
Naturrådet deltager i netværkssamarbejde med andre naturråd i Europa. Samarbejdet omfatter bl.a. en arbejdsgruppe der beskæftiger sig med landbrugspolitik. Dette notat er udarbejdet af det hollandske 'Council for Rural Area' i samarbejde med de øvrige deltagere i arbejdsgruppen¹. Notatet danner baggrund for Peter Nijhoff's oplæg på konferencen 'Organic Food and Farming – Towards Partnership and Action in Europe' den 10.-11. maj 2001 i Danmark. Initiativtager til konferencen er fødevareminister Ritt Bjerregaard.

Organic farming as a Strategy for a Multi-functional Agriculture

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1. Facing the present crisis

Increased complexity and vulnerability

Europe is facing a crisis not only forcing a radical change of our agricultural system, but also changing our whole concept of societal responsibility and risk management in a time characterised by very complex and unpredictable processes making our farming systems, rural environments and food chains increasingly vulnerable. BSE and other threats towards food security, the lack of respect of the integrity of living organisms, the severe loss of biodiversity and the escalating soil degradation show that a fundamental societal crisis is at hand. The Foot & Mouth disease has in parts of Europe distorted the rural economy severely and showed the predominance of short term economic interests above other values.

Disrespect of life processes

Interfering with life and ecological processes with far reaching consequences is one of the most important reasons for the present societal crisis. Life sciences that dissect life in a purely technical sense have to be counterbalanced by an ethical view on risk management and moral responsibility in a long-term perspective. Resilience should be a fundamental concept for research and development, especially within agricultural and ecological sciences. Utilising the improved robustness of the more complex ecosystems, which characterise organic farms, will be one way in which we can seek to cope with the present challenges.

International commitment

The Common Agricultural Policy - with its trade distorting subsidies and trade barriers - has an international dimension that has to be faced. The new CAP reform has to take account of the possible effects on developing countries. Solving our problems at the cost of developing coun-

¹ Includes: Danish Nature Council, Denmark; Council for Rural Areas, The Netherlands; English Nature, England; Austrian Association for Agricultural Research, Austria; Environmental and Nature Council of Flanders, Belgium; German Council of Environmental Advisory Councils, Germany; Portuguese National Council on Environment and Sustainable Development, Portugal; Countryside Council for Wales, UK; Scottish Natural Heritage, UK.

tries is no long-term solution and in ethical terms unjustifiable. The natural environment is not limited to political borders and control mechanisms, markets are interconnected and people count all over the world. Safe and good food, a healthy environment and fostering cultural roots are necessary for all people. EU-policy changes have to take the consequences in ecological, economic, social and cultural sense on a global scale into account.

Acknowledge the multi-functional value of the countryside

The consequences of the stand-still of all movements following the outbreak of the Foot & Mouth disease in parts of Europe has shown how vulnerable the rural economy is. In UK the tourist industry is losing money three times faster than agriculture because of this. Even in strictly economic terms the principle contribution of farmers is no longer solely the production of food but the maintenance of countryside which people enjoy and use for recreation. However, recreation also puts pressure on the nature and landscape values, facilities and space in the countryside. There is a sensitive balance between the development of agricultural practices, tourism, nature and landscape management and land use in general. We have to acknowledge and further elaborate the interconnection between sustainable agriculture, tourism and the multi-functional value of the countryside. Further agricultural intensification - using the classical principles of an economy of scale - is not in line with the multi-functional value of the countryside.

Towards an economy of care

The bulk production and its exploiting character has to change in a production system based on safety, quality and care. In stead of an economy of scale, we need an economy of care based on research and technology that strengthens the resilience of ecosystems and rural communities. An economy of care would acknowledge the interconnections between agriculture, tourism and the wider economy. The trend towards multi-functionality has to be accelerated and fully integrated into the new CAP reform. Such a vision that would make it possible for the society to regain confidence and trust in agriculture as part of the rural community and as care-taker of our natural and cultural heritage. Care and trust as to the food chain, the rural economy and the environment has to be central in the new CAP reform.

