



International **F**ederation of **O**rganic **A**griculture **M**ovements

Consultation on review Principles of Organic Agriculture  
January – March 2005

Uniting the Organic World 1

*IFOAM's mission is  
leading, uniting and assisting the organic  
movement  
in its full diversity.*

*Our goal is the Worldwide Adoption of  
ecologically, socially and economically  
sound systems that are based on the  
Principles of  
Organic Agriculture.*

## So far IFOAM had ‘principal aims’

- Used as introduction for Standards (section B1 of the IFOAM Basic Standards for Organic Production and Processing)
- Directly connected to the Standards
- Clarifying the *aims* of Organic Agriculture
- Changed when new Standards chapters were introduced (processing, textiles)

## Why a review?

1. At the IFOAM General Assembly, August 2002 in Victoria, Canada an amendment to a motion on the IFOAM Basic Standards revision procedure was accepted: ‘Any change in the basic principles (section B.1) would have to be approved by the GA’.
2. In March 2003 the IFOAM World Board formulated the IFOAM mission.

## Review process

- IFOAM's World Board installed a Task Force (8 persons) and a Consultative Group (more than 40 persons)
- IFOAM's World Board formulated a draft preamble to indicate the scope of the work to be done
- At the next General Assembly (September 2005, Adelaide, Australia) the World Board will propose a motion on Principles

## Task Force on review of Principles of Organic Agriculture

- Dr. K. Vijayalakshmi (India)
- Hugo Alroe (Denmark)
- Roberto Ugas (Peru)
- Liz Clay (Australia)(in addition serving as World Board liaison)
- Brian Baker (USA)
- Lawrence Woodward (UK)
- Guy Rilov (Israel)
- Bassoum Souleymane (Senegal)

## Foreseen result:

- Self standing document, no longer *directly* connected to the IFOAM Basic Standard
- Slight change in point of view: from ‘principal aims’ to ‘principles’
- Balance between ‘clear and short’ and ‘complete and holistic’
- Drafted within the scope of draft preamble
- The process as such

## Step 1 (March 2004)

### First Questionnaire to Consultative Group

1. Currently IFOAM has principal aims. What do you see as the principles behind these aims? What do you see as the most important purpose of having a set of Principles?

→ To set the framework for Organic Agriculture

→ To be the foundation for the Movement

→ To give guidance (in standards, policies, in general)



## First Questionnaire to Consultative Group

2. What kind of work are the principles doing in the organic movement? What would be the role of the principles outside the organic movements?
  - Lead and unite the organic movement
  - Inspire (internally for the movement, externally for change)
  - Provide universal principles that are regionally applicable
  - Identify our movement

## First Questionnaire to Consultative Group

3. What does this (your answers to the former questions) require with respect to the form and number of principles? Do you have clear, specific and appropriate ideas for drafting the principles? How can we best establish a set of principles of organic agriculture?

→ Simple

→ Ethical (normative)

## Task Force identified thematic areas/values

‘Holistic health’

‘Livelihood – equity’

‘Biodiversity’

‘Soil’

‘Animals’

‘Local markets / accessibility’

‘Cyclical systems’

‘Precautionary principle’

## First rough draft; proposed principles

Principle of health / Principle of ecological health / Principle of holistic health

*Organic Agriculture should maintain and enhance health as an indivisible connection between human, animal, plant and soil.*

The cyclical principle / The ecological principle / Principle of ecological integrity / principle of organic integrity

*Organic food systems should emulate and benefit from nature's systems and cycles, fit into them and help sustain them.*

Livelihood – equity principle / Principle of ecological justice

*Organic agriculture should strive to provide ecological justice to all concerned and ensure fair and transparent opportunities for livelihood.*

## First rough draft; proposed principles

### The Precautionary Principle

*Organic agriculture should adopt only technologies that take precautionary measures to protect human health and the environment.*

### Principle of animal welfare / Principle of animal integrity /

#### The Humane Principle

*Organic agriculture should raise/ keep domesticated animals in a way that maintains and promotes their health, respects their natural behavior, and does not cause undue stress, pain or suffering.*

### Principle on Soil

*Organic Agriculture should secure and enhance soil fertility.*

## Proposed Hierarchy

Hierarchy re overarching / subordination (not in importance)

1: Principle of (ecological / holistic) health

2: Principle of ecological justice (livelihood/equity)

2: Principle of ecological integrity (cyclical/ecological)

2: Principle of precaution

3: Principle on animal welfare / animal integrity  
(humane principle)

3: Principle on soil

# CURRENT DRAFT

## Preamble <sup>(1)</sup>

We hold these Principles as the foundation of the organic movement. The Principles are the roots from which organic agriculture grows and develops. They express the potential contribution that organic agriculture can make to the world, and a vision to improve all agriculture in a global context. Their function is to guide the positions, programs and standards developed by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). They are formulated as normative, or ethical, principles in recognition that the future we desire is not always realised today.

## Preamble (2)

Agriculture is one of humankind's most basic activities because we need to nourish ourselves daily. History, culture and community values are embedded in agriculture. The Principles concern agriculture in the broadest sense, including the way humans tend the soil and interact with the landscape, plants, and animals; what we eat and wear; how food and other vital goods are obtained, handled, prepared, and distributed; and the legacy we leave to future generations.



## Preamble (3)

Four principles have been created to identify organic agriculture:

- *The principle of health*
- *The ecological principle*
- *The principle of fairness*
- *The principle of care*

Each principle is articulated in a statement with an explanation. The principles all belong together to be used interdependently in consideration with the other principles. Together, they have been composed to inspire action to make their vision a reality.

