as a motive for conversion, and 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.

One of the groups of established organic producers discussed a potential conflict involving soil fertility, food security, and conservation; this arose because production of food requires soil to be fertile, which may reduce biodiversity. One of the English established organic growers used a conflict related to soil cultivation as an example to illustrate that having too many organic values could be too prescriptive. He used ploughing to control disease, but had faced criticism from others because this was seen as wasting energy.

#### 4.3.3 Diversity, environmental protection and conservation

In **Austria** the diversity of enterprises, crops and plants grown on the farm was among the focus groups' first associations, and the farmers appreciated that organic management enabled them to grow a wide variety of main and catch crops. Loss of diversity (through increasing specialisation on organic farms) was associated with a loss of quality. Protection of biodiversity and species richness in semi-natural habitats was less frequently discussed; only the researchers talked about increases in biodiversity on organic farms. However, the wider concept of protecting nature was frequently discussed, and nature conservation might have been included in this concept.

In **Italy** the subject of biodiversity was discussed in the general context of environment protection, but not as a central issue. There were no significant differences in this between the groups of farmers and policy makers. Genetic diversity was not specifically mentioned, but one experienced organic producer talked about integration of his farm with the surrounding environment, touching indirectly on the issue of landscape diversity.

*An organic farm is embedded in the environment; it is not the organic farm and the land, but it's all land. Once there were borders between woods and my farm because I used to do one activity and the woods did another one. Now the farm is integrated in its context (IT, Em).*

In the **Netherlands**, organic farming and nature conservation were seen as closely related.

*When you look at nature conservation in the Netherlands then you end up looking at agriculture because there is no nature here (maybe some little spots), but almost all nature is shaped, influenced or directed by agriculture. Organic agriculture makes sense because it is so close to nature (NL, Rf).*

In **Switzerland** the protection of diversity was a topic of discussion mainly in the groups of mountain farmers, who talked about the need for preserving natural living spaces for future generations. The recently converted farmers discussed a link between organic farming and the protection of old varieties of potatoes and other vegetables, and rare breeds of livestock, which in one case was mentioned as a motive for organic farming. They also were concerned about species diversity in the meadows, which increases the quality of the feed for the cattle.

The newly converted group of mountain farmers discussed the complex relationship between the landscape and tourism, which offers opportunities and poses threats at the same time.

*We need to present products through holiday experiences (CH, Cf).*

*We should take care of our Alps in such a way that our cattle and the tourists enjoy it (CH, Cm).*

Participants in the **UK** saw the negative environmental impacts of conventional agriculture as mainly related to loss of biodiversity. In both the groups of established organic producers, conservation and wildlife came up as first associations and as motives for conversion. Promoting or increasing diversity was seen as an innate value of organic farming. Among the group of other professionals, the ecology of agricultural systems and conservation were important motives for their involvement with organic farming.

#### 4.3.4 Naturalness

Naturalness as a concept within organic farming was discussed mainly in the Netherlands and in the UK, but the Austrian team commented on the fact the German terms environmental protection (*Umweltschutz*) and protection of nature (*Naturschutz*) were used interchangeably. The absence of a specific section in the Austrian and the Swiss national reports may be a result of difficulties in the translation of specific terms and so do not necessarily indicate that the concepts were not discussed.

In **Austria**, some groups discussed the role of organic farming as a pioneer for conventional systems in developing innovations for a variety of purposes, including how to work in natural cycles and thus develop greater independence for agricultural production systems. One group of established organic producers made particular reference to the need to (re)-learn "farming with nature" as an important skill.

Producers, both recently converted and established organic, associated working on an organic farm with the idea of managing a living organism, with the synergies and complexities being similar to natural cycles. Some producers agreed that their way of producing was somehow an imitation of what nature does normally. Although this general area was not central, management of the farm as an organism, inspiration

from nature, and harmony were among the concepts discussed by producers in **Italy**.

*Organic farming gives you the idea of a better balance in doing things, in producing them; in a way, what you're doing makes sense; it's a cycle, a balanced production, and part of something wider (IT, Ef).*

Naturalness was among the first associations with the word *organic* among the arable producers in the **Netherlands**, and working with nature, cultivating nature, and trust in nature's processes were represented in their value-clusters. The group of researchers in the Netherlands attached importance to naturalness, integrity, and the connectedness of the farmer with plants and animals. The Dutch researchers, for example, referred to the need for patience to let nature do its job of self-regulating problems before humans interfere.

In **Switzerland** established organic producers saw *respecting nature* and *learning from nature* as positive values in organic agriculture, which were part of their philosophical commitment. This included respect for the dignity of all living organisms in developing systems that should be "suitable for everyone and everything" (CH, Rm).

In the **UK**, naturalness was discussed mainly in the group of researchers, but they found it difficult to define. While the researchers mainly referred to *natural* in comparison to synthetic chemicals (see 4.3.5 below) and in the sense of mimicking natural processes, the producers used *natural* in a wider sense as the opposite to anything *unnatural*.

*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 (UK, Em).*

#### **4.3.5 Conflicts involving organic farming values related to the principle of ecology**

Established organic producers in **Austria** saw conflicts between the protection of nature and the protection of the consumer: they thought that consumers tended to express naïve ideas about conservation and environmental protection.

*There are conflicts and the consumers are too idealistic. They are already disappointed if you have an 80 horsepower tractor (AT, Em).*

Further conflicts were identified in relation to international trade and the long-distance transportation of organic products, which were seen as being in conflict with the aim of minimising resource use (see also 4.6.2 Proximity and the importance of local networks).

In **Italy** participants referred to a conflict between environmental protection and organic farming as a natural consequence of human activity. This was considered to happen even if organic farming was less harmful than conventional farming.

*Every year we ruined a part of nature, from another side we preserve it; we're practising a preserving agriculture (IT, Em).*

The **Dutch** participants saw conflicts between the organic value of closed production cycles and economic pressures. Because the manure has little market value, the economy rules above organic values. The researchers agreed on the importance of the values related to the ecological principle but saw conflicts arising.

*Organic agriculture has developed due to environmental problems in the western world. However, when the market grows and products are being imported, new environmental and welfare problems arise. The organic sector should take care of providing a good income to the farmers elsewhere, and have preconditions regarding transport (energy), production and packaging (NL, Rf).*

In **Switzerland** converting producers mentioned a conflict between diversity and labour requirements. The staff of one organic organisation discussed "organic imperialism", meaning trade in organic products without any social standards and disregard of the need for equal distribution of food. Others claimed that food production in itself conflicts with nature and highlighted that this was specifically addressed in their standards.

*Agricultural methods for cultivating crops for humans are always interfering with nature (CH, Pm).*

In Switzerland, conflicts with societal values emerged mainly in the established organic farmers' focus groups. Among lowland farmers, one conflict dealt with the question of whose responsibility it should be not to use inputs: one farmer felt that he would be penalised for using inputs, whereas advisors and manufacturers of inputs were not charged with any such responsibility. Moreover, rules for organic production in Switzerland stricter than those in the EU were seen as unfair. The established organic producers saw potential conflict between ecological needs and the needs of the market.

*Ecology should be aligned with the reaction of markets and customers' needs so that a synergy exists. However, when the market asks for more vegetable production, it does not respect ecology (balance) (CH, Em).*

In the **UK** producers were concerned about a potential conflict between the scale of the organic movement and farm diversity; farmers feared that organic sector growth and market concentration 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, and 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 (UK, Ef).*

The UK researchers were concerned about whether to use "natural" or "synthetic" chemicals within organic systems as illustrated by the following argument.



*I think there's another specific thing with the pesticide thing, which is ... about avoiding synthetic substances and being pure or natural .... This is ... over and above the biodiversity and negative impacts and non-polluting (UK, Rf).*

and in reply:

*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 it's natural (UK, Rm)?*

The group of converting producers in the UK expressed some concern that increasing agri-environment policies may remove conservation as a distinguishing feature of organic systems. However, participants felt that reducing the intensity of production on the whole farm might be more appropriate than setting aside certain areas.

#### **4.3.6 Summary and conclusions on the principle of ecology**

The term *organic* was associated by producers in all five countries with closed production cycles and reduced external inputs, as well as conservation/protection of the environment or biodiversity. These themes reappeared among motives for conversion and in the discussion of shared organic values, confirming the great importance of environmental protection to all participants in the focus groups.

Soil and soil fertility were mentioned among first associations in some countries, but with the exception of the arable group in the Netherlands, the topics were not discussed in any great detail. Where discussions took place, these were in the contexts of agricultural sustainability and of soil as the basis for a healthy production system.

Diversity was also among the first associations in all countries for all types of stakeholder. It was among the reasons for involvement with the organic sector, and it was referred to again in the subsequent discussions in relation both to enterprise diversity to minimise farm business risk and to environmental and biodiversity conservation.

In all countries, there were discussions on working with natural cycles and on learning from or respecting nature, which were seen in Switzerland as very important values in organic agriculture. In the UK the researchers discussed in a more academic way whether there was a clear difference between natural and other external inputs.

Discussions about sustainability are reported under the principle of care (see 4.5.1) although they relate to other IFOAM principles including the principle of ecology.

## 4.4 Values related to the principle of fairness

### Box 3: The principle of fairness

*Organic Agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.*

Fairness is characterized by equity, respect, justice and stewardship of the shared world, both among people and in their relations to other living beings.

This principle emphasizes that those involved in organic agriculture should conduct human relationships in a manner that ensures fairness at all levels and to all parties: farmers, workers, processors, distributors, traders and consumers. Organic agriculture should provide everyone involved with a good quality of life and contribute to food sovereignty and reduction of poverty. It aims to produce a sufficient supply of good quality food and other products.

This principle insists that animals should be provided with the conditions and opportunities of life that accord with their physiology, natural behaviour and well-being.

Natural and environmental resources that are used for production and consumption should be managed in a way that is socially and ecologically just and should be held in trust for future generations. Fairness requires systems of production, distribution and trade that are open and equitable and account for real environmental and social costs.

Concepts and values related to the principle of fairness were discussed in all countries (see Table 15). Securing the farm income or the long-term financial sustainability of agriculture was consistently seen as a very important value (see also sustainability in general under 4.5.1), whereas most other dimensions of the fairness principle were not discussed in every country. Discussions about animal welfare are also relevant to this principle; these are reported together with animal health under heading 4.6.1. Some of the discussions about food quality, already covered in the section on the principle of health (heading 4.2.2), are also relevant to this principle. In terms of spreading the risk and providing a more stable income, the issue of diversity can also be related to farm incomes and thus also to the principle of fairness, but the material relevant to this topic is covered under heading 4.3.3 in the section on the principle of ecology.

**Table 15: Concepts and values related to the principle of fairness**

	AT	IT	NL	CH	UK
Securing farm income	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fair prices			✓	✓	✓
Independence from/costs of inputs	✓	✓		✓	✓
Rural employment, lifestyle, family farm	✓		✓	✓	✓

In **Austria** farmers were concerned about their income and about the gradual loss of diversity in farming systems, for which industrialisation and globalisation were held partly responsible. The well-established organic producers discussed independence

from farm inputs. Organic farming and direct marketing were seen as options for the survival of holdings, even very small ones, and the subsidies were considered to play a major role by the more recently converted producers. The fact that organic farming creates jobs was seen as a value in itself, and one group discussed job opportunities for women in this context. The quality of life enabled by organic farming was mentioned in three groups in Austria as a first association with the word *organic*.

In **Italy** values related to the principle of fairness were frequently mentioned not only by producers but also by researchers and policy makers. Ensuring a good quality of life for producers was considered a shared value, and the concern about assuring a decent farm income was by far the most important aspect shared by all groups and participants. However, only one person (from the group of policy makers) associated livelihood values spontaneously with the term *organic*.

*I say quality, sustainability, and for sure remuneration (IT, Rm).*

In the **Netherlands** livelihood/equity was among the arable farmers' first associations related to the principle of fairness, whereas the dairy and biodynamic producers discussed fairness-related values in relation to their experiences in developing countries. Many producers mentioned values related to the fairness principle among their motives for conversion. Values related to trade and the import of organic products were the most important in this category among the researchers.

Most of the focus groups in **Switzerland** discussed values relevant to all the major aspects of the fairness principle. Securing farm income was extensively discussed and was expressed as three main issues: farm income, prices, and subsidies. Diversification was mentioned mainly by experienced organic farmers.

In the **UK**, discussions relevant to the fairness principle covered topics including social well-being in general, the need for profitability or financial sustainability for the farmer, affordability to consumers, and local/regional structures. Detailed discussions relating to the fairness principle focused on issues of securing the farm income and profitability, mixed enterprise structure and diversification to minimise risk, and lifestyle issues related to working on a farm, as explained in the following sections.

#### 4.4.1 Securing farm income

In the discussions on the issue of securing farm income, a number of different dimensions were covered in greater or lesser depth in the various countries. These included the role of subsidies and a question on whether organic or conventional farming can guarantee better incomes. Many of these discussions also covered fair prices for organic producers, as reported below (see 4.4.2).

In **Austria** the value of *securing the farm income* was attributed great importance among all the focus groups of farmers. Within this discussion, relevant topics included diversity, independence from farm inputs, direct sales, and subsidies. Farmers debated whether subsidies like the Austrian agri-environmental programme (*ÖPUL*) should be more socially oriented, and they discussed the concept of fair prices. They were concerned that ending subsidies would lead to abandonment of many holdings, especially smaller ones.

In **Italy** the topic of farm income attracted attention in all the focus groups, including the producers and the policy makers. Everyone agreed on the necessity of assuring a good remuneration for producers.

*In order to spread, organic farming needs to be considered not as a philosophy but as an economic resource ... (IT, Ef).*

However, ideas about how to assure sufficient income were quite variable. Some producers, both experienced and newly converted, considered subsidies important because the whole community benefits from the efforts of organic farmers in terms of costs saved for soil and environmental protection and some policy makers agreed with that.

*Organic farmers' incomes should be sustained; this is a duty because organic farmers are asked not only to produce according to organic methods but also to preserve land in a certain way (IT, Rm).*

Others, mainly among the experienced organic producers, did not like the idea of being dependent on subsidies, possibly because of professional pride. They considered that subsidies would make them feel less inclined to consider market factors in their decision-making.

