‘Build the European Organic Future’

Summary report of introductory vision conference

Brussels, 8 November 2013
Build the European Organic Future

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Context (1)

Why develop a vision?

• to help the sector in Europe to be prepared for future political processes, environmental challenges and market developments

• to have a coordinated approach towards the further development of practices, standards, controls, research, innovation and related policies in organic farming

• to determine where organic is today, where it wants to go, what challenges it faces

• to provide guidance to the sector on how this can be accomplished.
IFOAM EU has set out to develop a participatory process throughout 2014 that will lead to the formulation of the vision for the organic movement in Europe to 2030.

The aim of the workshop ‘Build the European Organic Future’: to present the vision process and to collect first input from organic stakeholders.

Some of the key note speeches and introductory speeches given during the day are available from the event website.
Some impressions from the conference
Workshops Overview (1): Points discussed

**Workshop 1**
*Unique selling point: Role of organics in society*
- What makes organic food & farming indispensable to society today?
- What *will make* organic food and farming indispensable to society in *2030*?

**Workshop 2**
*Concentrating on the positives: Our Strengths*
- What are we doing better than others? Why?
- Which strengths do we want to develop further in the years to come?

**Workshop 3**
*Staying centred: Our Values*
- Where do we get our strength from?
- What is it we believe in?
Workshops Overview (2): Key messages

**Workshop 1**
*Unique selling point: Role of organics in society*
- Product quality
- Health benefits
- Off-product quality
- Ethics
- Social reasons
- Circular economy
- Lifestyle
- Provision of public goods
- Holistic approach

**Workshop 2**
*Concentrating on the positives: Our Strengths*
- Good in connecting
- Convictions, heart & open-mind
- Respect & courage
- Added env. & community value
- Diversity of businesses
- Autonomy at farm level
- Quality of products

**Workshop 3**
*Staying centred: Our Values*
- Friends and allies, building bridges;
- Sustainability & creativity of farmers
- Holism
- Transparency
- Force for change
**DETAILED WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION**

**Workshop 1**

*Unique selling point: What will make organic food and farming indispensable to society in 2030?*

I. What makes organic food and farming indispensable to society *today?*

For **consumers:**
- internal product quality of organic produce
- desirable health benefits
- taste of organic produce
- trust in the ethics and guarantees that the organic sector can offer
- ‘off product qualities’ of organic products: benefits of organics for environment & animal welfare, ‘the story behind the product’ that presents organics as an authentic production approach
- lifestyle considerations, e.g. organic products as a token of luxury products.

For **civil society at large:**
- ‘off product qualities’ of organics matter: environmental benefits of organic farming
- social reasons, e.g. Rural Development Programmes.

→ Both on the private as on the public side the holistic approach of organic farming is quite recognised.
Unique selling point: What will make organic food and farming indispensable to society in 2030?

II. What will make organic food and farming indispensable to society in 2030?

For consumers:
• Health advantages: scientific proof of health advantages of organic food is needed, e.g. higher levels of micronutrients (antioxidants like phenols) and lower residues levels
• Lifestyle considerations: emphasize connectedness b/n organic farming and the whole food chain and consumers’ way of life and impact on the food chain
• Pleasure and fun aspects and the positive values of organic food and farming need to be emphasized

For civil society at large:
• Circular economy: resilience, diversity, autonomy at farm level. As competition for resources gets fiercer, these advantages of organic farming can score even higher
• Health advantages are expected to be even more important in future: better individual health means fewer costs for the society
• Provision of public goods in both environmental as well as landscape aspects

→ to demonstrate benefits of organic food and farming to consumers and policy makers the organic sector will have to make sure that the overall holistic advantages of organic are recognised and understood
Concentrating on the positives: Which are our particular strengths that we want to foster?

- We are good in connecting
- We are convinced of what we are doing. Being convinced of the way you have chosen enables you to achieve.
- We are being respected because we have the courage to choose another way. Courage is needed when you want to change the world

An idea of this group was that social media could make it possible to provide transparency to the citizens about organic farms. That way, control bodies within an EC law made by administrators might not be necessary anymore.
DETAILED WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Workshop 2

Concentrating on the positives: Which are our particular strengths that we want to foster?

