

Organic Agriculture, Climate Change and the Environment
Iran Room, 22 April 2009, 12-14 hours

Welcome

by

Alexander Mueller, Assist Director-General
Natural Resources Management and Environment Department
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Today, 22 April is Earth Day and the beginning of “The Green Generation Campaign” which will also be the focus of the 40th Anniversary of Earth Day in 2010. With negotiations for a new global climate agreement coming up in December, Earth Day 2009 must be a day of action and civic participation, to defend The Green Generation’s core principles defined as follows:

- A carbon-free future based on renewable that will end our common dependency on fossil fuels, including coal;
- An individual’s commitment to responsible and sustainable consumption;
- Creation of a new green economy that lifts people out of poverty by creating millions of quality green jobs and transforms the global education system into a green one.

This Side Event therefore falls within these principles, and I am glad to note that this morning, upon entering FAO, all delegates were greeted with a little cone of paper carrying organic strawberries, which the Go Green Group of FAO prepared with the intent to raise awareness on such issues.

In January 1999, the 15th Session of COAG requested that a cross-sectoral programme on organic agriculture be established and housed in the Sustainable Development Department, which has become the NR Department in 2008.

Since 1999, this programme operates through the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Organic Agriculture (NR provides the Secretariat), with seed funding provided by PBE. Under the FAO Reform (2007 onward), the organic agriculture theme is listed under the "other important multidisciplinary areas" to be implemented through "joint actions related to multi-disciplinary themes which will keep their priority status".

Many of the documents produced by the Organic Programme are available outside the Iran Room. Activity reports are regularly submitted to the FAO technical committees and this COAG has an INF10 document on Public-Private Partnerships for Enhancing Organic Agriculture Trade, which includes the results of a successful cooperation on harmonization and equivalence of organic agriculture regulations.

In the last biennium, the IDWG/OA worked around preparing the conference on Organic Agriculture and Food Security (May 2007). During this biennium, the main activity is ORCA.

ORCA, or the Organic Research Centres Alliance is a concept developed jointly by the FAO, Tufts University (USA) and the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL, Switzerland) and the International Centre for Research in Organic Food Systems (ICROFS, Denmark). I am very glad that the directors of both FiBL and ICROFS are here with us today.

Fundamental science and applied research are crucial requirements for the development of organic agriculture, especially in developing countries. The proposed alliance therefore intends to internationally network and strengthen existing institutions with scientific credentials and empower them to become centers of excellence in transdisciplinary organic agriculture research.

We are working on strengthening the science-basis of organic agriculture, while pioneering an alternative paradigm of agricultural research research, built on farmer participation and “centres without walls”.

One first attempt will be next month, in Kampala, on the occasion of the African Organic Conference, where we will bring together various donors’ initiatives and existing human and institutional capacities around a common African agenda for organic agriculture research.

Much work is devoted by my Department’s staff to natural resources and climate change. And so is NR organic component. On the occasion of the HLC, a document was produced on Low Greenhouse Gas Agriculture, using evidence from organic agriculture. This document has recently been revised, and as it is the fruit of a cooperation with FiBL, you will hear about it from Urs Niggli in a moment.

Similarly, NR has been supporting the Tigray project in Ethiopia, and you will soon hear about this from my friend Tewelde.

Another major initiative is implemented in the Pacific Region, where Pacific Island Countries have gone a long way in establishing a Regional Organic Task Force, which produced its own Pacific Organic Standards. The Pacific Region is a hot spot in terms of climate change and a special case in terms of commodity trade, due to the smallness of countries. Organic agriculture offers these countries a way to compete on market with high quality/small quantity products, while caring for the environment.

Finally, I would like to thank IFOAM, and Cristina Grandi in particular, for its continued and pleasant cooperation with FAO; Denmark for this Side Event initiative; FiBL and ICROFS for scientific support.