Financial considerations were clearly among the important motives for conversion in **Switzerland**. Mainly in the mountain areas, organic farming was seen as an opportunity for survival as a farmer. Among established organic farmers, however, farming organically was no longer seen as providing a guarantee of a secure existence, but rather as assuring a more stable income. A high quality end-product to add value and direct marketing to attract customers were seen as good ways to secure income. The focus group of recently converted farmers felt that people pay more attention to animal welfare than the welfare of farmers or the financial sustainability of farming. They saw a need to complement the family income with a second job (e.g. as a bus driver), but they did not want to give up farm activities because of the job satisfaction. Sufficient farm size was seen as important in achieving income sustainability for farmers' families. In the Swiss mountain area, there were complaints that farming organically was not economically sustainable: 75% said they were not making a profit.

Although Swiss focus group discussions concluded that subsidies were necessary, some participants said that grant funds were not distributed in proportion to real farmed land and to real needs. There was a negative view that very low intensity farming was only done because of the payments. However, mountain farmers emphasised that they not would be able to survive without subsidies. One recently converted farmer suggested that direct payment rates should be based on labour requirements rather than on cultivated area.

In the **Netherlands** securing farm income appeared to be the most important value related to the fairness principle. The environment and life opportunities were seen as important both for farmers close to home and for people in developing countries. Life opportunities in this context were defined as development opportunities that provide fair incomes, good working conditions for employees, and a good environment for people who live in the region. For the farmers, the continuity and generational

succession of the family farm was a very important value, which was mentioned by many participants even in their introductions. Within the group of biodynamic farmers, some participants had personal experience of the effect of western countries' overproduction on agricultural development in third world countries. They thought about the topic of securing the farm income in the context of other farmers in developing countries, in the sense of *Think globally, act locally*. At least for one farmer, this aspect of the fairness principle was more important than values related to the ecological principle. He stated:

*For me it is more important not to produce at the cost of people in the third world than to achieve a closed cycle on my farm (NL, Em).*

Many of the producers in the **UK** pointed out that they needed to secure an income from the farm. Some established organic producers thought that they had found their niche in the market; however, others said they had made reasonable amounts of money in the past but were no longer so confident about their income.

There were differences in terminology between converting and established organic producers. Established producers stated that they were farming to make a living and would like it to continue that way but did not really like to talk about profit.

*It's a dirty word, 'profit' (UK, Em).*

Their avoidance of the word *profit* implied concerns that aiming solely for higher profits could impinge on other organic values, such as those relating to environmental issues and animal welfare. They felt that it was a distinguishing feature of organic agriculture for its practitioners to be influenced by a wider set of values than those operating in conventional farming. The converting producers did not have the same aversion; the consensus in this group 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 (UK, Cm)?*

Being able to maintain farm income was an important part of the motivation to go organic for the converting producers. However, when challenged directly whether they were only farming for profit, they all disagreed vehemently but stated that the conversion grant had given them the financial security to be able to convert. Some were disappointed now that the markets were not as strong as expected and that they were not significantly better off than conventional farmers, but no one was considering reversion to conventional farming.

#### **4.4.2 Fair and transparent prices**

In Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK, the concept of a fair or transparent price was discussed in some detail. In the Netherlands, fair trade and social relations among workers and traders were discussed in the context of working conditions and payments in the developing world.

*When you import coffee, you should take care the farmer gets a good income instead of being a labourer on a plantation where only the landowner benefits (NL, Rf).*

In Switzerland, getting a better price through certification and labelling was seen as important by established organic producers, and many farmers wished that the price of organic food products would increase. Swiss producers attributed low food prices to the lack of willingness among consumers to pay more, but some had visions of fair prices in the future.

*The vision of the future for me is a fair price, not a price determined by the state; in that way farmers can sustain and develop (CH, Em).*

However, one group of the established producers in the UK (England) complained about the current downward pressure on organic prices caused by the involvement of multiple retailers.

*Their price structure [of the supermarkets], in my case the pigs, is no way offering us a lifeline, not at all. That's why I try to ... [sell at] 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 (UK, Em).*

Organic organisation staff in Switzerland saw a contradiction between mass production at a low price and the principle of fairness in organic farming, and fairness was mentioned in connection with price transparency.

*“[It is ironic that] conventional food should cost more, so that with the “profit” (meaning: the environment taxes) the damage to nature can be repaired. (CH, Em).*

The group of researchers and professionals in the UK felt that food prices had to rise to provide a fair reward to 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 (UK, Rm).*

#### **4.4.3 Reducing input costs and achieving independence from agro-chemicals**

This topic is closely related to material already covered under the principle of ecology, especially under heading 4.3.1. The concept of cyclical production was highlighted by discussions referring to re-use, re-cycling, and independence from external inputs. In Austria, Switzerland, and the UK, discussions linked this topic to saving input costs and improving farm incomes.

In **Austria**, this argument was discussed only in the group of longest-established organic farmers, for whom the independence from input suppliers was as important as saving the costs. The farmers argued that this requires management changes,

such as reducing the emphasis on high milk yields in the breeding of dairy cows. In **Italy** the recently converted producers briefly discussed reducing the farm's dependence on external inputs in relation to the high costs of certain inputs. In **Switzerland** the group of established organic lowland farmers was concerned that many farmers often do not cover their production costs, but a farmer in this group expressed his conviction that organic agriculture is ...

*... the only sustainable production system, which allows farmers to be independent from the chemical industry (CH, Em).*

In the **UK** both converting and established organic producers referred to a vicious circle of input-dependency, in which they had previously felt trapped - having to use more and more inputs such as veterinary medicines, fertilisers and pesticides. One producer, referring to a neighbouring farm, described this as a costly treadmill:

*I think the biggest motivation for them was a great dissolution with the conventional system ... the treadmill that they had got into from the inputs they had to put in to grow a crop, ... and financially that they weren't making any money; that was the biggest reason that they changed over. (UK, Em).*

Organic conversion allowed them to return to a more natural balance for their farms, which helped to secure income. Other UK producers mentioned aspects of self-sufficiency and cost savings on fuels and fertilisers.

#### 4.4.4 Rural employment and lifestyle

Issues of the rural lifestyle and generating employment were discussed in Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK. Relevant topics included the job satisfaction that farmers derive from farming organically, along with other values related to organic farming as a profession, which are discussed below.

In **Austria** the group of researchers saw the fact that organic farming creates jobs as a value in itself, but farmers saw the higher labour requirements rather as a burden or excessive strain. Aspects of the quality of life enabled by organic farming were mentioned in the groups of long-term established organic farmers and the researchers. Organic farming was seen as the "only reasonable way", which allows a certain quality of life for the family on the holding, but pressure for growth was regarded as a problem. In the group of established organic producers, quality of life issues were among their first associations with the word *organic*. It was pointed out that the children of organic farmers take over the holdings with great interest. The researchers highlighted the job opportunities for women in organic farming, especially in relation to direct sales. The group of recently converted farmers commented on the extremely good cooperation and openness among the organic farmers, but regional differences in these working relationships were also mentioned. The value of nationwide cooperation of all organic farmers' associations was seen as a positive aspect, but was also criticised.

Issues of lifestyle and rural employment were not reported from the discussion in **Italy**. However, in **Switzerland** the high labour requirement of organic farming was discussed from different perspectives. Many farmers mentioned that organic farming has greater labour requirements but that this work is underpaid; they considered

that the additional costs of creating the added value of an organic product are not always recognised. Diversification was seen as a way to generate further employment, and training young people, as a way to recruit more workers. Some farmers commented on the high workload and the hard physical work, which make such a burden of working as a farmer. Nevertheless, in almost all groups in Switzerland, organic farming was associated with quality of life. One recently converted lowland farmer said:

*Agriculture gets more attractive when converting to organic farming, even for the family (CH, Cm).*

However, women's conditions on organic farms were perceived in **Switzerland** less positively than in the focus groups in Austria. They were described as physically and psychologically hard because of disappointing incomes, and mountain farmers wanted to communicate to consumers how hard the work and life of farmers is. For producers in all groups in Switzerland, it was most important to be able to keep a farm in same family over several generations.

*The farm should be managed to sustain a family economically and to enable continuity as an organic farm (CH, Cm).*

In some cases, the farm was now being managed organically by the second generation, who wanted to be able to continue this way.

In the **Netherlands**, rural lifestyle and family succession for farms were very important issues. The organic dairy farmers touched on this even in the introductions. Part of their motivation to work in organic agriculture was a feeling of responsibility for society; being an organic farmer was seen as securing not only ones own income but also that of others. Their children were involved in the development and continuity of their farms and in decisions on how to take care of the farm and the animals. Other organic farmers were seen as colleagues rather than competitors.

In the **UK** focus group discussions, organic farming was credited with a quality of life dimension, and conversion was associated with lifestyle changes such as searching for a wholesome way of living. Some researchers referred to social well-being as an important value of organic farming. Some established organic producers had been attracted to organic farming through their interest in gardening and developing self-sufficiency on a smallholding, which had developed into growing vegetables for the market. Two producers had converted because of personal health constraints: the conversion had allowed them to reduce their workload by reducing stock numbers. A number of producers mentioned their job satisfaction in this way of farming: organic farming was a challenge because they needed to develop methods for their own farms without following blueprint solutions, but this offered more opportunities for personal development.

#### **4.4.5 Conflicts between the principle of fairness and other organic values**

This was the most important area in which value conflicts were discussed across all groups and countries. In **Austria**, financial necessities and the great number of



regulations were seen as an area of value conflict, especially in relation to animal husbandry. Producers from smallholdings were concerned about the future of their livelihoods in organic farming. Recently converted farmers addressed conflicts between economic survival and diversity, and between globalisation and fair prices for organic products. Another perceived value conflict involved the expectation that organic products should be available for all consumers, which was seen as threatening the survival of smallholders.

**Italian** producers were concerned about low remuneration of organic farmers and tried to identify reasons for this; many producers saw this as a problem for the whole agricultural sector.

*I always thought that organic farming was the only choice to escape from a situation where everybody earns but the producer. It was a hope. Now I really doubt it (IT, Cm).*

Another commonly made point was the lack of marketing structure in the organic sector, which provides less access to supply the big distribution chains. However, there was no specific reference to organic sector values contrasting with livelihood or fairness to producers.

In **Switzerland**, the main discussion focused on a potential conflict between financial pressure and different dimensions of sustainability. Staff of the organic organisation pointed out that internalisation of external costs in agriculture would create a more level playing field for organic farming.

*Agriculture should principally have all external costs internalised. Organic farming represents the future ideal farming system when the real macro-economic costs, such as environment costs and transport costs, should be reflected in the product cost. This is the logical consequence of organic farming (CH, Om).*

Another value conflict identified was between diversification and the farm workload. Researchers were concerned about communicating the costs of potential social standards and other new standards in organic farming, which could lead to even higher prices for the consumer.

In the **UK**, focus groups perceived conflicts between profitability and values. Established organic producers saw the need for political lobbying for the organic farming sector, which they thought should take a stand against agri-business and in favour of the environment and nature. Shareholders' desire to make a profit was seen as being in conflict with a more sustainable development process. UK producers in general were concerned that *making a profit* should not be allowed to have a negative impact on other organic values, especially food quality, but they expected the principle of fairness to apply to their own incomes. Both the focus groups of experienced organic producers saw the supermarkets' policy of low prices as conflicting directly with their own need for livelihood and profitability. The current financial climate of agriculture was seen as conflicting with a value-driven approach like organic farming.

However, in the group of researchers, it was pointed out that it was not so much that values were in conflict with each other (e.g. sustainability and fair trade) but

that conflicts or difficulties would be encountered in achieving both sets of values. The researchers saw the fair price as a way to enable producers to meet many of the other organic agriculture values. Mainly the smaller producers saw a conflict between diversity and profitability. The costs of complying with current regulations (such as food hygiene) limit the number of enterprises that a farm can have and so create a driver towards greater specialisation, especially for smaller farms.

#### 4.4.6 Summary of values related to the fairness principle

In summary, maintaining their income was of concern to all the participating producers, and the concern was shared by other stakeholders, such as policy makers in Italy. Financial sustainability was seen as difficult to achieve in agriculture, but farmers saw opportunities to improve incomes on organic farms through direct payments, direct sales initiatives, and higher consumer price premiums for organic products. Although farmers' work is hard, most participants considered that organic farming can represent a good working opportunity, especially for young generations, and can be satisfying as it brings more people back to the land.

Participants in some countries worried that farm support payments might be "unfair", but they were recognised as an incentive to farm organically. Many producers stated clearly that despite their desire to maintain a fair income, they did not want to sacrifice all other values for profitability. Converting farmers were especially explicit that they were farming to make a living. However, with the possible exception of distribution problems in Italy, financial problems with food production were not considered as especially *organic* issues.

The issue of a fair price was approached from two angles. Some groups discussed the value of keeping organic products affordable to a wide range of consumers. However, established organic producers felt that the growing involvement of multiple retailers, with its resulting downward pressure on prices, could endanger their livelihoods in the long term, and many of them, especially vegetable producers, talked about developing alternative marketing outlets.

Producers expressed the belief that farming organically gave them greater flexibility and independence, especially from the agro-business sector. Overall, producers were proud to be able to make a living whilst practising what they considered a more environmentally benign approach, but they saw this as conflicting with external societal values.

Most farmers were aiming for long-term sustainability in their systems and talked about the value of being able to pass on the family farm to future generations. Generating employment through organic farming was discussed; the emphasis among the farmers was on the difficulty of managing higher workloads, but researchers and policymakers saw a more general value in creating more work.

Conflicts between livelihood and other values were discussed in all groups; the increasing economic pressure to produce cheaper food was seen as conflicting with high quality and organic production. In particular, there were seen to be conflicts involving diversification, labour requirements, and economies of scale.

## 4.5 Values related to the principle of care

### Box 4: The principle of care

*Organic Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.*

Organic agriculture is a living and dynamic system that responds to internal and external demands and conditions. Practitioners of organic agriculture can enhance efficiency and increase productivity, but this should not be at the risk of jeopardizing health and well-being. Consequently, new technologies need to be assessed and existing methods reviewed. Given the incomplete understanding of ecosystems and agriculture, care must be taken.