A radical reform of EU-policy is necessary

With the BSE-crisis and Foot & Mouth disease, agricultural policy is once again in the middle of serious societal concern on a global scale. Overproduction, distortion of the world market and environmental degradation has already given agriculture and agricultural policy a stigma. The ongoing reform of the CAP has not yet gone far enough. The CAP still provides perverse subsidies which encourage damage to the environment. The present crisis, the WTO-negotiations and the accession of new member states will force a more thorough and earlier reform than foreseen. The catalysing factors demanding a change of the CAP are diverse and not under the responsibility of DG Agriculture, i.e. food safety, developments of bio-technology, health concerns, bio diversity, soil and environment, accession and trade. These are all policy areas under the responsibility of other DG's. EU-Agricultural Policy is not only a policy with very high societal costs; it is also driven by an outdated and inappropriate vision that is not in touch with catalysing forces driving a fundamental change of policy.

2. Organic farming

Using the stimulating force of a pioneer

Social responsibility, local co-operation, respect of the integrity of living organisms, strengthening (agro)biodiversity, building up the natural fertility of the soil and care in all parts of the food chain are fundamental to organic production systems. Organic products are traceable products produced in a transparent process supporting and strengthening the agro-ecosystem. Organic farming is also important to reduce water contamination and to safeguard drinking water supplies, thus contributing to food safety in a broader sense and to sustainable agriculture. Central to this production method is care. Furthermore organic farming plays the role of pioneer in a process towards a more ecologically sustainable agricultural system within a global society. It is important that all present and future member states within the EU are involved in this process of change and not only a few hot spots.

Advantages of organic farming

Organic farming has the following advantages over conventional farming:

- a *certified* production method, with a defined and regulated set of standards
- produced *without the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides*
- a *guaranteed GMO-free chain*
- strengthening *biodiversity* is acknowledged as a result of the farming system.
- the *soil quality* is a fundamental asset in the organic farming system and organic farming produces a rich and fertile soil
- organic farming has a *high overall outcome on environmental indicators in a broad sense*; higher than other farming systems
- the higher production costs are compensated by *higher prices which pass back down the supply chain to the farmers*
- organic products have an *internationally acknowledged label* and this should guarantee a sound competition and fair trade on a global scale
- stimulating organic farming on an international scale has consequences as to *food safety and security, bio diversity, soil and environment in the production countries*.

Learning from each other

These advantages of organic farming doesn't mean that organic farming is more sophisticated and developed than conventional farming in all respects. The growth of the organic sector is in many European countries impeded by the small scale and the fragmentation in all parts of the chain.

Organic and conventional farming can learn from each other. Knowledge and methods from both systems can be transformed and used and put into practice strengthening a professional and sustainable approach. Both systems are systems in development.

Organic farming needs a more professional approach in the whole chain. Conventional farming in its modern form is an efficient and often technically advanced production system with in many sectors and regions a highly professional and integrated food chain from the farm to the fork. But not only in the chain also in relation to the environment, nature and landscape the targets of organic farming can be made more explicit, learning from and introducing agro-environmental schemes. As yet organic farming doesn't automatically fulfill all requirements for multi-functionality. Further more low input farming can reach higher environmental yields than organic farming on specific objectives; e.g. nitrate leaching at dairy farms.

Conventional farming is also a system in development. Within conventional farming is a growing awareness that a more environmental sustainable system is needed. Organic methods and materials (natural crop protection methods, soil conservation strategies and animal welfare

strategies, closing nutrient cycles and choice of seed and plant material) are gradually being used within conventional farming strengthening a more sustainable and integrated approach. If conventional farming would have to internalise environmental costs of their production the incentive towards a shift to sustainable (organic) farming would be stronger.

Riskmanagement

The technical advanced agriculture based on a reductionistic scientific approach has gone hand in hand with the development of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and GMO's. Biodiversity, productive soil and water of high quality have been lost all over Europe. Economising on animal feed, long distance transport of living animals and increasing specialisation and intensification on crop and animal production have lead to a vulnerable rural economies and disease outbreaks that have had far reaching consequences.

The strategy has been to strengthen the controle regime. Monitoring, risk assessment, intensification of research effort and the development of control systems has been the answer.

Additional to this there is an answer based on precaution. More self-sufficient organic farming systems in terms of input would strengthen the resilience and health of ecosystems and reduce the risks that the reductionist scientific approach and 'modern' global agricultural strategies have brought.

Putting organic farming at the centre of agricultural change would show a clear choice for greater care in the whole food chain, respect for the intrinsic value of organisms, the will to strengthen (agro)biodiversity and soil fertility and a clear move towards a more environmentally sound agriculture thereby taking the societal responsibility and an integrated approach serious. It would meet growing consumer concerns and increase trust.