Outcomes of Group 2 Session:

- **Added** environmental and community value of organic agriculture: need to better communicate a measurable added value of organic farming; parameters used to assess environmental and community value should be shared within the society to make sure the values are accepted & recognised.

- **We are united in our ideals, ideas and goals**: We are an idealistic movement and we are able to speak with one voice, e.g. because of IFOAM; need to defend these joint interests, even if we are market competitors. Possible tools to be used:
  - **Internal communication**: develop trainee programmes nationwide, Europe-wide and also worldwide so that people are better connected and relate to each other even when organic movement grows further
  - **Transparency has to be further developed**: not only for the consumers and for the food chain but also the transparency and communication within the growing companies or organizations.

- **Diversity of businesses**: organic sector is characterised by businesses that have individual traits and different strengths rather than pursuing all the same type of corporate identity
Workshop 2

Concentrating on the positives: Which are our particular strengths that we want to foster?

- Autonomy at farm level
- Quality of the products produced in the organic sector

We need to work on the communication of these strengths: Communication should not follow the usual ways of education and training but try to actively involve people starting from food production / cultivation. People who actively participate in the organic movement will feel much more responsible for what is happening in the organic world.
DETAILED WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Workshop 2

Concentrating on the positives: Which are our particular strengths that we want to foster?

Outcomes of Group 4 Session:

• Heart
• Open-mindedness

It is important to pay attention to the issues beyond our political framework and the financial side of farming. Otherwise we will develop to turn into a business like any other business.
DETAILED WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Workshop 2

Concentrating on the positives: Which are our particular strengths that we want to foster?

Achievements we would like to be remembered for:

• People get in direct contact with organic farming as co-workers at farms when they come during the weekend to buy their food
• A soap opera featuring organic food and farming is running in cinemas or theatres
• A daily TV series on an organic family and their daily life and love stories and fates: the organic idea is explained through emotional stories and is brought forward
• No VAT on organic food anymore
• Internalisation of costs took place
• The top income is cut at a reasonable sum so that cooperative directors do not earn disproportionally high salaries
• Health costs are related mostly to prevention of diseases due to shift to healthier diets
• Higher number of organic farmers in Europe, with an average age of 40 years
• Urban agriculture flourishes: locally grown food for everyone

→ Organic is the majority, conventional farming does hardly exist anymore.
Workshop 3

Staying centred: Which are the values that will navigate us through the next decades?

Values of the participants:

• Friends and allies, building bridges: overcoming stagnation, being flexible
• Sustainability
• Farmers and their creativity and independence
• Holism, holistic thinking
• Transparency
• Force for change: There was a strong plea for being more political, looking at new economic models, thinking about new economics, and not just accepting that it is difficult to change within the current not very organic friendly external environment where the non-organic farmers do not pay for the externalities that they create.
Workshop 3

*Staying centred: Which are the values that will navigate us through the next decades?*

Topics that had come up in the introductory round of values but not discussed at any of the tables:

- Respect for nature
- Two cost-accounting as a strength because the organic producers internalise the costs
- Holistic approach as strength and potentially a value.
- Bringing the economic focus back into focus.
- The IFOAM values.
- Courage, freedom in two shades: Freedom for creativity but also economic freedom, financial independence.
- ‘Organic not as a boundary’
- Openness
- Working with communities
- Environmentally friendly
- Denial of fair and care in macro-economical systems’
Thank you!

- To all **participants** for sharing their perspectives!
- To all **moderators** of the workshops:
  - Workshop 1: **Sabine von Wirén-Lehr**, EOCC
  - Workshop 2: **Alexandra Thöring**, artebio
  - Workshop 3: **Susanne Padel**, The Organic Research Centre UK

- To **Gebhard Rossmanith** (Bingenheimer Saatgut AG), **Andrea Ferrante** (AIAB), **Markus Arbenz** (IFOAM) for their introductory statements to the workshops

- To **Geoff Tansey** (Food Ethics Council), **Josef Wilhelm** (Rapunzel), **Urs Niggli** (FiBL) for their key note speeches

*Some of the key note speeches and introductory speeches given during the day are available from the [event website](#)*
Participate in our further vision process!

Vision 2030 website

Brussels, 8 November 2013