This principle states that precaution and responsibility are the key concerns in management, development and technology choices in organic agriculture. Science is necessary to ensure that organic agriculture is healthy, safe and ecologically sound. However, scientific knowledge alone is not sufficient. Practical experience, accumulated wisdom and traditional knowledge offer valid solutions, tested by time. Organic agriculture should prevent significant risks by adopting appropriate technologies and rejecting unpredictable ones, such as genetic engineering. Decisions should reflect the values and needs of all who might be affected, through transparent and participatory processes.

The most important value directly related to the principle of care is that of sustainability, which was discussed in all countries and received high scores in both Switzerland and the UK focus group votes. Unlike the IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture text, the producers in this study tended to use the word *sustainability* directly rather than referring to care for the needs of future generations.

**Table 16: Values related to the principle of care**

	AT	IT	NL	CH	UK
Sustainability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Taking care to avoid residues and GM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

From the discussions in all countries, two values can be most directly related to the principle of care: *sustainability*, and *taking care to avoid the risk of chemical residues*, which were both discussed all countries. The definition of the word *sustainability* is notoriously broad and ambiguous as reflected in the discussions covering the three dimensions of sustainability (economic, social and environmental), which inevitably involved a range of values related to more than one of the IFOAM principles. However, given that the farmers often discussed all three dimensions together, values related to sustainability are reported here together under the same heading, with some exceptions.

The values of *environmental protection* and *conservation of biodiversity* are related to the principle of care, but are covered above in the section on the principle of ecology (under heading 4.3.3). The avoidance of residues in relation to GMOs was

discussed at any length only in some groups in Austria and in the UK. Some other related issues are summarised below under heading 4.6.4 "Professional pride", which refers to the special skills needed to be an organic farmer and the producers' pride in their achievements.

#### 4.5.1 Sustainability

In **Austria** sustainability was considered a strong value and was discussed in all focus groups except one group of well-established organic producers. Particularly in the group of researchers, participants considered traditional peasant farming (*Bäuerliche Landwirtschaft*) as a prime example of sustainable thinking, which they considered to be an overarching concept and to encompass a number of other values such as environmental protection, regional production, social and cultural aspects, and innovation. In groups of established organic producers, sustainability was seen as self-explanatory and strongly connected to organic farming, but some farmers referred to difficulties in achieving sustainability while also surviving economically early during their organic farm conversions. In one focus group, discussions did not directly use the term *sustainability* but clearly implied reference to the concept in relation to limiting the use of scarce resources.

In **Italy** many producers agreed that sustainability should be a strong and important value for organic food production, this must be communicated to consumers, and policy makers should pay for this.

*[Organic farming] is the only human activity consistent with the possibility of preserving and recovering the environment in which we're living. If we don't take this path, there's no future (IT, Cm).*

*That is why our strength is that we do not burden society with costs for land recovery and preservation (IT, Cm).*

From the coded transcripts in the **Netherlands**, it is clear that the ability of the system to sustain itself for future generations was an important value in almost all groups, but the national report did not use the term sustainability as such.

*In 50 years we want to pass a healthy country to future generations (NL, Ef).*

In **Switzerland** the converting farmers referred to organic as a system of *healthy, sustainable production*, but one established organic Swiss farmer was sceptical about the word *sustainable*, which he saw as a trendy word that was not a true value. However, participants generally saw a need to consider all three major dimensions of sustainability (economic, social and ecological) together when developing organic farming systems.

*[It is] strategically successful to keep the three dimensions together when farming organically. (CH, Em).*

There was some recognition of the difficulty of achieving all three dimensions of sustainability. Some of the farmers were concerned that humans should not be allowed to be the central focus point, as this would contradict the holistic approach than involves all dimensions. However, the staff of the organic organisation

considered it important that organic agriculture maintains its human dimension in a world of globalisation and growing anonymity of markets.

Sustainability was an important value discussed in all four groups in the **UK**, but it is important to note that the word appeared to mean different things to different people. Producers talked about sustainability in the various contexts of the environment, of recycling within the farm, of local production, of financial sustainability, and of the security of food production in the future, 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 (UK, Em).*

*Security of future production, we need to produce food sustainably ... into the future... and secure that it hasn't got residues etc. (UK, Em).*

*Sustainability: that's keeping things within the farm, without bringing too many things in, just moving the cycle around (UK, Em).*

Sustainability was also associated with the long-term viability of the family farm and with passing on the land in better condition than it was before. Food security was seen as especially important for developing countries, particularly by those who had personal experience of working there, but some questioned what role certified organic production has to play in providing food security.

#### 4.5.2 Responsibility and taking care

In all groups in **Austria**, discussions touched on taking care, respect and responsibility for nature, and in one group, responsibility for health was discussed in the context of sustainability. Opposition both to synthetic crop protection and to GMOs was frequently mentioned in discussion among converting and established organic producers.

*Half a year ago, I sold my sprayer and that was a really good day for me (AT, Cm).*

Reducing the risk of ground water pollution was discussed, and in the first associations there was criticism of maximising production without limits and of agricultural policies that force farmers to use undesirable inputs. Avoiding the use of GMOs was discussed by the researchers and touched on in one group of established organic producers.

In **Italy** the perceptions of farmers and policy makers about organic farming focused quite strongly on avoiding chemicals and residues, and on the feeling of taking care of the environment, as illustrated by many of their first associations with the term *organic*, such as *not contaminated*, *residue-free*, and *clean*. The producers expressed real concern about the future of the environment and their need to take care of it, a concern that was shared by researchers and policy makers.

*[Organic farming] is the only human activity consistent with the possibility of preserving and recovering the environment in which we're living. If we don't take this path, there's no future (IT, Cm).*

Avoiding GMOs was briefly discussed in only two groups, but all groups mentioned avoiding chemicals and other substances dangerous for the environment or human and animal health as a motive for involvement with organic farming.

*I come from chemical farming. I wanted to change partly because I felt a bit guilty while selling my products at the market because I knew what pesticide I had put in them; I knew what was written behind [the bottle], and I didn't feel honest about it (IT, Cm).*

In the **Netherlands** the values related to the principle of care were among the first associations of all groups, but they featured in the more detailed discussions only in two of the groups of established organic producers. The researchers appeared to assume that taking care is already embedded in other values they had discussed, especially those related to ecology, but also to livelihood, animal welfare and soil. Participants in the producer focus groups attributed importance to social responsibility, which is a value related to both the principles of care and fairness (see 4.4). In talking about their value-cluster *Care and respect for human beings, animals and plants* (see Table 7), they included the concept of "care-taking farms", where disabled, elderly, or physically troubled people find work and a home on special farms; in one focus group it was noted that most of these farms in the Netherlands are now organic. The focus group of organic dairy farmers saw the prevention of pollution, nutrient leaching, and soil erosion as a social responsibility. For one farmer, aversion to chemical-use on plants, animals, and soil was the reason to convert to organic farming. The increasing number of water purification installations was seen as an indication that something was going wrong in conventional agriculture. The dairy farmers mentioned their aversion to GMOs. The arable farmers discussed taking care of nature in a more general sense, and saw the absence of chemical inputs as making this easier.

In **Switzerland** values related to the principle of care were not among the first associations and did not receive much attention in the focus group discussions. Taking care of nature was the relevant issue most often discussed, whereas avoidance of residues and GMOs were not discussed in detail. Producers discussed respect for the environment and for nature, and acting in a responsible manner, and they saw organic products as being "close-to-nature". Taking care was discussed in relation to the concepts of sustainability; respect; and exercising personal responsibility for ecosystems and the environment, despite the needs of the market. In contrast to organic farming, conventional agriculture was seen as "not respectful", even though it has improved in recent years. Staff of the organic organisation also introduced the social dimensions of taking care and discussed integrating the needs of people into the values of organic farming.

All the focus groups in Switzerland mentioned that non-use of chemical inputs was one of the major reasons for converting to organic farming. Food safety was discussed in relation to the absence of harmful residues and the needs of allergic people. Established organic farmers discussed the dependence of conventional agriculture on manufacturers who provide a chemical remedy for any kind of disease. A recently converted lowland farmer mentioned the risk caused by chemical residues

in food as a reason why organic farming tries to avoid spraying and poisoning nature. The student group extended the question of residues and pollution from food to other resources in discussing the importance of having uncontaminated drinking water. Avoiding GMOs was briefly discussed only in one group.

In the **UK** experienced organic producers' and the professionals' first associations with the word *organic* included terms like *working in balance with nature*, *minimising man's impact on nature* as well as avoiding pesticides residues and GM contamination; they continued these themes to some extent in their later discussions. One established producer defined organic as non-aggressive or benign, which expressed for her the need to pass on a world that is better than the one we inherited. Three groups discussed *safety*, meaning that production systems should be safe for production workers, consumers, and the food and farming system as a whole. Some producers particularly appreciated that organic methods allowed them to avoid certain chemical inputs they regarded as dangerous.

*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 got GM; we don't use [high risk] things (UK, Em).*

Members of the focus group of experienced producers in Wales intensely discussed the threat that GM technology might pose to organic farming.

#### 4.5.3 Value conflicts related to the principle of care

In **Austria** farmers, especially converting producers, saw a danger that the emphasis on avoiding residues in the product may lead to a shift from inspection of the production process towards proving instead that organic products are free from pesticides. Researchers felt that some criticisms of organic quality claims, under the umbrella of consumer protection, are unjustified.

In **Italy**, conflicts mentioned in relation to this principle focused on the political situation regarding GMOs. Farmers felt that society or government could cause them many problems by permitting GMOs to be cultivated.

*The game with GMOs is still open, still to be played; just think that if investigation on them is allowed, in a few years they will tell us that there are no consequent effects... (IT, Cm).*

In **Switzerland**, one conflict between organic practices and the value of *taking care* was seen in relation to the use of inputs, especially copper. The principle of care was also seen as sometimes conflicting with the requirements of the market.

#### 4.5.4 Summary of values directly related to the principle of care

In the focus groups, a number of values were discussed that directly related to the principle of care. In this report and in the IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture, the subject areas related to respect and responsibility for nature and the environment are included within the principle of ecology (see 4.3 and subheadings), and social care values are related to the fairness principle (see 4.4 and subheadings). More specifically related to the principle of care as defined in the IFOAM principles,

the focus groups included intensive discussions about avoiding inputs and reducing the risk of residues in the product, both in relation to chemical inputs and to GMOs. The sustainability of farming systems often meant the ability to pass the farm on to future generations, but this concern involved broad discussions that included the social, economic and ecological aspects of sustainability.

## 4.6 Discussions about other important values

### 4.6.1 Animal health and welfare

In the IFOAM principles, animal health is included in the principle of health, and animal welfare comes into the fairness principle (see Box 5). Although these principles are dealt with under separate headings in this report (see 4.2 and 4.4), the focus groups discussions generally discussed these issues together, so they are reported together in this section.

#### **Box 5: Issues related to animals as mentioned within the IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture**

Principle of health:

*Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animals and human as one and indivisible.*

Explanations in the principle of health:

Health is the wholeness and integrity of living systems. It is not simply the absence of illness, but the maintenance of physical, mental, social and ecological well-being. Immunity, resilience and regeneration are key characteristics of health.

Explanation of the principle of fairness:

This principle insists that animals should be provided with the conditions and opportunities of life that accord with their physiology, natural behaviour and well-being.

Explanations in the principle of ecology:

This principle roots organic agriculture within living ecological systems: for animals it is the farm ecosystem.

Organic agriculture should attain ecological balance through the design of farming systems, establishment of habitats and maintenance of genetic and agricultural diversity.

Discussions about *animal welfare* took place in Italy, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the UK. Focus groups in most countries, with the exception of Italy, also discussed *animal health*; it had been mentioned as a motive for conversion for some established organic producers, who had experienced animal health problems when farming conventionally. With the exception of Austria, the discussions focused



more on animal welfare than on animal health. Animal welfare was further discussed as an objective that organic farming should deliver. The preservation of *genetic diversity* and *appropriate breeds*, which are mentioned in the principle of ecology, were not discussed in detail in any country.

### **Animal health**

The topic of animal health was not covered in **Italy**. However, animal health was included among the motives for organic conversion in **Austria**, and farmers referred to the cycle of health that includes animals. In two groups in Austria, farmers discussed animal health problems as key motives for organic conversion, and they saw connections to the health of soil and crops (see 4.2.4 under principle of health). The concept of health on organic farms was seen as one of natural or preventative health in contrast to conventional systems' reliance on drugs and medication. Some problems with the organic standards were discussed.

In the **Netherlands**, the groups of livestock farmers discussed both animal health and welfare. However, the established organic dairy producers discussed the aim of improving disease resistance and robustness to prevent health and welfare problems. Where disease existed, they saw herbal and homeopathic treatments as the natural solution, instead of antibiotics. Established organic producers discussed the bio-security risks of animal transport, which can increase the risk of the spreading diseases, and they were worried about the harm transport in itself can do to the animals.

In **Switzerland**, the mountain farmers discussed animal health and related issues: they highlighted the connection between the farming system and disease prevention. One established organic farmer saw parasite problems as more difficult to manage when there is a "monoculture in the livestock husbandry". A recently converted farmer referred to the lower veterinary costs in organic systems, but there was some argument over whether "natural fodder, if not complemented with concentrated feeding stuff" always leads to a better animal health status.

In the **UK**, both animal health and animal welfare were mentioned among the first associations with the word *organic* together with other health issues and the cycle of health (see 3.1) but no further detailed discussion on this topic took place.

### **Animal welfare**

In **Austria**, animal welfare was discussed mainly in only one group of established organic farmers, who criticised what they considered excessive regulation particularly in relation to outdoor access requirements in some mountain regions.

In **Italy**, animal welfare was a subject of disagreement between two established organic cattle farmers over whether cattle should be tied indoors or kept on free-range pasture. They discussed the implications for meat quality, and the two farmers disagreed over how important animal welfare should be in this context.

In the **Netherlands**, all groups except for the arable farmers discussed animal welfare as a value but with varying degrees of attention. Mainly the group of established biodynamic farmers discussed this issue. The Dutch researchers included

connectedness of the farmers with their animals in their first associations with the word *organic*. They saw respect for the animals' integrity and natural behaviour as the basis for good animal husbandry.

