

ORCA discussion forum – Week 1 Summary

Many thanks to those who have already registered and participated in the ORCA discussion forum! As of Sunday evening EST, we have 139 registered users and a number of helpful comments.

If you have not already found the ORCA document, it is located on the main Forum page, on the right-hand side. There is a colorful wheel diagram there and the link to the document is right above it. You may also link directly to the document:

- <http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/organicag/files/ORCA-complete.pdf> (English)
- http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/organicag/files/draft_orca_es.pdf (Spanish)

On the discussion page, a list of "fundamental questions" for our discussion is posted, also on the right-hand side of the page.

In an effort to distribute this invitation to a wide and diverse audience, we sent it out to several email lists, including 250 professional on the FAO organic agriculture list, 45 FAO field offices, the FiBL list of 750 organic research institutes, 20 organic experts who reviewed an earlier draft of the paper, the Info-organic list, and the CGIAR Science Council. The paper was also sent to the following regional groups:

- Third World Network (Asia based)
- Organic Consumers Association (US based)
- Maela Network (Latin America based)
- The SIDA/Grolink list of 1,200 Africans who applied for training in organic agriculture
- The Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's weekly report (US based)

Based on these numbers and a count of emails that bounced back, we estimate that at least 2,000 institutions or individuals received the invitation to participate in the ORCA discussion forum. We encourage participants to share the invitation with other networks and colleagues with potential interest in ORCA. Our goal is to have as open, transparent, and productive discussion as possible over the next few weeks.

Please also note that the ORCA document is available in both English and Spanish. Participants should feel free to post comments in either language as we do have a moderator who is fluent in Spanish. In order to find the Spanish version, you can click on the "español" tab at the top left of the page, or go directly to: http://www.fao.org/organicag/oa-forum/es/?no_cache=1. We recognized this week that the discussion page was not fully translated and we will rectify that soon. The weekly summaries will integrate all comments, in both languages.

Already we have seen many interesting comments and suggestions, and we look forward to more to come. Below is a synopsis of the discussion as of Sunday, November 23 at 6 pm EST.

A number of people have shared their interesting experiences with organic agriculture and provided contact information in order to connect with others working in the field. While our intent was to get feedback on the ORCA document, we understand that this discussion provides a unique opportunity for organic researchers and practitioners to share knowledge. We may reorganize the web page next week to allow a section for this type of exchange to happen alongside the broader ORCA discussion.

Some participants have suggested that we include discussion of the following resources to strengthen the ORCA document:

- Organic.Edune (<http://www.organic-edunet.eu>) and Organic.ePrints (<http://www.orgprints.org/>)
- *The Transformation of agri-food systems*, an FAO book edited by McCullough et al (ISBN 978-92-5-105962-3)

We welcome suggestions for other resources that might strengthen the ORCA paper.

Throughout the discussion, the need to link research with awareness and training was a major theme. One person described a need to do more to educate NGOs and governments; others outlined specific strategies to increase awareness among consumers and farmers.

Further reflections on the role of ORCA in outreach are welcome?

Last week's discussion also produced these important questions:

- Should ORCA centers focus on local food systems research? If so, how would this best be organized?
- Should all agro-ecosystem centers take on the role of researching seeds and breeds appropriate to their regions? Or is the proposed design, with seeds and breeds as its own center, the best approach?
- How can ORCA best support farmers as active participants in organic research efforts?
- Should we add responsibility for organic guarantee systems into the center on economics, markets and trade? What other options are there for covering guarantee systems?
- Should ORCA include an online journal for exchange of organic research, or do other journals suffice? What do you think of an open-source system such as Organic ePrints (<http://www.orgprints.org/>)?

As we enter the second week of the Forum, we would like to focus feedback on the fundamental questions raised for Chapter 3.

Thanks once again for your participation. We look forward to a lively discussion!