

# **Sociological Perspectives of Organic Agriculture: from Pioneer to Policy**

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library, London, UK.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Sociological perspectives of organic agriculture: from pioneer to policy / edited by Georgina Holt and Matthew Reed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-84593-038-7 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-84593-038-X (alk. paper)

1. Natural foods industry—Congresses. 2. Organic farming—Congresses. 3. Sociology, Rural—Congresses. I. Holt, Georgina. II. Reed, Matthew. III. Title.

HD9000.5.S657 2006-02-08

306.3'49—dc22

2005026796

ISBN-10: 1 84593 038 X

ISBN-13: 978 1 84593 038 7

Printed and bound in the UK from copy supplied by the editors by Athenaeum Press, Gateshead.

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# Preface

The signpost is not the journey (Adapted from Zen saying).

There is now a growing body of literature about organic farming, less about the techniques and philosophy of practice than about the social aspects of the organic movement and its emergence. However, for someone like me, who has played a part in the organic sector since the mid-1970s, a vaguely uncomfortable feeling is generated by reading about decisions and developments that I was party to; largely because I cannot work out which is the more erroneous – historical analysis by non-participants or my own memory!

It is clear though that for a grassroots movement, as the organic movement was, to move into the mainstream in the space of 25 years in the face of opposition from the scientific establishment, ridicule from the farming establishment, and hesitant apathy from the political establishment, is unusual if not unique, and is worthy of sociological and political study – if, in the next 25 years we can build on past experiences.

This book stands apart from the generality of published material on the subject; not least because a number of the contributors have been around the organic movement and sector for some time and they have a degree of knowledge that goes beyond cliché and speculation. Of course each author has their own insight, and each reader too, nevertheless the book is a real step towards sharing an understanding of the significance and dynamics of a farming movement that set out ‘to change the world’, and might have ended up being completely changed itself.

Organic farming continues to grow in hectares and prominence across the globe and there is no doubt in my mind that this will continue to be a critical consideration for policy makers at every level as more people realise that we do indeed live in a world of finite and diminishing natural resources. Therefore, I view this book as a valuable and timely guide to those activities and trends that underpin the influence of organic farming on, not only agricultural and health policies but also, rural, social and international development.

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# 1

## **Sociological Perspectives of Organic Agriculture: an Introduction**

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My subject is food, which concerns everyone; it is health, which concerns everyone; it is the soil, which concerns everyone – even if he does not realise it, and it is the history of certain recent scientific research linking (these) three vital subjects (Balfour, 1943: 9).

Food as a culturally hybrid entity, becomes unevenly embedded into the fabric of new rural development practices; and new synergies become developed between food, agricultural practice, consumption practices and associational and institutional arrangements (Marsden, 2004: 139).

We should not be surprised that one of the founders of the organic farming and food movement should be focused on food, how it links to health, the environment and recent advances in science. It is noteworthy that an eminent contemporary rural sociologist should find the topic of food to be central to the understanding of the unfolding of much of modern society. Food has been a historical constant in societies, but historically this has revolved around its shortage and the lack of security of its supply. For many of the world's more affluent people, be they in the North or the urban centres of the South of the planet, questions of the qualities of food have taken over these earlier concerns. There are questions around the safety of food in light of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and pesticide residues, the environmental sustainability of how it is produced, the ethical treatment of producers, the landscape agriculture creates and the treatment of animals within farming. These concerns have fused into one another, bring food into question in a way that is historically and socially novel. Our cultural anxieties about food have not been removed but have been displaced into other areas.

Equally, for many of those people for whom the supply of food remains a central question in their lives, be they a subsistence farmer or a technologically orientated commercial one, the way in which food is grown, the price they

receive for it and the relationship they have with those who purchase their crops is of vital importance. In a world where the ability to communicate and trade is being revolutionized, where people are linked in new ways, old questions of food are becoming reframed and press on all of our lives in fresh ways. Rural sociology responds to these old questions and the changes in them by searching for both descriptions and explanations. The purpose of this book is to consider the role that rural sociology has in explaining one of the newest, and for some people most challenging, developments in food and farming – organic agriculture.