*An animal takes what it needs when you give it the opportunity. They develop in the way they need to develop; they have an internal balance to weigh and decide what is good for them. You should give the animal the opportunity to self-regulate; otherwise, you interfere with its system (NL, Rf).*

Rules were seen as important particularly to ensure that newly converting farms have good welfare standards. For the biodynamic farmers, animal welfare was very much part of their daily practice, and the frequency with which it was discussed suggested that this was one of their most important values. They spoke of fodder, behaviour, breeding, health care, disease resistance, and calf rearing all relating to animal welfare.

*The essence of keeping animals organically is that the animal should be able to be "animal"; a cow should graze in the pasture, a chicken should be able to range freely, and a pig should be able to root (NL, Ef).*

The groups of other established organic farmers in the Netherlands saw continuous improvement of animal welfare on their farms as an important goal. The arable farmers did not discuss animal welfare but recognised an important role for animals in closing the production cycle and in enhancing biological processes.

In **Switzerland**, many of the focus groups emphasised that farming organically implies improving animal welfare and accomplishing animal-friendly systems. The researchers first associated animal welfare with adequate animal housing and emphasised that typical organic farms have animals; whereas more groups discussed the need to improve animal welfare. Managing cattle as naturally as possible gave farmers the feeling that their animals were doing better, but this was also necessary for them to meet the consumer expectations for natural animal husbandry systems. Consumers were seen to be influenced by pretty pictures that made them willing to pay a higher price. Mountain farmers emphasised that it is important to care for the Alps (the alpine vegetation), with benefits for both the animals and for tourism.

In the discussions among the groups of organic organisation staff and researchers in Switzerland, animal welfare was related to social responsibility and to a more respectful relationship to nature, resources, and animals; the latter concern included not only farming but also slaughter.

In the **UK**, discussion on animal welfare focused on consumer expectations of organic farming.

*Animal welfare is something ... clearly delivered in organic farming and is a major reason for motivating many people both at the production and consumer end (UK, Em).*

The established organic producers expressed a strong belief that animal welfare would improve when a farming system was brought back into balance; however, a converting hill sheep farmer claimed that her farming practices and animal welfare

had not changed, so she felt there was no reason for organic farmers to claim improved welfare. The researchers were concerned that the organic movement does not pay enough attention to animal welfare (nor to environmental and social issues) compared with product quality and health because the latter are seen as major motives for consumers to buy organic food. They discussed ethology (the study of animal behaviour) and the value of low-input animal production in organic systems, which did not imply lower management intensiveness. The established organic producers in UK discussed the need to reduce the reliance on conventional feed inputs for animals and so to improve the integrity of the organic approach.

### **Value conflicts related to animal health and welfare**

No specific conflicts in relation to health and welfare were reported from Austria or the UK. In the **Netherlands** and **Switzerland**, some groups discussed examples of conflicts between animal welfare and the requirements of the market. In Italy one group discussed the requirements for free-range versus tethered cattle as a potential conflict between animal welfare and food quality.

In the **Netherlands**, these conflicts involved the castration of fattening pigs, vaccination, and the dehorning of cattle. These were seen not as internal organic value conflicts but rather as external conflicts pitting organic values against national regulations and market drivers. For example, fattening pigs may be castrated because the market will not accept the meat of boars due to the risk of a taint in the meat, but castration impairs the animals' welfare. It was stated that the organic regulations allow producers to be "more organic", i.e. to be stricter than the standards. However, there may be an internal organic value-conflict here between animal welfare and the need for adequate farm incomes. Similarly, in **Switzerland** the contradiction between consumer expectations for white calf meat and the respectful care of animals was discussed.

### **4.6.2 Proximity and the importance of local networks**

Values related to a close regional connection between production and consumption of organic food were discussed in all countries. These included various benefits of short supply chains, and trust between producers and consumers was discussed mostly by the producers. Because it is difficult to make clear distinctions between the relevant values, the discussions are summarised for each country in turn. These values are closely related both to the principle of ecology, such as resource use (see 4.3.1 and 4.3.5), and to the principle of fairness (see 4.4). Given that the participants often discussed these values together in the context of regionality, they have been kept together in this section.

#### **Austria**

In Austria, short supply chains and direct sales from the farm were credited with creating work opportunities for women, securing farm income, and allowing producers to make contact with consumers. Short supply chains were discussed as an alternative to globalisation, but sales in supermarkets were also seen as necessary.

A number of discussions centred on the traceability of organic food. The researchers thought it important to allow consumers to trace the origin of food, although established organic producers expected consumers to have confidence in organic products. The converting farmers realised that, in addition to comprehensive controls, openness is needed to help reduce unrealistic expectations and build consumer confidence. Even organic farmers themselves need to be able to trust other organic products.

The researchers saw regionality as an original value of organic farming, contributing more than conventional farming to the maintenance of the regions. There was an expectation in some groups that organic products should be marketed (close to) where they were produced, not on a global scale. It was considered that this emphasis on regionality as an alternative development model to globalisation provides an opportunity for organic farming. The issue of distance was extended to organic farming organisations, and it was considered important that these should be of a reasonably small size, with less bureaucracy, to reduce the distance between the officials and the producers.

Regionality included additional aspects for the researchers, such as nature protection, food quality, independence of the holdings, and a variety of organisational structures. The producers added related concepts of social networks and responsibility towards consumers. It was thought that the regional aspect in marketing should be made clear by specific labels in addition to the certified organic labels, and there was support for the possibility of regionally adapting the organic regulations.

### **Italy**

In Italy, the concepts of *trust* and of *freshness* were both raised as first associations with the word *organic*. Selling directly to consumers was a common aim for many producers because it would allow them to reduce distribution problems, build closer links with their consumers, and sell organic food at a lower retail price. However, some considered this aim difficult to realise: it depended on product attributes, such as the amount of processing required, and on the proximity of the farm to major population centres. Researchers and the staff of organic organisations emphasised the importance of close links between production and consumption, but producers discussed the difficulties of establishing and maintaining such relationships. The feeling of trust between producers and consumers was seen as an important reason for promoting these close links.

*Together with the certificate, people want to see the producer's face. .... It is important to have a direct relationship with the public because the consumer who trusts you makes you do a better job. .... I want people to be happy when eating my meat (IT, C m)!*

### **The Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, the proximity principle was not among the first associations and was not discussed in any detail. Researchers discussed product characteristics in this context, and the arable farmers mentioned trust and direct contact with the consumer.

The researchers appreciated seasonality in short supply chains, for example in terms of the varying flavour of dairy products, but asserted that they did not want to eat only cabbage all winter. Short supply chains were seen as attractive from the point of view of energy conservation, with some expressing their preference for local production over organic.

*I would rather have a conventionally grown apple from my own region than an organic papaya flown in from South America (NL Rf).*

Participants saw an important function of short supply chains in allowing communication to consumers about the realities of agriculture, counterbalancing an anonymous market with a need for honest messages. The producers also felt that they have an important social function in creating local networks and sourcing inputs locally, but they found only limited opportunities to sell their products within the region. It was felt that communication between producers and consumers was needed to identify shared values and improve mutual trust, and that opportunities for farm visits by consumers could help to achieve these goals. The producers thought there was a problem because farmers were not dealing directly with the consumers but through traders and supermarkets with different interests.

### **Switzerland**

In Switzerland, short supply chains were covered in all focus group sessions, and trust was discussed in detail by the group of experienced organic mountain farmers. The producers generally considered that marketing and processing structures should be transparent and that regional dimensions should be used to improve the image of organic agriculture. Apart from increased sales, a major advantage of direct marketing for the experienced organic farmers had been the opportunity to communicate personal commitment and to build a loyal clientele for their farms.

*Consumers can feel, perceive, smell and experience (CH, Cm).*

Others wanted to communicate wider messages to consumers about Swiss agriculture. There was concern that consumers would have difficulty or be unwilling to distinguish between organic and regional products, and that product marketing can be quite misleading in this respect; for example, the "Heidi" label emphasises *natural* but is not necessarily organic.

The farmers saw benefits in knowing how their products reach the market and in reducing the distances that food has to travel. Shorter transport distances were considered to have benefits for animal welfare and meat quality. Producers hoped that short supply chains and decentralised marketing structures would foster a direct relationship among trading partners to help them negotiate fair prices. The producers also saw benefits in sourcing farm inputs from short supply chains:

*I would rather buy Swiss low-input cereals than organic fodder from Rumania (CH, Cm).*

Although well known as an organic logo, the BIO SUISSE logo (the bud) was not seen as appropriate for promoting regional products. In the Swiss farmers' vision of future organic market development, decentralisation and direct and regional

marketing were very important. For some, this link between regional production and regional consumption would be the logical consequence of implementing organic agriculture systems, and it was generally felt to increase job satisfaction for the farmers.

Among researchers and organic organisation staff, the closeness to consumers was also seen as important. For some, this was coupled with an image of small farms and proximity to major population centres. Further issues raised included co-operation with consumers who want to work on farms and the need for farmers to open their doors to communicate real messages about real people working on farms. There was a consensus among these other stakeholders that these are important ways to build trust with consumers, to increase their commitment to organic production, and for farmers to improve their understanding of consumers and their preferences.

Other strategies discussed that might enable organic farmers to build trust in their products included the following:

- Clear differentiation between organic and other natural products
- Unified organic standards for Switzerland and the EU
- Aim to increase consumer appreciation for organic products
- Aim for high standards in production and in caring for the environment

The researchers used the term *authenticity* of organic production to define the way to meet consumer expectations and gain their long-term trust.

Swiss organic farmers felt “penalised” in their own efforts to sell seasonal produce at local markets, when other outlets stock a wide range of organic products throughout the year from anywhere in the world. Other discussions concerned a range of related issues, including the difficulty in changing consumers’ habits, the decreasing time spent on grocery shopping, consumers’ preference for the cheapest food possible, and traders’ lack of consideration for the real costs of production. Some focus groups considered the possibility of policy measures to create a more level playing field for organic food regarding the costs of food transport, such as a transport tax or a carbon tax.

## **UK**

In the UK, local food production and short supply chains were given considerable attention in most groups, particularly the producers, both during the first associations and in the subsequent discussion. Two important dimensions became apparent:

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

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

Trust and openness towards the public were mentioned among the first associations with the word *organic*; it was considered that consumers should be able to know where their organic food comes from, and there should be independent assurance or

verification of the production methods. Producers were clear that having earned the trust of consumers was an important achievement that the organic sector must protect. However, one established organic producer felt that the direct trust between producers and consumer had been replaced by regulations, which were based more on legalistic concerns than on organic principles. This led to a discussion about the bureaucracy involved in the organic sector, which some producers clearly did not like. Others thought it important that organic production involves external verification through inspection, and open communication about what it involves.

The discussions on food miles centred on the energy use of transport. One of the experienced organic producers mentioned self-sufficiency in this context, giving preference to local food. A number of participants were convinced that the growth of the organic sector would now cause organic food to travel longer distances and that increasing food miles (with globalisation) was one of the biggest threats to the organic movement. One group spent 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 also 4.3.1 above). Suggestions in other groups included new organic standards to address this issue, or a tax on food miles.

Support for local networks was mentioned as a first association only by one of the converting producers, and one researcher mentioned working with local breeds in the context of regionality of production. Although local food networks were an important value in all UK groups, it is not clear what the participants considered local, with implied definitions 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.

### **4.6.3 Holism and systems thinking**

Values relating to holism and systems thinking were discussed in a number of groups as one of the main distinguishing features between organic and conventional agriculture. Because there is reference to the systems approach in relation to more than one of the IFOAM principles, in particular that of health (eco-systems health 4.2.3) and ecology (closed production cycles 4.3.1), the discussions are summarised here in a separate section.

#### ***Austria***

In Austria, producers were convinced that having a whole systems way of thinking about agriculture was a feature that distinguishes organic from conventional agriculture, and the researchers considered this systems approach as an alternative to the conventional, industrialised way of farming.

*The tension between ecology and economy is eased by organic farming (AT, Em).*

For the researchers, a wide range of organic values was considered part of a humanist way of thinking and acting, which had to include consideration for the developing world. These values included diversity, regionality, independence, protection of nature, food or process quality, sustainable development, quality of life, social networking, commitment and self-esteem. In the researchers' perspective,

organic farming required intensive care and a comprehensive way of thinking in systems, making the global benefits of organic farming more important than its regional effects. For them, the diversity of organic food systems related not only to ecological values, but also socio-economic, philosophical, and cultural values; organic systems could include a variety of products and farming systems, but some of the values might be incompatible with economic factors.

A number of groups discussed the role of organic farming as a pioneer for conventional systems in developing innovations for a variety of purposes, such as food safety, systems to benefit developing countries, sustainability, quality of life, working in natural cycles, and independence for agricultural production systems. This created a feeling among established organic producers that there was an essential purpose in their work, so they felt privileged to be organic farmers.

### **Italy**

In Italy, a number of organic producers associated organic farming with an alternative way of production or even an alternative life model; this seemed to be more important for the experienced organic producers. A couple of these experienced producers included the concept of *harmony* in their first associations with the word *organic*.

*Difficulties; challenge; harmony; personal satisfaction (IT, Em).*

Producers, both established and recently converted, associated working on an organic farm with the idea of managing a living organism using processes similar to natural cycles (see 4.3.4. Naturalness).

### **Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, holism and systems thinking were intensively discussed in all groups. Related terms were among the first associations of the researchers and the biodynamic farmers; in the latter case this was one of their most important first associations.

In the group of researchers, such values were already quite dominant among the first associations with the word *organic*, referring to the whole farming system including soil, plants, animals and farmers. They considered that a systems approach should be used in problem solving and there should be recognition that all parts of the systems work together. They thought that farming systems should be designed and customised to suit the soil, plants, animals, and humans that are a part of it. The terms *Balance* and *Harmony* were often mentioned.

Patience was seen as necessary to give plants and animals time and opportunity to grow and develop. Self-regulation was seen as an important aspect of the whole system and its component parts. The production chain was defined as a system; interactions occur among all stakeholders in the production chain, and problems can be solved by optimising these interactions.

Holism and system thinking were very important for the Biodynamic farmers. They mentioned these concepts in their first associations with the term *organic*, with



reference to their farms' development and to their problem-solving strategies. Again, *balance* and *harmony* were very often mentioned. All participants supported the statement: "If all values are in harmony, there will be no conflicts between them."