3. A radical reform is more needed than ever before

The CAP is still a production oriented policy with devastating environmental consequences (as to biodiversity, soil and aquatic ecosystems), reducing regional and local landscape characteristics, favouring wealthy regions and large farms, distorting the world market and without the possibility – as yet – to guarantee food security and quality. This has to change. Only a very radical reform can reach this!

Agricultural policy should give support to maintaining regional and local landscape character, to sustaining local communities, to protecting and enhancing biodiversity, and to protecting soils and aquatic ecosystems. In the last respect, agricultural policy should operate within the framework of wider policies aimed at reducing acidification of soils, limiting concentrations of heavy metals and persistent organic compounds in soils, preventing eutrophication of water caused by excess nutrients, preventing physical impacts such as erosion or compaction of soils, and limiting emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants into the atmosphere.

By putting organic farming at the centre of the reform, agricultural policy could come closer to these ideal. The European Agricultural policy will have to find greater harmony with other EU

policies, like Health and the Consumer, Environmental, Regional, Enlargement, Development and Trade Policy. Agriculture would regain its position as a respectable societal activity delivering products that society wants and needs if organic farming would be promoted on a much larger scale. In stead of a sector producing one crisis after another, it would be a sector that integrates different fundamental issues concerning ethics and integrity: health, environmental sustainability and solidarity with developing countries. To reach that the political and economic power of the old system, based on intensive use of resources, will have to be dismantled. EU and national governments will have to face the conflicts that will arise if such a shift in policy would take place.

4. Recommendations

Harmonise rules and legislation on an international level

The EU provides the rules for organic agriculture, but harmonisation leaves much to be desired. The EU rules for organic agriculture must be better geared to IFOAM'S *basic standards* and the Codex Alimentarius. IFOAM and Codex Alimentarius are internationally respected bodies and should define a level playing field for the purpose of international trade. Compatibility between the EU system and these international systems should be strengthened. The judgement of equivalency should be based on a solid value basis respecting regional differences in implementation of the general rules and not just on a technical evaluation comparable to industrial production. The EU-regulation is now based on technical criteria also used for industrial productions without taking environmental and regional differences into account. Products that received the organic quality mark in one member state must also be recognised as such in the other member states. In any harmonisation it is important to avoid a leveling down.

Introduce 'care and trust' as leading concepts within the production chain

Consumer trust - based on high standards - has been basic for the present growth of the organic sector. Implementing, handling and guaranteeing these standards needs specific attention. Not only formally but as part of a production system based on care. Scandals as to food safety or animal health within the organic sector would be devastating for the further development. This care has to be the central concern throughout the whole production chain from farm to fork. Transparency of the production is necessary. The sector itself has its own responsibility. But food safety, animal health and welfare, environmental and landscape quality are important aspects for organic farming in which the government plays a part, as well as the external conditions in primary production enterprises (influence of nutrients, pesticides, GMOs). Therefore encourage the development of systems and means of production for food-safe organic farming, and work on a certification system for food safety and animal welfare, including animal health, together with the sector. Introduce a control system tailored to organic farming.

Guarantee GMO-free chains and environment

As organic production according to the regulations does not allow the use of genetic engineering it is important that the development perspective of organic farming should not be frustrated. The initiatives within the EU and the WHO/FAO that should result in guaranteeing chains that are free of genetic modification must be supported. Research capacity for the development of modern gentic-free production methods and means of production for organic agriculture should be made available. Set up, in line with the EU initiatives, a system for control and labelling of all means of production (sowing seed, saplings, animal feed and fodder, crop protection agents, vaccines, medicines) related to the presence or absence of genetic modification. Organic farming also needs space to develop itself without interference from genetic modification. Co-ordination of land use is necessary to guarantee this.

Develop economic incentives to go and stay organic

The basic principles of future policies should be to give farmers financial support if they go beyond the legal requirements to protect nature and the environment, but no longer provide general unconditional support. Organic farming will have to function as an economic and competitive sector. To eliminate unfair competition subsidising environmental damaging agricultural production should stop. The costs of production would be more fair if environmental costs of conventional agricultural productions were internalised by making use of green taxes. Reducing VAT for organic products is as yet not possible within EU because of competition arguments. In a transition phase stimulating consumers to make a shift in their purchasing behaviour it could be useful. Creating insurance and safety net systems in the transition period could help farmers overcome their doubt converting to organic farming.

