

Gunnar Rundgren, Opening Speech Organic World Congress Aug 2002.

This is the first and the 14th Organic World Congress. It is the 14th Congress because IFOAM has had similar conferences 13 times before. It is the first Organic World Congress because the previous events were called scientific conferences.

- The term Organic World Congress gives a more accurate description of the nature of this event. Yes there are scientific findings presented at this congress as it was also before. But also before a large proportion of the presentations are not scientific in its more narrow sense. A lot of the presentations are political, they are touching the core values of organic, some try to expand the values into new areas, others want to deepen the values in existing areas. They are also touching key aspects of the organic sector. Aspects of production of marketing of certification and standards. I think the mixture of science and other approaches is nice and it fits well into the organic approach where science is put in its wider context.
- IFOAM celebrates its 30th anniversary. There has been a remarkable progress in the organic sector during this period. As a matter of fact if the organic sector continues to grow in the same rate the coming 30 years, conventional farming will only be practiced in special places dedicated to the preservation of redundant technologies. And for those that are very interested in statistics I can tell you that IFOAM itself is growing its number of employees in the same rate as the last two years, we will have 8,5 million employees 30 years down the road!

Just after this congress I and some more proceed to another event – a mega event in Johannesburg called the World Summit on Sustainable Development. At this event, world leaders are supposed to report back what they have done since the Rio Earth Summit 1992. The summit where the Agenda 21 was formulated, the Summit where bold statements were made. When the world leaders come to Joburg they have not too many good things to report, and a number of failures to reflect upon. The development of organic agriculture is one of the few positive signs, although it can be disputed to what extent that is thanks to the world leaders or despite the actions of the world leaders:

Certified organic farming has increased around 10 times during this period, from less than a couple of million hectares to 20 million hectares. Non certified organic farming has also increased in similar rates. Organic farming does deliver. It delivers some of elements that are key elements of sustainable development.

- The introduction of organic farming is a radical improvement for the environment. OA put less pressure on non-renewable resources and it does not cause the same kind of environmental degradation as conventional production. Organic agriculture contributes to biodiversity.
- It contributes to food safety.
- It contributes to food security. One of the commonly heard argument against OA is that it can't feed the world. However there is no support for this argument. OA is a sustainable and resilient production method that is well adapted for the rural people that are most likely to suffer from food shortages. As 800 million people is starving it seems more logical to claim that conventional farming can't feed the world. But I am not going to say that (did I?) since food security is more of a economic, social and political issue than an agricultural production issue.
- It delivers a sustainable agriculture production. The care for the soil and the living which are the real attributes for organic, are key for a sustainable production. More recently the care for the organic matter in the soil has been identified also as a possibly important strategy in combatting global warming – another of these issues where leaders, and especially US leaders come very empty handed to Johannesburg

Organic agriculture delivers also in a lot of other areas, which may not be very high on the agenda in Johannesburg, such as animal welfare.

Still, we are not delivering enough: we should deliver more in a number of areas:

- rural development, the survival of small or family farms
- social conditions
- the design of the whole food system

All of these topics are in the focus of this congress. As a matter of fact they are very interrelated and may often be difficult to separate out from each other.

Long transports and intensive processing are some of the result of the economy of scale and the corporate take-over of the food chain. With the introduction of chemical fertilisers a link was broken. The link between the land, the crops the animals eating them and the food and fibers consumed by humans - this link was broken. With the introduction of pesticides there was even less reason to respect good cropping practices such as crop rotation which was necessary before. Those two technologies were fitting well into the other trends and helped to create the farm and food system we have today.

Strong calls are made for the redesign of our food systems. The arguments presented differ quite a lot. Some argue heavily against long transports of food because these transports consume a lot of energy and they contribute to pollution. However, I believe the major environmental problem is that it brakes a vital link in a system that should be cyclic. By accepting the large scale movement of nutrients from one place to another, we are creating imbalances, imbalances that lead to the depletion of soils in one part and to an overcharge of nutrients in the other end. I believe that a very strong case for a redesign of the food system comes from a political and social aspect.

The gap between producers and consumers is creating a number of problems:

Lack of understanding on both sides

- The consumers don't understand the conditions of the producers, they don't see the immediate link between their behaviour as consumers and the effect this have on the farms
- But also the farmers have little understanding of the needs and perceptions of the consumers.

The gap created between producers and consumers in this system also made possible the introduction of methods of keeping animals that never would have developed otherwise. New technologies for preservation, such as raditation would not be needed and even less accepted if there were more direct control over the food chain. Even the introduction of GMOs would be much less likely in a better integrated system. Earlier some of the gap was bridged by the fact that many city dwellers were born in the country side themselves or at least still had some relatives that were farmers. With farming population down to a couple percent in the most "advanced" countries this is not often the case anymore.

IFOAM is supporting the development of local and direct marketing. This should not be seen as targeted against large scale organic production or sales via supermarkets or the transnational companies. Farmers doing large scale organic, supermarkets and lately also transnational companies should have a lot of credit for what they have done to increase organic 10 fold in ten years. What they have done has liberated fields and animals from a unstustainable, dangerous and unethical production. We don't want to diminish that contribution.

The redesigning of our food system is not something that primarily can take place by making special organic standards. A radical redesign of the food system accross the board requires major political and economic changes and the responsibility for that can't be put on the shoulders of the organic farmers alone. I don't think we are helping anybody by telling the organic coffee farmer in Mexico that: Sorry your products can't be called organic because they have been transported too far and this is not sustainable. In the same way I don't think the farmer that sell to the big companies should be pictured as a traitor, or that an organic MacBurger shall be prohibited because it is a symbol for junk food and a global food system. I do believe that individuals can make a choice not to buy such products and that they should have the information to be able to make such choices.

There were very few people that thought that was promoted as organic farming 30 years ago would develop to the industry it is today. In the same way, even if some of the alternative schemes that are presented seems marginal or utopian today, they may very well carry the seeds for a similar development with our food system. A future better food system and the future of small farms and local markets lies in innovation and creativity. What we should focus on is to highlight the good examples,

to make them visible, to create a platform for their promotion and for the exchange of experiences. One important way is by this Organic World Congress.