The Dutch organic dairy farmers saw a systems approach as typical for organic farming; when the balance is disturbed, problems occur and you should look for the real causes. They advocated preventative strategies to deal with problems, and suggested that people tend to disturb the balance and so disrupt the self-regulating power of nature.

The arable farmers extensively discussed the farming system; balance and interconnectedness were experienced as a challenge. The system was seen as being always in development, but worries were expressed that new converters might not give the time needed to develop a system that works.

*The new converters think conventionally; they don't have that feeling, nor the intention to do it without those inputs or to optimise their system. It does not get the chance to develop, to get it right. They don't have the patience and as so keep applying minerals (NL, Am).*

The arable farmers also introduced the word *re-production* as a preferred alternative to *production*. They spoke of working with nature instead of against it (see also 4.3.4) and stated that problems they used to have as conventional farmers were reduced now they were organic; this proved to them that the system works.

Holism and systems thinking were very important values of the groups and considered as values that bring together all aspects of the farm. The farm was seen as one system, with another important system being the food network, which includes producers, traders, consumers, and other stakeholders. It was considered important to work with nature and learn from it (see 4.3.4). Systems were seen as self-regulating, such as individual organisms or the soil. *Balance* and *harmony* were words often used and were seen as very important values. The participants said that there should be a balance between the different aspects of the farm but also between the various values of organic farming. The need for a patient, calm approach was emphasised to allow time to grow and develop the system and its products. All groups referred to the systems approach as a way to avoid and resolve problems.

## **Switzerland**

In Switzerland general aspects of these issues were expressed mostly by non-farmers, but the issue of systems thinking and managing the whole farming system was an important topic of discussion in all groups. In the focus group of researchers, their first associations with the word *organic* included respect for the Earth and for its plants, biology and people.

The concept of systems was extended beyond the farm gate. One student participant was interested in the integrity of organic agriculture and in how the actors are aware of being part of a larger system that is not fragmented. Others responded to this point by referring to the wider areas of responsibility for organic actors, for example towards landscape.

The Swiss participants were concerned about the balance of systems in a similar way to those in the Netherlands. Researchers visualised the organic sector as an expression of a holistic philosophy, which was a pleasant area to be involved in. Participants in almost all the focus groups referred to seeing organic agriculture as a whole system, relating this to the cycle of health (see 4.2.3). Experienced organic farmers underlined the importance of producers' commitment to a systems approach, and one suggested that it was better to have fewer organic farmers as long as they were committed to this principle.

The producers saw the organic approach as requiring not only specific technical skills but also a philosophical approach and a religious dimension, which included respect for nature (see 4.3.4). However, researchers in Switzerland saw some of the ideals of the 1968-generation, "promoting peace and love movement" (CH, Rm), reflected in ideals of organic farming. They perceived a conflict arising because any form of agricultural production, including organic farming, involves some interference in nature. They therefore concluded that organic farming should be conducted with respect for nature, for example in animal domestication, forestry, and other agricultural practices.

Regarding the wider food network, they perceived a conflict related to the social system and hence related to the fairness principle, as follows:

*The more actors there are in organic farming, the more the competition increases. At worst, this will mean that the system penalises cooperation between the actors and thus destroys its own basis (CH, Rm).*

## UK

*Systems approach, balanced system, systems integrity, all-roundness, and holism* were all among the first associations with the term *organic* in all groups. Some participants stated that they were struggling to find the right word to describe this concept. Producers felt that implementing a balanced system would enhance its durability 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 (UK, Cf).*

Systems thinking included the dimensions of optimising resource use and minimising the costs of production. For some producers and researchers, adopting such a systems approach should place 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 ... has integrity .... Something that is integral in itself (UK, Em).*

*I think that the ... balance of values is important to maintain (UK, Rm).*

However, there were critical comments about the lack of integrity of the contemporary organic system, particularly in relation to livestock feed derogations,

and there was concern that the organic regulations should not be too prescriptive and should be allowed to evolve so they could be adapted to different situations.

#### **4.6.4 Professional pride about being a good organic farmer**

In discussing the values of organic farming, producers frequently mentioned their pride in being organic farmers and in producing food of good quality with reduced negative impacts on the environment. This is not necessarily an exclusively organic value but a professional one held by all farmers. The producers spent considerable time discussing this issue, which indicates its high level of importance to them. Some of these concepts related to both the principles of care (see 4.5) and fairness (see 4.4). As that they relate to more one of the IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture, they are reported in a separate section. Another strong dimension of the professional values is that of independence from agri-business with enhanced ability to take important decisions independent of outside pressure, which is another value discussed in the section on the principle of fairness.

##### ***Austria***

Both established and converting producers saw organic farming as an interesting challenge that fulfils the desire for innovation. Financial and economic prudence were considered essential for the survival of the holdings, referring to low-input systems and caution in spending.

All groups attached great importance to the opportunity to be independent, and this was identified as a motive for organic conversion. Independence was considered to include the freedom to take decisions, to get active in the various processes, and to be self-sufficient. Independence was often discussed alongside regionality and the survival of a holding, i.e. financial independence with respect to banks, credit institutes and the processing industry. Producers saw this value being increasingly threatened by large corporations, with market concentration leading to increasing dependence.

There was mention of an *organic identity* that should be taken into account in setting organic guidelines even if not all converting farmers identify with it immediately. It was felt that this would allow the standards to be less detailed and prescriptive. Self-esteem, job-satisfaction, and self-realisation or fulfilment were seen as important and as related to the survival of the farm.

These values were seen as conflicting in particular with economic factors such as oversupply of the market, the image that consumers have of farmers, downward trends in prices, and other values of organic farming. The farmers saw a need for greater flexibility in marketing so that the diversity of the sector could be preserved to avoid further "unification" or concentration of Austrian structures.

##### ***Italy***

In Italy values related to professionalism were discussed mostly by the two groups of farmers. These discussions were focused on the need for professionalism in organic cultivation methods, which the producers perceived as challenging.

*The first thing that comes to mind is “difficulty”; if we want to be pessimistic we call it like that; if we want to be optimistic, we call it “challenge” (IT, Em).*

The experienced organic producers considered that this challenge was particularly important during organic conversion; difficulties encountered were balanced by personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement in good farm performance without chemical inputs.

A few producers suggested that conventional agriculture has reduced the abilities of farmers to respond to problems, making them dependent on external inputs and external consultants. Organic farming, in contrast, was thought to allow producers to rediscover skills and professional knowledge.

*When you decide to be an organic farmer you have to change mentality. It's not only a matter of changing practices, [but also more] like changing your job (IT Cm).*

Policy makers and researchers described organic farmers as managers or entrepreneurs rather than simple executors of a technological blueprint developed and learned elsewhere. In contrast, conventional farmers were seen as more schematic and less flexible in responding to problems. An associated value discussed in Italy was that of freedom and independence, especially by one producer who felt that there was greater capacity to do what he thought was the right thing with fewer restrictions.

### **Switzerland**

In Switzerland professionalism, flexibility, and freedom were discussed mainly by lowland producers, although non-farming stakeholders commented from a more general point of view. For some farmers it was important to have positive feedback from consumers and society. One established organic farmer (lowland) remarked on the importance of showing consumers how he manages his farm, and said this can help to develop a positive understanding between producers and consumers.

*What convinced me was that I was able to do something positive for those consumers who were sceptical about traditional agriculture but were interested in healthy food production (CH, Em).*

The producers described working as an organic farmer as self-determined, a matter of choice, pleasurable, and providing new experiences. Organic farmers viewed themselves as being interested in new things and committed to their work. As in Italy, participants described organic farming as a challenge requiring strong commitment to the system itself, and they commented on the need to broaden their knowledge and skills at the beginning of the conversion period.

*[Organic farming represents] a chance to develop oneself professionally as well as within the family (CH, Cm).*

In contrast, they saw little hope in the future of conventional farming. Independence from the chemical industry through closed nutrient cycles was seen as one of the

attractive characteristics of organic agriculture. Producers mentioned a number of times how important it was to work independently.

*[Farming organically] gives the chance to carry out your own business - be your own boss (CH, Cm).*

Farmers felt that they could take independent decisions and so feel responsible for the way they farm, but they saw that this value might be threatened in future, particularly by market developments.

### **Netherlands**

In the Netherlands all focus groups referred to professionalism and related values, which were put at third place in the order of importance. The biodynamic farmers seemed to have a lot of professional pride. Because they converted when there was less of a market for their products, they saw themselves as pioneers. They saw a positive attitude as an important characteristic of the sector. Their work was challenging and constantly changing, with new developments such as letting dairy cows rear their own calves.

*It is a big change, and again pioneers are needed who are strong enough to give it a try. This is typically organic, and it should be always developing (NL, Ef).*

The producers reported experiencing great freedom, which was said to be often under-estimated. Because it is a value-driven system, they did not feel restricted by the rules but kept developing their system. They were proud when individual aspects worked and performed very well to remain sustainable in combination with other aspects, reflecting good agricultural practice. The farmers saw it as important to be able to enjoy work, but also to have leisure time. A typical aspect of this Biodynamic approach is the farm energy, a form of life energy indicating the harmony of a farm.

*You can do courses but it is most special when you have it yourself; it is part of the harmony on your farm (NL, Bm).*

The organic dairy farmers referred to the freedom they experienced in organic agriculture. They felt that values gave them more freedom than strict rules, but minimum rules were needed as a quality guarantee. They experienced their decision to produce organically as a free choice and were proud of their profession; the recognition of society motivated them.

*Farmer used to be a bad name, but nowadays it is quite an honour to be an organic farmer (NL, Om).*

Aspects of professional independence discussed included independence from the need for artificial fertilisers and other chemicals, and this related to farmers in developing countries as well as Dutch producers.

*You should not make them [farmers in developing countries] dependent on the chemicals of the western countries. Chemicals are dumped and people don't know what they are using (NL, Om).*

The arable farmers liked to improve their own skills and optimise their systems, and they saw organic production as a real challenge, especially with difficult crops. Continuing their discussion on quality requirements set by the trade, they talked about how bakeries used to be experts in baking. The feeling was that bakers used to be professionals and had been able to bake good bread with all varieties of wheat, but that today the bakeries have strict requirements for the grain, such as a certain protein percentage etc. This gives the farmers less flexibility and makes them more dependent on chemical inputs to ensure consistency in their crops and over years. Dependence was an important aspect for the arable farmers; in this context, one producer introduced his own interpretation of sustainability:

*You should not use inputs which are [a] limited [resource]; you will really have a problem when a situation of war is at hand, and you cannot produce because you need your inputs (NL, Am).*

The professional pride of the researchers could be classified into three areas: their pride for their own profession, the pride they felt for the sector, and the pride of farmers with whom they worked. They experienced the sector as positive, as a good thing, and as something right, which is reflected in the positive way society views organic agriculture. Researchers considered that organic farmers work in a value-driven system and make conscious choices, i.e. they view their plants and animals with an attitude of respect and try to work with nature instead of against it.

*I find it very inspiring to visit a farm and to see that it works (NL, Rf).*

In their own work, the researchers were proud of their professionalism and that they are now accepted by "conventional" research organisations, which was not always so. The researchers were proud of their participatory research work and their systems approach, but they saw a conflict in other institutes between professionalism and systems thinking. For example, it was stated that solutions have become very high-tech, with conventional researchers seeking one strain of bacteria to solve a multivariate complex soil problem.

## **UK**

Producers in the UK 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 (UK, Em).*

Experiencing problems or disillusionment with conventional agriculture was an important driver for organic conversion for many of the producers. They had observed that their systems were out of balance and there was a spiral of increasing inputs, but eventually they realised that it was possible farm without all the external inputs.

Once they had taken the step to convert their farms, producers expressed enthusiasm for how well the new system was working. They felt that organic farming had forced them improve themselves and was professionally challenging because

they needed to develop it for their own farm without any blueprint solutions. In the group of converting producers, some referred to the hostility of conventional colleagues but also to the subsequent acknowledgement of their achievement.

*You could say it was like re-empowerment (UK, Em).*

Overall, UK producers were proud to be able to make a living while practising what they considered a more environmentally benign approach. They saw the current economic environment of agriculture as conflicting with the value-driven approach of organic farming. In particular, the established organic producers were very critical of the supermarkets, which made decisions based on their own values and ignored the values of organic farming.

#### **4.6.5 Summary of other important values**

Animal health and welfare were discussed in most countries but they were rarely the central issue. The most detailed discussions on this topic were in groups in the Netherlands. Dutch participants considered that disease prevention and self-regulation were important for animal health, and that respect for the integrity of the animal was the basis for animal welfare. There was some controversy about animal welfare in Italy, regarding whether or not organic farmers should be allowed to tether their cattle and what implications this has for meat quality. Some negative comments about the level of bureaucracy in Austria illustrate that animal welfare is not unanimously seen as important by all organic producers. However, discussions in the UK and Switzerland focused on the need of producers to respond to this area of growing importance to consumers.

Close proximity between production and consumption was generally discussed as a natural progression from other organic values. Especially in Austria this was seen as an alternative development path to globalisation. The discussions related to this value touched on various dimensions, such as increasing farm income by getting higher prices, direct communication and building trust with consumers, reducing food miles, and being able to provide a fresher and more authentic product.

In all countries the holistic approach was discussed as a central value or principle of organic agriculture, important beyond the farm gate. In all countries except Italy, the most detailed discussions on this topic occurred among researchers, followed by experienced organic producers; they considered the farm and the food network as systems, with reference to a cycle of health that begins with healthy soils and leads to healthy people. The systems approach was seen as important in problem solving. Participants considered that problems ought to be seen as indicators of a lack of balance or harmony in the system, and that solutions should be found by understanding how the parts of the system work together. Many participants saw this systems perspective of organic agriculture as a feature that distinguishes it from the conventional sector.

Organic organisation staff in the IFOAM EU group referred to “unlearning” of agriculture, meaning that producers have to disregard or forget some of the things that they had learned in their agricultural education.

*Six years they went to University, and they were taught just that one way of farming. So it is very difficult to forget and sort of empty your brain of all the things that you are taught and then try to understand something logical (IFOAM, Of).*

In most countries, producers displayed a considerable amount of pride about their profession; they were proud of the skills they had learned to become good organic farmers and of making their systems work. The UK and Italian producers referred to the need to re-learn (see 4.6.3 Holism and systems thinking) agricultural skills and to solve problems with a systems rather than input-oriented approach. They described organic production as a continuous challenge, demanding but flexible, and they enjoyed engaging with innovative ideas.

