

ORGANIC TO FEED THE WORLD, EMPOWER POOR, MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE & PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY¹

Anne English[©]

So far, the world has always managed to meet the challenge of food productivity. In fact, today we have 25% oversupply measured in calories after losses. The challenge is to provide access to food for the poor. The strategy of ecological intensification using organic principles and practices is a new paradigm to feed the world while empowering the poor and mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss.

Why is it that we have abundant food yet there are one billion hungry or starving people in the world, most of them living in rural areas? And the world is expected to produce 70% more food by 2050. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations estimates that 80% of this has to come from productivity increases and only 20% from new land. Production has to consider the loss of biodiversity, degeneration of soil, water scarcity and of course climate change.

Hungry People First

It is widely accepted that organic agriculture contributes to the alleviation of poverty, but there are still mis-conceptions that organic agriculture cannot feed the world. According to Markus Arbenz, who is Executive Director of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), "It can! Organic agriculture currently has similar yields to conventional agriculture and often much higher yields in regions of the world where production environments are tough." And he adds, "Conventional practices deplete soils and thereby undermine long term food security. The reality is that conventional, green revolution-based or industrial agriculture fails to feed 15% of the world's population - so it's clear that focusing on production alone is an ill-advised strategy. Sadly, smallholder farmers are pushed-out through international investments, through land-grabbing and through bad governance. This reflects the prioritisation of profit opportunities by businesses and the international community over food security for the poor and the livelihoods of local people."

Eco-Intensification

According to Arbenz, "We need a paradigm shift - a new strategy based on affordable production systems for the poor through the smart use of biodiversity and the solutions that nature offers while acknowledging the diversity of cultures and leveraging the knowledge and practices they bring." Eco-intensification is the alternative that the organic movement suggests. It sees immense potential to achieve greater productivity and resilience by enhancing the biological activity of farming systems rather than outsourcing performance to costly, toxic inputs with wide-ranging adverse effects.

Robert Jordan, Advocacy Manager at IFOAM explains, "Practices such as composting improve the biological activity of the soil which in turn accelerates nutrient cycling and healthy plant growth. Nitrogen which is the most important nutrient for plant growth is obtained by

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integrating plants that naturally fix nitrogen in the soil from the air. Other ecological functions that are stimulated by organic farming practices include pest and disease regulation, soil building, water cycling and pollination.

Best Practice in Food Security

Small farmers already produce 70% of the world's food and form the backbone of food security throughout the developing world. Arbenz says, "We need to recognise the world's small farms as the most appropriate means in which to secure food supply for all, including the poor and to cool the planet." Ethiopia and Egypt are two countries already adopting strategic elements advocated by the organic movement. In both countries, land has been regenerated with organic agriculture and people-centred approaches that have resulted in thousands of people finding confidence in their ability to feed their families. The Ethiopian government has since put organic practices at the heart of their national agriculture development policies and in Egypt agricultural pesticide use has been dramatically reduced after consultation with local organic farmers.

KRAV is a key player in the Swedish organic market. It ensures that the fast growing community of organic consumers (the annual value of organic retail sales worldwide is US\$ 50 billion) has access to organic products that are not just healthy and tasty, but that contribute to the food security of the families and communities that grow the produce. KRAV is a well-known world leader among sustainability and organic standards, and includes also social accountability, animal welfare and climate change mitigation requirements. The whole value chain contributes with its investment and consumption choices to enhanced food security, while taking advantage of products that have a smaller ecological footprint and improve the livelihoods of the producers. "Buying KRAV is a really strong statement for sustainable food production," says Johan Cejie, KRAV's head of strategies and climate.

Arbenz says, "Supporting small farmers worldwide would strengthen the livelihoods of the poor and assure access to food for all. To make this a reality, we need the right policies at international, national and local levels, we need corporate social responsibility and we need to support the capacity of the poor, with relevant research and advisory services in ecological intensification."