## Principle of health (1)

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

This principle is the foundation of organic agriculture. It states that the health of all living systems and organisms, from the smallest in the soil to human beings, are mutually dependent. Even though they are separate entities, they belong together and form larger entities. It builds on the shared origin of the words “whole” and “health” and stresses the integrity of living systems as a whole.

## Principle of health (2)

Health is the maintenance of physical, mental and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease or illness. It is a continual process that accumulates and distributes the materials and energy necessary for the function of all living organisms. Mutuality, resilience, self-regulation and regeneration are key characteristics of this process.

The role of organic agriculture whether in farming, processing, distribution or consumption is to sustain and enhance the process of health at all stages and levels.

## Ecological principle (1)

*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 stresses that production is to be based on ecological processes instead of external inputs. Nourishment and well-being is 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.

## Ecological principle (2)

Production, through farming or wild harvesting, should not be exploitative. It should be managed in accordance with the cycles that are observed in nature and all living systems. It should seek to enhance the properties of resilience, self-regulation and regeneration inherent in them. These cycles are universal but their operation is site specific. Therefore organic management must be adaptive and appropriate to local conditions, ecology, culture and scale.

## Ecological principle (3)

This principle also applies beyond the farm to the processing, manufacturing, distribution and retailing of the products of organic agriculture. The concept of cycles should be applied to minimize resource inputs by enhancing reuse and recycling of materials and energy. Organic agriculture should also ensure that it does not adversely affect living systems, such as landscape, habitat, biodiversity, water or the general environment, which exist outside of its production areas.

## Principle of fairness (1)

*Organic Agriculture should be built upon relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.*

This principle deals with human relations and relations between humans and other living beings. It stresses that organic agriculture should maintain and conduct these relationships in a manner that ensures fairness: a concept that includes the characteristics of equity, respect, justice and stewardship.

## Principle of fairness (2)

Its use and management of natural and environmental resources should not perpetuate social and ecological injustice. Instead, it should demonstrate how production and consumption can be socially and ecologically equitable and just by developing relationships built on fairness. Human relationships whether within or touched by organic agriculture should ensure fairness at all levels and to all parties – producers, farm workers, processors, distributors, traders or consumers – and should be seen to do so.



## Principle of fairness (3)

With regard to specific ecosystems and environmental resources, organic agriculture and all parties to it should acknowledge that rights and ownership are temporary and are ultimately held in trust for all living organisms and future generations. It's real environmental costs should be accounted for and should be transparent.

This principle insists that animals are provided with the conditions and opportunities of life that accord with their physiology, innate behavioral characteristics and well-being. Organic production systems should be constrained by the animal's needs - and not the other way around.

## Principle of care (1)

*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.*

This principle primarily stresses the approach of organic agriculture to strategic and day-to-day management. Precaution and responsibility is called for, not risk assessment which is a narrow notion based on a narrow scientific or economic appraisal. By contrast care: precaution and responsibility encompass evidence and perspectives that can be scientific but can also be outside of the realm of science, have a moral content and a relevance to non-experts.

## Principle of care (2)

This principle should govern management, development and technology choices in organic agriculture. Such a precautionary approach to decision-making will recognize that, even when the best scientific knowledge is used, there is often a lack of knowledge with regard to future consequences and to the plurality of values and preferences of those who might be affected.

## Principle of care (3)

Organic agriculture is a living and dynamic system. It cannot be static and survive; it has to evolve in the face of both internal and external demands and conditions.

Consequently, existing practices and technologies need to be reviewed and if necessary changed, new ones assessed and introduced. Efficiencies can be found and improvements made but this should not be at the risk of jeopardizing the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment. This principle therefore, like the principle of fairness, depends on the involvement or representation of all stakeholders and it needs institutions of openness, transparency and participation.

## Questions (1)

1. Do the proposed principles presented reflect the values of organic agriculture? If not, are there values or principles that are missing or some that could be removed?
2. Do you think that the proposed principles are universally applicable and take into account regional variation?
3. The feedback on the first questionnaire suggested that principles should be formulated in a normative way. However some members of the consultative group questioned the use of the word 'should'. The Task Force solicits for ideas on a different kind of wording that is as strongly normative as 'should', but otherwise formulated.

## Questions (2)

4. Do you have any suggestions on the wording of the preamble?
5. Do you have any suggestions on wording and language? Are the principles and the explanations that belong to them easily to be translated in your language?
6. Do the proposed principles and explanations address 'soil,' 'animal welfare' and 'biodiversity' in a satisfying way? Do 'soil' and / or 'animal welfare' deserve a separate principle? If you think so, please suggest some motivation, formulation and explanation of the new principle.

## Questions (3)

7. Do you think that the principle of fairness rightly addresses the responsibility of Organic Agriculture's in the world? Does the proposed statement make claims and imply obligations that are beyond the control of the Organic Agriculture Movements?
8. Do you have any visualization / materialization (e.g. a photo, art, a poem, a music composition) that expresses for you the Principles of Organic Agriculture? You are invited to share them
9. Any other comments.

## Next steps

- Task Force will study all input and feedback in April / May 2005. All comments on the draft and the considerations of the Task Force are public
- Task Force will elaborate a new draft
- Task Force will send its recommendation to IFOAM's World Board (including argumentation)
- IFOAM's World Board shall decide on the motion to be put forward to the IFOAM General Assembly in September 2005 in Adelaide, Australia



## Your feedback

- All IFOAM members are invited to participate in this consultation round on the review of Principles of Organic Agriculture → please give your feedback on the questions asked
- All consultation feedback is due by no later than March 25<sup>th</sup>. Please email your responses to [l.luttikholt@ifoam.org](mailto:l.luttikholt@ifoam.org)
- All questionnaires and feedback are public