Build up a firm knowledge-basis

Organic agriculture is a sector in development. In all parts of the food chain further research and development of knowledge is necessary on how to handle organic products, production methods and the environment. Only a few percent of the available research funds are used for organic farming, and the greater part of it goes to subjects in the field of primary production. This gives little attention to chain and market, and hardly any to societal issues related to organic farming. Therefore pursue more research into organic agriculture both in the scope of primary production and in processing, chain forming and the whole societal context, including consumer behaviour. Encourage that, where possible, applied research takes place on location or in consultation with the farmers themselves. Research into organic farming must go further than translating research from conventional farming into organic farming. But do also pursue basic research via separate programmes and call in renowned research institutes. Let new institutes adhere to the same strict requirements as the established institutes.

Give organic farming a full place in the curricula of agricultural training, and develop specialisation on all levels. Give organic products an own place in the modules on the environment and food in training centres for catering and general and technical services industries.

Communicate the societal costs and benefits of organic farming

Proper communication is vital for the development of organic agriculture. The available knowledge and experience must become available to new organic producers and new incentives in the chain. But the consumer must be well informed as well, the more so since an appeal is made to the consumer's sense of responsibility and willingness to pay a higher price.

Centres for the transfer of knowledge can form an important link between individual farmers, enterprises, social organisations, knowledge institutes and the government. Many members have these kind of centres. A European network of centres like this should be set up. EU has a responsibility in this. This European network for optimising the transfer of knowledge within the organic sector and outside must monitor the position of organic farming within the agricultural sector and the whole European society in order to adjust and to provide impetuses where necessary. Close co-operation with existing organisation is needed.

Public authorities may well opt for using organic products within their own institutions. They may also conclude covenants with the largest Dutch catering companies, hotel and restaurant chains to assure their supply consists of, say, 30% organic products. In addition, an annual reward may be offered to the best organic works canteen or restaurant. And finally, there are possibilities ('*postbus 51*', etceteras) to show good examples and where perhaps prominent persons can be called in.

Purchasing a product with the EKO quality mark must guarantee the consumer that it is a real organic product: from the organic seeds and materials, via production, processing and distribution, up to the shop. This is only possible by making the (meaning of the) quality mark generally

known, and by a proper government-controlled certification and control. Trust is not only build through control and control of the control. The consumer has his own responsibility. He must know what quality and safety can be expected from organic products and how to store and use them at home. Equally important is that the consumer knows what care has been given to animal welfare, the environment, nature and landscape during the production.

Marketing societal services could be an important stimulus to organic agriculture. Unfortunately, developing its concepts and constructions is no easy matter. It is therefore important to support this endeavour, which may consist, among other things, of a comparative study into the efficiency of organic and other forms of agriculture, if calculations include all societal assets and liabilities.

Provide support and guidance to organic farming in future member states of the EU

During the regional conference for Europe FAO expressed solid arguments to increase organic farming, especially in the Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore it is important to provide technical assistance and training facilities in developing the required expertise and infrastructure for organic farming in these countries. Agri-environmental measures and organic farming should be incorporated in the Rural Development Plans under SAPARD/PHARE.

Develop an EU Action Plan on organic food and farming as part of the coming CAP reform

The EEAC supports the initiative of the Danish Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Mrs. Ritt Bjerregaard, to develop an EU Action Plan on organic food and farming in Europe. This Action Plan should not be put outside the new CAP reform. It should be seen as a driving force within the new CAP reform stimulating the conventional farming to take further steps towards quality in the food chain and the environment. It should also stimulate to incorporate organic farming and to give a new push to the ESDP process and the implementation of Natura 2000 and the Biodiversity Convention. Biodiversity should be part of the standards of Organic Farming on all levels. The EU should give a good example in this by strengthening the standards on biodiversity in their regulation. Spatial policy on EU and national level - in which not only nature, but also the soil and water quality plays an important role in land use policy is necessary. A pro-active role in protecting the possibility for organic farming in the most suitable regions has to be taken. Unintentional influence on organic farming by e.g. nutrients, pesticides and GMOs by taking precautionary measures on and around neighbouring enterprises and premises have to be avoided and organic farmers who want to relocate their farms to a concentration area for organic farming should get government assistance. Integration of specific and regional diversified agro-environmental measures into the organic farming system - in accordance with Natura 2000 - has to be stimulated.