Producers commented on gaining greater personal and job satisfaction than they had done prior to organic conversion, and they attributed this to the recognition received from consumers and from society. They appeared to take their professional responsibility seriously.

For many organic farmers it was important to work independently, and this contributed to their high levels of commitment and involvement in the production systems. Although some negative comments were made about too much bureaucracy, the majority of participants did not seem to experience standards and rules as restrictions on their independence. The value-driven organic systems, adopted by their own free will, gave them greater freedom. An important element contributing to this feeling of independence was that they did not have to buy fertilisers and chemicals.

Only a few conflicts were mentioned in relation to other organic values. Swiss organic farmers felt "penalised" by organic outlets that sell a wide range of organic food products throughout the year from around the world. They also discussed the decreasing time and money spent on food and retailers ignorance about the real costs of production. It was thought that agriculture in general focuses on the needs of humans and necessarily involves interference with nature, but that organic agriculture tends to be more respectful towards the whole system. However, many producers were concerned that this "organic identity" might be under threat from external pressures and further market concentration.



## 5 Comparing and contrasting results

This penultimate chapter brings together important findings and groups them according to the objectives of the focus group work:

- to identify the range of values and related attitudes among organic producers in Europe
- to explore differences of values among groups of organic producers and between regions
- to explore differences between producers and other organic stakeholders, in particular through comparison with work on organic consumers in the OMIaRD project

The first section compares the importance of motives and values among the different stakeholder groups. Subsections compare the importance of values and motives between countries and then between different types of producers. The subsequent section compares first associations and value between of producers in this study with findings about consumers from the OMIaRD project. The final section examines how values related to each of the four principles of organic farming and other important value categories were expressed among all types stakeholders. This forms the basis for conclusions and recommendations presented in the final chapter.

### 5.1 Comparison of the importance of motives and values

#### 5.1.1 Differences in the importance of values between countries

The participants discussed the meaning and the importance of values of the organic sector. These discussions followed on from the participants' personal histories, which included reasons for their own behaviour, building up to the more abstract values, thus almost following the laddering method of means-end chains. In three countries (with the exception of Italy and the Netherlands), participants were asked to "vote" for the three values they thought were most important to the organic movement. Both the detailed discussions and the voting showed some differences in the importance of values to participants in the various countries.

Table 17 gives an indication of the results of the voting where it was carried out. The most important three values are marked for four countries, other values that received some votes are marked by "X". In the Netherlands, the participants sorted values into clusters which are indicated with "X". For Italy, where no voting was carried out, the most important three values marked are as described in the national report. In the final column, there is a count of the number of countries which voted a value into the "top three", and the number in brackets shows the number of other countries where the value was attributed some importance (as indicated by "X"). Values are sorted by the total number of countries that considered them important. This is followed by short descriptions of the importance of values in each country, based on the national reports.

It is important to note that discussions were carried out in the native languages, in which the moderators may have used their own terms, and the reports were later

translated into English. Some of the terms are closely related and in some cases overlap. Observed differences among the countries could, therefore, be a reflection of the different meanings of terms, rather than true differences in values. Further research would be needed to resolve these linguistic difficulties and confirm such differences.

**Table 17: Comparison of important values in focus groups between countries\***

	AT	CH	UK	IT	NL	No of countries
Food quality	1	X	3	2	X	3+(2)= 5
Environmental protection	3	X	3	1	X	3+(2)= 5
Limiting resource use	X	X	X	X	X	(5) = 5
Health	1	2	1	X	X	3+(1)= 5
Sustainability	X	1**	2		X	2+(2) =4
Independence	2	X	X		X	1(+3) =4
Respect for nature/ Farming with nature	X	3			X	1+(2)=3
Alternative model/ Education	X		X	3		1+(2)=3
Professional challenge and pride			X	X	X	(3)=3
Fairness in the food chain	X	X			X	(3)=3
Systems approach		X	X		X	(3)=3
Regional production	X		X		X	(3)=3
Animal welfare			X	X	X	(2)=2
Global fairness	X				X	(2)=2
Social networks/ wellbeing	X		X			(2)=2
Avoiding residues/ non-polluting		X	X			(2)=2
Farm diversity	X		X			(2)=2
Family farm		3				1 =1
Quality of live on the farm	X					(1)=1
Trust			X			(1)=1
Low food miles			x			(1)=1
Traditional methods			X			(1)=1
Integrity			X			(1)=1
Rural employment		X				(1)=1
Total number of values	14	12	18	6	13	

\*The 3 most important values in each countries are marked 1-3, other values of importance are marked by X.

\*\*The term used in Switzerland was "ecological sustainability"

In **Austria**, central topics mentioned repeatedly included the aversion to agro-chemicals, closed cycles, health, and environmental protection, but the organic farmers did not appear to see themselves as environmentalists. They saw agriculture as increasingly marginalised, which had a negative effect on their self-esteem and pride even related to organic farming. The issues of economic well-being of farms, farm income, and profitability were widely discussed, including aspects such as economic survival, independence, and alternatives in marketing. Food quality and health were together the most important values to all participants, followed by independence, and then ecology and environmental protection. Other important

values were diversity, regionality, economics, sustainability, freedom from GMOs, quality of life, and social values, but animal welfare was not given any level of importance.

In **Italy**, three main areas of values were considered important by all participants: food quality and health (safety), environmental health and care, and livelihood. The discussions about food quality and health included reference to the authenticity of local products and how to find measurable parameters of food quality, but there were no differences between types of participants. On the environment, all types of participants agreed that organic farming and environment conservation are linked and that this environmental organic value should be strongly communicated to consumers. Environmental protection appeared to be most important value across all groups, followed by food quality, an “alternative life and agricultural model”, professional pride, and animal welfare.

In the **Netherlands**, the discussion about values can be summarised in the words of one of the participants:

*Organic agriculture is about producing endlessly [long-term sustainably], with care and respect for humans, animals, plants and soil. Organic farmers produce healthy and tasty food without harming the environment or the development of others. Their farms and agriculture in general are interconnected with small and big world problems (NL, Em).*

Participants did not order values by importance but sorted important values into clusters. Of these clusters, all four groups allocated importance to care for the environment; three of the four groups highlighted the systems approach, product quality and health, and fairness; two groups placed emphasis on respect for nature, global interdependence, animal welfare and health, and farming as a craft; and the concepts of regional production and connection to the land were each given importance by a single group.

In **Switzerland**, almost all participants were engaged in organic agriculture either due to their beliefs or just because they liked organic farming, but they had strong concerns regarding current developments affecting the sector. The current discussions about the basic values and principles of organic agriculture were seen as very positive and a move in the right direction. In a number of discussions, the concept of *health of the ecosystem* emerged as a fundamental value. Many participants saw fair trading conditions as a core issue. Ecological sustainability was by far the most important value, followed by health in general, the family farm, livelihood and social justice, food quality, and biodiversity.

In the **UK**, focus groups discussions attached importance to a range of value areas, including health, sustainability, environmental and ecological issues, financial viability, and local production. All three groups of producers discussed reducing the use of non-renewable energy. The discussions showed that participants' value systems were similar in many ways to the four IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture, although the discussions showed some differences in emphasis. The discussions about health referred to the cycle of health, including soil and animal health in production systems, personal and family health, and consumer health in relation to product quality. The most important value in the UK was health, followed

by sustainability, food quality, the environment, local and regional production, and the personal and professional challenge.

Among the most important values in at least four countries were:

- Food quality (all countries)
- Environmental protection (all countries)
- Limiting the resource use (all countries)

The values of health, sustainability and independence were not mentioned among most important values in Italy, and sustainability was seen as important only in two groups in the Netherlands. Discussions in Italy gave less attention to system thinking and eco-systems health, and overall fewer values were ranked as important in Italy. Of the countries represented, Italy has the shortest history of the organic movement, and combined with rapid growth, this could account for the fact that core organic values were not so widely discussed.

### **5.1.2 Contrasting the personal motives for organic conversion and involvement of different types of producers**

One of the aims of the study was to contrast the views of established and converting organic producers in relation to their motives for conversion. Some established organic producers, especially in the Netherlands, expressed their concern that newly converted farmers did not share the same motives but were converting mainly for economic reasons such as the conversion grant or premium prices. Indications of a change over time in motives for conversion have also been identified in the literature (see heading 1.1.2).

Producers gave the following motives for conversion, many of which had already come up as first associations:

- Concerns for food quality
- Environmental or ecological concerns
- Closed cycles, small-scale farming, and self-sufficiency or self-reliance
- Social justice and experiences from developing countries
- Securing or maintaining farm income, making a living, better prices
- Conversion grants (only available for the converting farms)
- Professional challenge and pride
- Farming close to nature
- Dislike of high input/ conventional agriculture and of dependence on agri-business

These are similar to the motives for conversion identified in the literature. All participating producers appeared very committed to organic methods, seeing them as the best agricultural practice, as a good example, or as a sustainable alternative to modern agriculture (even perhaps the only one). Some mentioned their personal background or saw a change in personal circumstances as a trigger, such as personal health or generation change. Among the newly converted farmers, the availability of grant aid was credited with reducing the perceived financial risk of conversion.

No clear differences were found between established and converting organic producers in relation to financial motives. All four groups of producers in Austria, of which three consisted of established organic farmers, attached importance to economic survival as independent farmers, securing the future of their own farms, and hoping to get a fair price and income. In the UK and Switzerland, economic motives were also mentioned both by experienced and converting organic producers. In Switzerland, financial motives were particularly mentioned in the mountain areas, where organic farming was seen as a strategy to earn a living and survive. This association of economic motives with a particular geographical region indicates that external conditions may be a more important factor in determining farmers' motives than the length of time since conversion. Therefore, the fact that the financial situation of agriculture has worsened over the last 20 years could better explain the observed trend for more frequent mentions of financial motives among the Dutch producers and in the literature, than any lack of commitment among new entrants.

The focus group of newly converted farmers in the **UK** was invited to respond to the statement that "later converters are only in it for the money". All participants in this group disagreed vehemently with such categorisation, but they pointed out that they had to farm for profit, not as a hobby, and said they found the grant aid helpful in reducing the financial risk of conversion.

Another relevant factor was suggested by the established farmers in the **Netherlands**, who reported that their attitudes had changed gradually and that the direct experience of working with natural cycles on their own farms had encouraged them to become "more organic" over time. This would indicate that studies comparing the motives of established organic producers with those of new entrants do not compare like with like; the established producers may be explaining their current views instead of reporting the motives that originally led them to convert their farms.

Some differences between established organic farmers and converting producers were reported from Italy. Here, the proportion of new entrants into farming was higher among the newly converted producers, but with such a small sample size, this may be related more to the regional locations than to the types of participants. In Switzerland, early converters' motives appeared more influenced by the personality of individual pioneer farmers, whereas recently converted lowland farmers mentioned the health of the ecosystem. The magnitude of required changes in farming practices during conversion, which varies with farm type, was mentioned as a factor by both mountain farmers in Switzerland and the group of converting producers in the UK.

For the non-producers, reasons to get involved were related to doing something new, finding "an alternative life model" (not just for agriculture), social justice, and interests in nature, biology, ecology, the environment, and food quality. Some also admitted that they got involved in organic farming more by accident. It appears that the non-producers' reasons for getting involved in organic food and farming were more theoretical and less personal, but many themes were mentioned by both producers and non-producers.

In summary, there appears to be a wide range of motives for becoming involved in organic farming for the focus group participants in most countries. These motives range from the environment to food quality and from the personal to the political.

Variations among groups are probably a reflection of the specific group attributes (including their external circumstances) rather than the time of their farm conversions. The comparison of the motives expressed by established and converting organic producers in this study does not support the generalisation that later converts are mainly financially motivated. Financial motives were mentioned in many groups, both by experienced and converting organic producers.

### 5.1.3 Differences in importance of values among various types of participants

Differences were also observed in the importance attributed to values in the discussions involving recently converted producers, established organic producers and other stakeholders. In **Austria**, established organic farmers were concerned that the popular image of organic farming could suffer if too many farms became organic to receive the subsidies but without real commitment. Recently converted organic farmers, on the other hand, were happy to participate and appeared committed to their ideals. They were concerned about the economic pressures on agriculture leading to intensification or excessive growth, and they had complex ideas about the future of organic farming. In the group of the scientists and advisors, social and economic issues were central topics of discussion rather than ecological ones. Values related to animal husbandry were important mainly for producers who were involved in livestock production. Social aspects and the education were discussed more frequently by the converting producers and the non-producer groups than among the established organic producers.

In **Italy**, livelihood was discussed by both producers and policy makers. The farmers did not see this as a core value of organic agriculture, but were concerned about the current situation of agriculture in general, including organic. Mainly the converting producers discussed the topic of professionalism and job-satisfaction, and the researchers referred to the role of organic agriculture as an alternative model.

Although there were no groups with recently converted farms in the **Netherlands**, interesting differences between producers from different farm types and backgrounds were noted. For example, only the group of established biodynamic farmers discussed animal welfare extensively. In the context of increasing specialisation in Dutch agriculture, closing nutrient cycles was discussed as a real challenge by arable producers, and others discussed the need for extended co-operation between arable and animal producers as an important means to close these cycles.

For one group of **Swiss** converting producers, healthy food was especially important, as well as maintaining the family farm, and generating rural employment. In the second group of converting producer, animal welfare was considered an important value.

In the **UK**, all producers were concerned about their livelihoods and the growing power of multiple retailers. For the recently converted farmers, animal welfare was especially important as well as the role of organic agriculture in educating children.

Recently converted producer focus groups in one or more countries considered the following values as especially important: Organic farming as an alternative model for

agriculture/education (AT, UK), animal welfare (UK,CH), job satisfaction (IT3) and family farm and rural employment (CH 4). Only one value appears to have been more important to established organic producers than other participants, and that is closed production cycles. Values especially important to researchers were animal welfare, social aspects and systems values.

