



Global Development of Organic Agriculture Challenges and Prospects

Does global organic trade support a sustainable development – and what are the challenges and prospects? Scientists from Denmark, USA, Argentina, Uganda, Austria, UK, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands have examined the global development of organic agriculture in a DARCOF knowledge synthesis. The work has resulted in a new book release from CABI Publishing.



Organic products from Africa, South America and China

Organic pineapple from Uganda, organic apples from Argentina and organic sunflower seeds from China can now be found in the supermarkets. Organic trade all over the world is increasing. The major markets for organic food and drink are Europe and North America, which account for roughly 97% of global revenues, and the markets are growing. Concurrently, regional markets of organic produce are also developing in countries like Brazil, China, India and South Africa. Major northern markets offer good prospects for suppliers of organic products not domestically produced. These include coffee, tea, cocoa, spices, sugarcane and tropical fruits, as well as fresh produce in the off-season.

Although certified organic products make up a minor share of the global food market it is the fastest growing segment of the food industry. Thus, over the past decade the organic food system has been transformed from a loosely coordinated local network of producers and consumers to a globalised system of formally regulated trade, which links socially and geographically distant sites of production and consumption.

Globalisation challenges organic agriculture

Agriculture and food systems, including organic agriculture, are undergoing a technological and structural modernisation strongly influenced by the growing globalisation. The organic agricultural movements can be seen as tangible efforts to create a more sustainable development. However, these efforts are challenged by the globalisation, which strongly influences organic agriculture and food chains. Furthermore, global agriculture and food systems hold large differences



between, on one hand, industrialised farming and consumption based on global food chains and, on the other, smallholder farmers and resource-poor people primarily linked in local food markets in low-income countries.

This development gives rise to a number of questions such as: Does global trade with organic products support a sustainable development? Can organic agriculture contribute to global food security? Does organic certification ensure natural resources and improve working conditions? Can fair trade with organic products be realised?

On this background, Danish Research Centre for Organic Food and Farming (DARCOF) initiated a so-called knowledge synthesis in order to provide an overview of the potential role of organic agriculture in a global perspective. Scientists from Denmark, Europe, Africa, South America and USA took part in the work, which also included an international workshop.

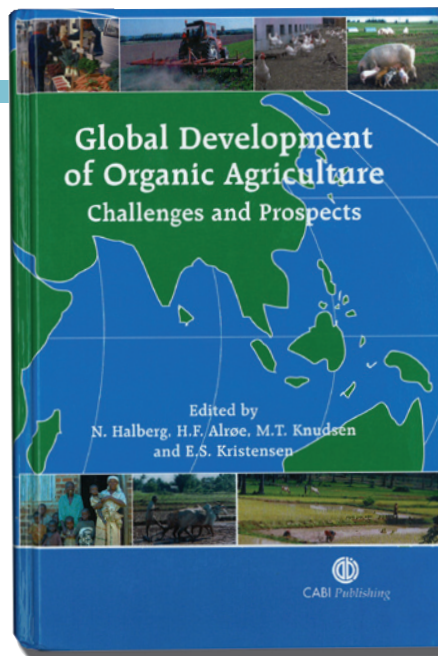
New book discusses prospects and challenges

The new book gives an overview of the global development of organic agriculture, together with in-depth discussions on political ecology, ecological justice, ecological economics and free trade with new insights on the challenges for organic agriculture. This is followed by the potential role of organic agriculture for improving *soil fertility*, *nutrient cycling* and *food security* and reducing *veterinary medicine use*, together with discussions of *research needs* and the importance of *non-certified organic agriculture*. Finally, a synthesis of the challenges and promises is given.

Furthermore, the knowledge synthesis has formed the basis for launching a new research effort in this area (see back page).

For further information:

See: www.ecowiki.org/GlobalPerspective or www.globalorg.dk



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New research project:

GLOBAL ORG

Sustainability of organic farming in a global food chains perspective

The overall objective of this project is to determine to what extent and under which conditions organic farming may reduce local and global negative environmental impacts and provide improvements in poor farmers' livelihoods within the framework of the global food supply chain and the increased urbanisation. Moreover, the project will address the following questions:

- ▶ Which role do supermarkets play in the sale of organic produce and how can small farmers act in this context?
 - ▶ Which development do consumers support when buying different kinds of imported organic products in Denmark and a chosen few other countries?
 - ▶ To which extent does organic certification contribute to protect soil and biodiversity on vulnerable locations – and what is the economic and social sustainability of such initiatives?
 - ▶ How does global trade with organic products comply with the ideas of utilisation of local resources and mutual understanding between producer and consumer along with other values behind the 'principle of nearness'?
 - ▶ Does transportation and energy use in global organic trade counterbalance the potential (environmental) advantages of organic farming?
- ▶ What is the level of local understanding and nature of embedment of organic ideas, principles and practices among public and private agencies as well as farmers' organisations in developing countries – and to what extent do the price premium benefit smallholder farmers?
 - ▶ What are the consequences of large-scale conversion to organic farming for food supply and food security among urban and rural poor at a regional scale?

Project title

Sustainability of organic farming in a global food chains perspective (GLOBAL ORG)

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