

# ORCA discussion forum - Week 2 Summary

Many thanks to all participants in the ORCA discussion forum. This second week has brought many new and interesting questions, and we look forward to a continued lively exchange. Below is a brief summary of topics discussed over the past week.

## The ORCA Vision

Last week, it was proposed that the ORCA vision be revised as follows: *Organic Research: Valued by farmers and policy makers worldwide by 2020.*

Some participants commented that ORCA should be responsive to the needs of organic farmers and processors. It was noted that farmers involved in organic research do not always benefit from the knowledge coming out of the research. One theme carrying over from last week's discussion is that of ORCA playing a role in disseminating the information that it is collecting and particularly filling a gap for extension. Others suggested that research centers take up the issue of integrity in the certification process and include certifiers in the research process.

Although research centers would do well to be grounded in the broad organic movement, it was pointed out that ORCA should make a clear distinction between extension and research, and it should be open to critiquing current organic practices in order to produce top-notch science.

In our vision of ORCA, we saw farmers as full research partners, working side-by-side with scientists in the production of knowledge. We use the term "transdisciplinary research," which may not be familiar to everyone, but which we hope indicates our strong desire for, and belief in, the necessity of farmer engagement. Yet much of the feedback we are receiving underscores the vast need for more extension in organic agriculture. Can ORCA undertake both research and extension or can other entities, such as FAO, increase their extension and development work in organic agriculture to meet this need?

## ORCA Topics

A few suggestions were made for new centers or resource concentrations within the ORCA structure:

- One thread of our discussion focused on the role of organic consumers and other social factors impacting and being impacted by organic agriculture. One participant suggested having a center on social aspects of OA, which would include information on consumer behaviors and other factors such as the impact of OA on rural socioeconomic development.
- Another participant commented that epistemological and methodological coordination among organic research institutes should be a priority for ORCA, and either based in one center that offers assistance to others, or as departments within each center.
- There was a discussion of the importance of indigenous knowledge in organic research, and a suggestion was made to include a responsibility for knowledge management systems within each agroecosystem center.

We would appreciate having more people weigh in on these discussions and the basic design of ORCA -- will it achieve our common goal of advancing organic agriculture research?

In this coming week, we would like participants to focus comments on two questions:

- (1) Are the selection criteria (Section 5.1) and selection process (Section 5.2) appropriate?
- (2) Last week, we received feedback that our description of how ORCA would be organized and operate failed to take full advantage of electronic communication and other modern technology. We tend to

agree with this critique but would appreciate help in providing a deeper understanding of how technology could be used. How can technology facilitate the vision and mission of ORCA?

Finally, a number of people have shared their valuable experiences working on organic agriculture in various countries, which will be important in revising the ORCA proposal to ensure it has considered the full range of organic research currently in progress. We hope that you continue to share your stories in addition to your comments on the ORCA proposal.