All producers showed a strong professional identity as organic farmers. Professional challenge was among the first associations in all five countries and an important value in three. It was mentioned both by experienced and converting producers, but not by other stakeholders. Independence was also an important value to producers in four countries (except IT). There was a generally positive attitude to the organic sector in most groups of producers. They were proud of what they had achieved, of the skills they had learned to become good organic farmers, and of the recognition they received for their efforts from society, which gave them job-satisfaction. They were pleased to be working in close connection with nature. Many felt that organic farming gave them greater opportunity for personal development. UK and Italian producers referred to the need for re-learning about agriculture, i.e. to forget some of the technical/input solutions they had used previously and to learn to solve problems in a more systems-oriented way.

All producers appeared to take very seriously their responsibility to produce high quality organic products. Although some negative comments were made about regulations, the majority of participants did not seem to experience the organic standards and rules as restrictions on their independence.

It may be concluded that the producers in these focus groups shared a strong professional identity as organic producers and were proud of their specialist skills. They derive a high level of job satisfaction, which was enhanced by their independence and opportunities for personal development. Their professional pride was also associated with a sense of responsibility for the quality of their product and for taking care of the environment.

#### **5.1.4 Differences in the importance of current and future values**

In a later section of the discussions, participants were asked to express what values they considered important in the future (see 3.5). This question approached the importance of values in a different way through using projective techniques. Most of the values attributed future importance had already been discussed, but others were mentioned for the first time, such as conserving energy in Austria. In other cases, the emphasis was changed, for example in relation to closer links and better communication between producers and consumers which were expected to become more important in the future in Italy and the Netherlands. In Switzerland, participants referred to the need for better communication in the market place.

Across all countries the following values were expected to gain more importance in the future:

- Limiting the use of energy from non-renewable resource
- Fair or cost-covering prices, solidarity and social justice
- Environmental conservation.

Other values already discussed were expected to remain important, such as:

- Integrity, holistic approach, openness, communication and trust throughout the whole organic food chain (AT, NL, CH, UK)
- Product quality, food safety (AT, CH, UK)
- Animal welfare (CH, UK).
- Local and regional production(CH).

Both in Italy and the UK, participants were concerned about the impact that raised standards in relation to animal welfare and the environment might have on the success of organic products in the market place. Dutch participants were worried about organic farming being able to maintain its integrity with a more widespread use of GMOs in conventional agriculture.

## 5.2 Comparison of the values of producers and consumers

### 5.2.1 Comparing first associations

Producers and consumers were both asked an identical question, which was to give their first associations with the word *organic*. The consumers were given this question as part of focus groups conducted in various European countries during the OMIaRD study. First associations provide a good way of understanding top-of-mind associations and thereby give some indication which values appear particularly important. This section compares the first associations of the focus groups of organic producers and consumers. Summarising the results presented in section 3.1, common themes of the first associations among producers in all countries were as follows:

- **Sustainability**
- **Closed production cycles and/or low use of external inputs** and related issues, such as self-regulation, protection of non-renewable resources, energy saving
- **Professional challenge** and related issues such as personal and professional development, greater freedom and independence
- **Health and food quality** and related issues such as taste, freshness, low residue levels, no harmful chemicals for workers

The following topics were mentioned by producers in most countries:

- **Ecology and environmental protection** and related issues such as biodiversity, landscape conservation (these were mentioned in four countries, but not Switzerland, where careful soil management was mentioned)
- **Working with nature** and associated issues (mentioned in four countries, with the exception of Italy)

Issues related to **economic and social justice, local production, animals** and **holistic thinking** were also among first associations in three countries. The most common negative associations were related to excessive bureaucracy and rules, the increasingly conventional market structures, and high premiums leading to a special type of affluent and middle class organic consumer.



In the OMIARD focus groups, consumers in all the countries studied mentioned the following positive terms as first associations with the word *organic* (Zanoli *et al.*, 2004):

- **Healthy**, contain little or no pesticides and other chemicals
- **Fresh**, unprocessed products like fruit and vegetables, milk and dairy products, meat and bread
- **Tastes good** and/or different
- **Locally** produced; farmed naturally, from small companies
- **Animal** and **environmentally friendly**

But on the negative side:

- **Expensive** and “elitist”
- **Poor appearance**

Associations common to both the producers and consumers were related to health, limited use of external inputs, low residues, environmental protection, local production as well as expensive and elitist. Only consumers mentioned freshness and taste, and poor appearance. However, first associations related to organic agriculture as a profession, such as professional challenge and excessive bureaucracy were mentioned only by producers. The producers' first associations appeared more fully considered than those of consumers.

### 5.2.2 Comparing values

The main values of organic food consumers were studied in the OMIARD project, using focus groups and individual laddering interviews with regular and occasional consumers of organic products (see Chapter 2 Methodology). In searching for corresponding values, comparisons of producers with regular consumers are more valuable than with occasional consumers. Based on 60 focus groups and 750 laddering interviews in seven European countries, Zanoli *et al.* (2004) summarised the main values of European consumers of organic food as follows:

- Own Health (the food contains little or no pesticides and other chemicals, which is seen as related to well being, family health, quality of life)
- Food as enjoyment (tastes good and/or different; fresh products)
- Environmental concerns (respect for nature; sustainability; responsibility)
- Animal welfare (related to purchase of animal products; not in all countries)
- Locally produced (farmed naturally; from small companies)
- Trustworthy

Consumer attitudes towards the quality and safety of organic food are complex, unstable, and embedded in a wide range of issues linking food to health, environment, ethics and identity. The meanings of *natural*, *pure*, *traditional* and *authentic* overlap in the minds of consumers and are not clearly distinguished from *organic*, especially as far as non-organic consumers are concerned. However, committed organic consumer have high expectations of organic products in relation to quality (with the exception of appearance), and safety, freshness, and taste, and consumers want reassurance about the environmental impacts of production, processing and distribution systems (Midmore *et al.* 2004; Midmore *et al.*, 2005).

In Table 18, the organic consumer values identified in OMIaRD are contrasted with the values of producers, identified as most important in the voting in the focus groups for this study (see 3.3 Further discussions on the values and their importance).

**Table 18: Contrasting important values of producers and consumers**

	Producers	Consumers
Food quality	X	X
Health	X	X
Environmental protection	X	X
Sustainability	X	X
Respect for nature/ farming with nature	(x)	X
Regional production / links with consumers	(x)	X
Animal welfare	(x)	X
Trustworthy	(x)	X
Limiting resource use	X	
Independence	X	
Professional challenge	(x)	
Fairness in the food chain	(x)	
Systems approach	(x)	
Alternative model/ Education	(x)	
Closed cycles	AT, CH	
Global fairness	AT, NL	
Family farm	CH only	
Food as enjoyment (freshness and taste)	IT	X

Source: Own data and Zanoli *et al.* (2004)

Values of shared importance between consumers and producers included those related to food quality, health, environmental protection, and sustainability. The values related to regional production, animal welfare, and trust were important to consumers and were discussed at some length in most groups of producers, but they were not represented among the three most important values for producers in any country. Equally, values related to organic farming as a profession were important to producers, but not to consumers. In particular, their own independence was very important to many producers.

Other frequently discussed topics among producers included personal and job satisfaction, securing the farm income now and in the future, and the holistic approach that secures the integrity of the whole system, even though the related values did not necessarily achieve a score as the most important organic values for producers. An area of values particularly important to consumers, but not to most producers, was related to the enjoyment of food; this referred to qualities such as freshness and taste, rather than health-giving qualities. With the exception of Italy, freshness and taste received very little attention in the discussion groups of producers and researchers.

## 5.3 Representation of the values related to each organic farming principle among different stakeholders

In the following section the results from all different sections are brought together to analyse the extent to which the values represented in the four new IFOAM principles are mentioned and supported by the various stakeholders. Each section draws on first associations, the importance of values, and more detail analysis of the values related to each principle, as well as the comparison with consumer values.

### 5.3.1 Values related to the principle of health

The results show that values related to the proposed principle of health were considered very important by all types of participants. Groups of all stakeholders, including organic consumers, included health and a range of related values in the first associations with the word *organic*. Both established and recently converted producers mentioned concerns for both food quality and their own personal health as important motives for conversion. In Austria, this included seeing a link between the family health and nutrition, which was similar to the value of health among consumers of organic produce.

Values related to the principles of health were then widely discussed by groups in all countries and by all types of stakeholders. This included intensive discussions about the subject of food quality by all types of participants and in all countries. Producers discussed their responsibility for product quality, and thus for the health of their consumers. Producers in Italy and researchers added the dimension of food for enjoyment, which is also shared by consumers but was not intensively discussed by producers in other countries.

Further health-related dimensions discussed in some but not all groups included absence of residues, the nutritional content of organic food, the potential benefits of organic food for vulnerable groups of society (e.g. children), the relationship between consumers and producers, authenticity and regionality of organic food, and the quality requirements of the trade, but there were no notable differences between countries or stakeholder groups.

Established organic producers in particular discussed the cycle of health, referring to the closed links between health of the soil (or soil fertility), consumer health and systems health. They expressed very similar ideas to those of the IFOAM principle of health. It appears that that these established producers have been more exposed to such concepts during their involvement with organic farming and through attending training courses. The researchers also discussed a concept of systems health, which they extended even to social aspects.

In summary, established organic producers and the researchers referred more to concepts such as systems health and the cycle of health than converting producers. The idea of a core principle of health for organic farming, therefore, appears well supported by the values expressed in these focus groups and by consumers.

### 5.3.2 Values related to the principle of ecology

The detailed analysis of the values related to this principle in Chapter 4 illustrates that broadly three main subject areas can be distinguished. These are

1. Closed production cycles, involving limitations in the use of non-renewable resources including energy, and (with less emphasis) soil fertility
2. Working with nature or in a natural way
3. Conservation of diversity in crops, species and landscape

In this study, closed production cycles were among the first associations in all countries, while sustainability, ecology and environmental production, and working with nature came up in four countries. This indicates the levels of importance of all three of the listed value concepts to the focus group participants. Similar environmental concerns were also important first associations of consumers in the OMIaRD project.

The importance of values related to this principle of ecology for all types of participants is confirmed by the fact that they were well-represented among votes for the most important values. Environmental protection and limiting resource use were identified as important values in all countries, followed by sustainability in four countries and respect for and farming with nature in three countries. Zanoli *et al.* (2004) identified environmental protection, sustainability, respect for nature and naturalness also as important values of consumers.

Established organic producers in Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK discussed the value of *closed cycles* far more intensively. Their discussions referred to the independence from external inputs and the integrity of the organic approach, focusing mainly on feed and livestock production. In the UK and Switzerland, established organic producers saw closing nutrient cycles and restricting the use of external inputs as a way to achieve the overall goal of sustainability, but not as a value in itself. All types of stakeholders in a number of countries discussed the preservation of non-renewable resources, another theme related to sustainability.

It was also mainly the established organic producers who attached importance to soil fertility among their first associations, although this was also mentioned by the other stakeholders. Soil fertility, however, was not intensively discussed on its own and not seen as a value in its own right, but it was mentioned in the context of sustainability, regarding the ability to pass the land in good condition to future generations, and healthy soil as part of the cycle of health.

All types of stakeholders across all countries saw organic farming as very closely related to nature protection and environmental conservation. In Switzerland these values were more intensively discussed by the mountain farmers than the lowland farmers, but otherwise no clear differences between stakeholders could be observed. Similarly, naturalness and farming with nature were discussed in all countries and by all stakeholders.

In summary, values related to the ecological principle were strong among all stakeholders in all three dimensions of resource use, learning from nature and conservation. The emphasis on closed production cycles in relation to resource use was strongest among established organic producers. Although the new IFOAM

principle of ecology includes all three dimensions, it reflects the same strong emphasis on closing cycles and balanced agro-eco systems. Given the high importance to organic producers and consumers of environment and biodiversity conservation, a direct mentioning of the value of nature conservation appears justified in the EU Regulation 2092/91, in addition to a more general principle of ecology.

### 5.3.3 Values related to the principle of fairness

Terms related to economic and social justice were represented in the first associations in three countries with no clear differentiation between stakeholders in this study. Consumers in the OMIaRD project mentioned locally produced and from small companies as first associations with *organic*.

Both established and recently converted organic producers expressed the desire for greater social justice among the motives for conversion. Some were referring to their experiences in developing countries, and some hoped to make a living from farming. Fairness in the food chain and regional production were among the important values in three countries and were expected to be important in the future in all countries.

Mostly the experienced organic producers believed that farming organically gave them greater flexibility and independence, especially from the agro-business sector. They were proud to be able to make a living whilst practising what they considered a more environmentally benign approach.

However, producers in all countries, both experienced and converting, appeared seriously concerned about whether they will be able to secure an income from organic farming in the future as indicated by conflicts between livelihood and other values that were discussed in all groups. In particular, the growing economic pressure to produce cheaper food was seen as being in continuing conflict with high quality and organic production. This concern was shared by other stakeholders but not discussed by them with the same intensity. The producers discussed a range of strategies that had allowed them to increase their income under organic management in the past (including diversification, direct marketing and on-farm processing) but did not give the impression that they considered this as sufficient to survive.

On the other hand, many producers, both established and converting, stated clearly that despite their desire to maintain a fair income, they did not want to place profitability over other values. This is reflected by the fact that the value *securing-farm income* did not score high as one of the most important values (see Table 17 on page 101).

In summary, the desire for fairness in the whole food chain is an important value shared by organic producers in all case study countries and by other stakeholders.

### 5.3.4 Values related to the principle of care

Many aspects of the discussions in the focus groups were related to the principle of care. Sustainability of the systems was a first association shared among all countries and all types of stakeholders. Sustainability was also among the most important

three values of producers in four countries. Both types of producers discussed passing the farm on to future generations. Despite the broadness and ambiguity of the word *sustainability*, it appears to have been a popular concept among the participants. Although the IFOAM principle of care is the one which refers to protecting “the health and well-being of current and future generations...”, discussions on sustainability were inevitably broad and often related to the IFOAM principles of ecology and fairness, as follows:

- Respect and responsibility for nature, protecting bio-diversity and the environment, and maintaining it for future generations as was reported under values related to the principle of ecology.
- Respect and responsibility for own farm income and for other people was described under values related to the principle of fairness.

Health and healthy products were among the first associations of producers and consumers and product quality was an important value for all stakeholders. The avoidance of GMOs was not discussed with the same intensity across all countries. Participants were critical of the use of agro-chemicals in conventional agriculture and saw this as a major difference between organic and conventional agriculture. There were no reported differences in this between recently converted and experienced organic producers or between producers and other stakeholders. The principle of care also contains some reference to tacit knowledge, covered under the heading of professionalism.

It may be concluded that the values represented in the principle of care are well-supported by the organic producers and other stakeholders in the focus groups. The participants strongly associated organic farming with sustainability of agriculture.

### **5.3.5 Animal health and welfare**

In most groups and countries, the topics of animal health and welfare were not central to the discussions. Animal welfare was among the first associations in only in two countries (CH, UK), but was a frequent first association of consumers in the OMIaRD project. Animal health was a motive for conversion for some of the established organic farmers, especially in Austria. The Dutch participants felt that an organic system should aim for “natural health” without regular inputs of medication. Such systems require diversity in the animal production systems and management strategies, supplemented when necessary by natural remedies and therapies.

Established producers in the Netherlands saw continuous improvement of animal welfare as an important goal of organic farming. The Dutch participants attached importance in this context to naturalness, the integrity of the animal, and giving the animal the opportunity to self-regulate and build up disease resistance. They felt that rules should set out the minimum requirements to prevent new entrants from harming the credibility of organic agriculture. Discussions in Switzerland and the UK focused on whether or not organic practices automatically lead to better welfare and on the producers’ need to respond to high consumer expectations on animal welfare. In both countries, animal welfare was expected to be more important in the future. In one Austrian focus group, producers focused on a perception of excessive animal welfare regulations, which indicates that animal welfare was not so important to them. For consumers, animal welfare was an important value in relation to organic farming, and especially regarding organic livestock products.

Producers in the Netherlands identified a conflict between animal welfare and some other aspects of food quality requirements in the market. Arguments among participants in relation to animal welfare practices were reported from the UK and Italy. There is a clear indication that livestock producers discussed this issue more intensively than arable or horticultural producers. In Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the UK, animal welfare was discussed in some detail by the researchers and organic organisation staff.

There is clear evidence that the values of animal health and welfare were important to producers involved with animal husbandry, to the other stakeholders in the focus groups, and to organic consumers in the OMIaRD study.

### 5.3.6 Proximity and local networks

Regional and local organic food production was among the first associations in three countries (AT, NL, UK) and was an important first association of consumers. Regional production was also among the values attributed importance in the same three countries. The discussions among both types of producers, as well as the other stakeholders, associated organic farming with regionality and short supply chains. This appeared to be a natural progression from other organic values and covered the following dimensions:

- **Farm income**  
Securing or increasing producer incomes by increasing direct sales or negotiating fair prices with trading partners
- **Traceability and trust**  
Providing opportunities for consumers to see where their products come from, and so building trust through direct interactions
- **Communication**  
Increasing consumer awareness of the values and the conditions of life and work in agriculture
- **Food miles**  
Reducing the transport distances for food and so cutting energy consumption
- **Product quality**  
Increasing the freshness of vegetables, the seasonality of the product range, and the stress for animals through shorter transport distances.

Supporting regional organic production also appeared as a strong value for organic consumers in the OMIaRD project. However, producers in most countries voiced concerns about the limitations of regional trade: they thought this was not an option for all producers and pointed to potential competition to organic labels represented by the increasing number of regional product labels from conventional agriculture.

Some of the differences in producer attitudes to local production could be a reflection of the different retail channels used by the various farm types. Arable farmers, who must actively sell their products, saw local trading networks as a

counterbalance to anonymous markets, whereas the dairy farmers were less enthusiastic about local trading probably because they had forward sales contracts and greater restrictions on direct sales due to hygiene requirements. Another factor influencing farmers' attitudes to regional marketing could be their proximity to major population centres.

Two significant areas of conflict with other values were mentioned:

- Globalisation interferes with the principle of ecology, which requires respect for natural growing cycles, locally seasonal foods, and limits on the use of non-renewable resources such as carbon fuels in food transport
- Regionality of food marketing conflicts with today's consumer lifestyle of fast shopping, and fast and cheap food. Many organic outlets try to satisfy this demand because they find it difficult to change the habits of consumers

It may be concluded that proximity and local trade are important to many organic stakeholders, including producers and consumers, and it is expected that more regionalised trade would have a number of benefits, such as increase farmers' incomes and reduced transportation of food, with benefits for energy use, product freshness and traceability. Local trade would also allow for better communication and trust building between producers and consumers. However, there is no clear expectation that this should be the only way of trading, and producers voiced their concerns about the limitations of regional trade and how it conflicts with the expectations of most consumers.

### 5.3.7 Holism and system thinking

Holistic thinking was among the first associations in Austria, Netherlands and the UK. The researchers discussed the holistic approach of organic agriculture in detail. They saw holism almost as a principle of organic agriculture, and as a feature distinguishing it from the conventional. Experienced organic producers saw the farm as a system, and they discussed the health cycle from healthy soils to healthy people, and a need to learn how the parts of the system can be improved in order to solve problems. For them, the need for systems perspectives went beyond the farm gate and included all the actors of the food network. In Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK, some experienced organic producers referred to a lack of understanding or commitment to this principle among new entrants to organic farming. It appears that understanding of this aspect of organic farming develops over time, with longer and more intensive involvement with organic farming.

Values of *respecting* and *learning from nature*, closely related to holistic perspectives, were represented in most groups/countries and among all stakeholders. Both in Austria and Switzerland, the established producers felt that organic farming systems allow a better balance between values otherwise considered contradictory, in particular those related to ecology/environment and economics, and the Swiss participants included social values.



## 6 Conclusions and recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusions

The participants of some but not all focus groups came up with well-considered opinions, rather top-of-the-mind associations, when asked for their first associations with the word *organic*. This suggests that organic producers spend time reflecting on their practices and values. The interesting and lively discussions that took place in all countries about personal values and organic sector values confirms this first impression.

Health and sustainability were predominant first associations in all countries, as was the professional challenge of becoming an organic farmer. In most of the countries, participants also mentioned limiting resource use, farming naturally, and environmental protection. Health (often personal health) and sustainability were also frequent first associations of consumers in the previously conducted OMIaRD study. Both consumers and producers also associated organic food with being expensive and elitist. Only consumers mentioned freshness and taste (and poor appearance), whereas only producers tended to mention the professional challenge and bureaucracy.

Producers mentioned a number of motives for becoming involved in organic farming, ranging from the environment to food quality. Some of these were personal, while others were of a more political nature. Their motives were generally similar to those discussed in the literature. There is some indication that internal circumstances (such as farm type) and external conditions (such as economic situation) influence which motives are important, but further research would be needed to come to clear conclusions on this.

From the producers' point of view in all participating countries, the most important values for the organic food and farming sector as a whole were food quality, environmental protection, and limiting resource use. The values of health, sustainability, and independence were seen as important in four countries. Limiting the use of energy from non-renewable resource, fair or cost-covering prices, solidarity and social justice, and environmental conservation were values expected to become more important in the future.

There were few examples of differences between the importance attributed to values by the recently converted and established organic producers. Values seen as more important among the recently converted producers in two countries included organic farming as an alternative model for agriculture (AT, UK), education (AT, UK), and animal welfare (CH, UK). Job satisfaction (IT) and rural employment (CH) were each more important to converting producers in one country. The only value more important to established organic producers than those recently converted was closed production cycles, which seems understandable looking at the historical development of organic farming.

The results do not support the widely expressed view that new entrants only convert for financial reasons and do not engage with the values of organic agriculture, even

though this concern was expressed by some established organic producers. Financial motives were mentioned in many focus groups, both by experienced and converting organic producers. Discussions about values were intensive in all groups, regardless of which type of producers participated. However, in countries with a long organic farming history, the established producers seem to have had more exposure than new entrants to “organic farming” theories, such as cycle of health or ecosystems health. This represents a challenge to the organic food and farming sector to ensure that all new entrants have the opportunity to learn about the wider values and principles; however, this may be difficult to achieve, particularly after periods of very rapid growth in organic agriculture.

The most important area of conflict between values, discussed by the producers in all countries, related to the way that external economic pressures prevent producers from realising organic values, especially in trade with large companies and across globalised markets. Examples mentioned include greenhouse crop rotations, labour saving technologies, the pressure for greater specialisation, and the costs of improved animal welfare. Other identified value conflicts concerned consumer protection and food safety, consumer health, and the integrity and practicality of the organic food and farming system.

A number of focus groups saw the value-driven nature of organic farming as one of its defining characteristics, and some pointed out that numerous values are aspired to at the same time, preventing any one value (in particular profitability) from dominating over others. Many producers were seriously concerned about whether they would be able to continue earning a living from their organic farms. However, very few saw this as a problem exclusive to organic farming, and most saw it affecting agriculture in general. Some producers were concerned that extending more sustainable practices to the whole agriculture sector might make it difficult to maintain distinct markets for organic products in the future.

The results show that there is much common ground between the values discussed by stakeholders and the values represented by the four IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture. Regarding the principle of health, all stakeholders associated organic farming with health, healthy products, and low residue levels. Many producers expressed concern for the health of consumers. Established organic producers and the researchers referred further to a concept of systems health or a cycle of health similar to the definition of health expressed in the IFOAM principle of health.

Values related to the ecological principle can be broken down into the three dimensions of resource use, learning from nature, and bio-diversity conservation; these were all equally important to most stakeholders. An emphasis on closed production cycles in relation to resource use was strongest among established organic producers. This is similar to the new IFOAM principle of ecology which places a strong emphasis on closing cycles and balanced agro-ecosystems but also includes all three of the dimensions as mentioned above. For new entrants and for consumers, environmental protection and biodiversity conservation were of high importance; these were also among the values expected to become more important in the future.

Values represented in both the principle of fairness and that of care were frequently mentioned and intensively discussed in the focus groups. The participants wanted fairness in the food chain and for people in developing countries. Although securing

farm incomes was extensively discussed, participants did not want profitability to dominate over other organic values. They strongly associated organic farming with the sustainability of agriculture, and expressed the need to take care for the product quality and for avoiding contamination with residues, and care for the environment.

Values concerned with animal health are covered in the IFOAM principle of health, and animal welfare is included in the principle of fairness. Animal welfare is of great importance to consumers in Europe; this was recognised by some converting producers and by the other stakeholders in the focus groups who saw animal welfare as becoming more important in the future.

Both producers and consumers expressed a strong preference for local and regional organic networks. These were thought to improve the traceability of products, to allow for direct communications and trust building between producers and consumers, to improve the freshness of products, and to reduce the environmental impacts of long distance transport. However, most producers and consumers also saw the limitations of smaller networks and acknowledged the necessity for larger-scale trade.

Many participants discussed a holistic or systems-oriented approach which goes beyond the farm gate. This systems-oriented approach was seen as useful for preventing and resolving problems. Many producers and researchers considered the systems approach to be a defining aspect of organic farming, distinguishing it from the conventional, input-oriented approach.

## **6.2 Recommendations for revision of the EU Regulation 2092/91**

The values contained in the four IFOAM Principles of Organic Agriculture should be considered in the drafting both of the overarching principles and of the area-specific working principles in the revision of the EU Regulation 2092/91 on organic production.

### **Principle of health**

The idea of a core principle of health for organic farming, to cover product quality, animal and human health, and the health of the system appears well supported by the values expressed in these focus groups and by consumers, and it should be included in the EU Regulation.

### **Principle of ecology**

Three areas of values are related to this principle: limitation in the use of non-renewable resources; working with nature or in a natural way; and conservation of diversity in crops, species and landscape. Values relating to all three areas appear well supported by all types of participants.

### **Principle of fairness**

The desire for fairness in the whole food chain is an important value shared by organic producers and other stakeholders across the countries studied. It therefore seems justified to establish a fairness principle and to consider social justice in the further development of standards and regulations.

**Principle of care**

Sustainability, and care for the production process, for product quality, and for the environment are well supported by the organic producers and other stakeholders of the focus groups. These values are related to the IFOAM principle of care this should therefore also be considered for inclusion in the principles of the EU Regulation. This principle mostly emphasises the precautionary principle, which is to be exercised when choosing new production technologies or inputs, and prefers processing technologies that are careful to maintain the quality and integrity of the product.

Furthermore, some types of values that are of great importance to producers and other stakeholders in Europe are not covered in detail by the new IFOAM principles or are split between two or more of the principles. These areas should also be considered for inclusion in the statements of principles of organic production in the EU Regulation for organic agriculture. They include the following categories of values:

**Environmental protection and bio-diversity conservation**

The contribution of organic farming to conservation and environmental protection emerges as an important value both to producers and to consumers, which is expected to become even more important in the future. Given this broad and growing support from a range of stakeholders, a direct mention of the value of nature conservation and bio-diversity in the EU Regulation appears justified, in addition to a more general principle of ecology.

**Animal welfare and animal health**

There seems to be a mismatch of expectations between consumers and producers in relation to animal welfare. This may be related to the fact that the EC organic standards for animal husbandry were introduced much later than for crops. Representing all issues related to animals in a principle of animal health and welfare in the EU Regulation could encourage more active engagement of all stakeholders with these issues, especially animal welfare that is of key importance to consumers and also an area of wider societal benefit.

**Local/regional production**

Both producers and consumers express a preference for local and regional organic networks, but they also see the limitations of smaller networks and acknowledge the necessity for larger-scale trade. Further work in the project will aim to clarify how these issues could be considered in future development of standards, while recognising the limitations of an exclusive focus on local trade, especially for producers in the more marginal areas.

**Whole systems or holistic approach of agriculture**

Many participants consider that the approach of organic agriculture is holistic, which involves the need to consider the impacts of any practice on the whole farming system. Organic producers need to learn that problems are best dealt with by prevention and by identifying the causes

within the system, respecting and learning from natural processes instead of relying on external inputs.

**Professional skills, independence and responsibility**

Many producers see being an organic farmer as a professional challenge, requiring them to develop specialist skills but providing the benefits of greater independence. They take their responsibilities very seriously towards the consumer and the environment, but they object to too much bureaucracy in the inspection system. The EU Regulation on organic production should remain a framework and not a listing of detailed prescriptions. It should clearly state the need to learn specialist organic farming skills as a requirement of the conversion period and possible could include a requirement of due diligence in relation to organic food production. More responsibility could be given to organic operators to demonstrate how the basic principles are translated into practice.

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