For the past twenty years organic products have been finding their ways onto the plates of consumers across the western world, supplied by an ever-growing archipelago of organic farms. In the past ten years this food has increasingly be grown and traded across the entire world. For the first time is possible to begin to talk about the global phenomenon that is organic agriculture and to begin to consider what it means for farmers, consumers and more broadly the societies within and between which this new form of food production has emerged. For nearly a century the production of food was dominated by an ever-greater emphasis on particular forms of rationality and technology. From the beginning of this emphasis, which was most obvious as the Green Revolution, there were those who doubted its veracity. This minority were often clustered around the early organic farming movement; they questioned the reliance on chemical technologies, the seeming simplification of the ecosystems around farmland and the sidelining of the health giving benefits of food. As this critique became louder, the problems more pressing and the opportunities for an alternative more apparent, the organic farming movement came to prominence.

There is not a unified or singular explanation of the rise or social meaning of organic agriculture so this book presents the reader with the opportunity to take part in the vital and growing discussion about the different experiences of organic farming and food. Aside from Antarctica, every continent on the planet is featured in this collection, with the various authors discussing the particular experiences that organic agriculture has brought to radically different communities. In analysing and explaining organic agriculture an equally diverse range of approaches are taken representing the full range and diversity of the sociological approach. The authors range from those who are well established in academic careers through to those who are just beginning in professional research. Just as this collection is a primer in the discussions about the planetary diffusion of organic agriculture, it is equally a guide to the contemporary state of the art of rural sociology and its allies.

Organic agriculture has many facets, a considerable number of which are not discussed in this book. This breaks with some of the fundamental objectives of the earliest organic farmers who wanted the farm to be viewed as a whole, as a complex ecology of not just plants, microbes and animals but also its footprint on the society in which it is intimately bound. The collision of vision and pragmatism has meant that for some time a technical literature about organic

farming has been published that has largely ignored the questions raised by the social sciences. In beginning to fill that gap we argue that we are moving towards a point at which the totality of the farm is more likely to be understood and not a moment too soon. As is apparent from the examples discussed in this book the biggest questions that face organic agriculture at present are not about farm management or farming systems but about creating viable businesses, winning over consumers, struggles over policy and the very meaning of organic in a complex and dynamic world.

Before moving to describe in further detail the papers in this collection it is necessary to describe what we mean by organic agriculture and also to a degree rural sociology. These accounts will be by necessity brief but should serve to help the readers orientate themselves as to what is being discussed before becoming involved in the details. These descriptions are intended as points of departure rather than final statements so we signpost readings that could be followed up that are beyond the scope of this work. Once those introductory sections are completed we proceed to map out the structure of the book and how the contributions intertwine. Although it would be possible to read this book from one end to the other in one sitting, we imagine that many readers will peruse the book in their own way, dipping in and out of it. So as to aid that particular pleasure the map will allow the reader to chart their way through the chapters.

### **Organic Agriculture**

Simplified, and put into a practical context, it is the recognition that – within agriculture, as within Nature – everything affects everything else. One component cannot be changed or taken out of the farming or natural system without positively or adversely affecting other things (Lampkin, 1990: 5).

Frequently people think that as organic agriculture is just farming without artificial fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, hormones and genetically modified (GM) crops then before the invention of these technologies all farming was organic. The simplicity of this notion is attractive, but it romanticises the past and misses out what many people involved with organic agriculture would see as one of its most important contributions. To understand this clearly it is helpful to know a little of the history of organic agriculture. Although it has only risen to public prominence in the last twenty years, the roots of organic agriculture are in the early twentieth century when it became increasingly apparent that agriculture as practised was struggling to feed people adequately and was causing considerable damage to the environment (Conford, 2001). Widespread soil erosion occurred not only in the USA but also in South Africa and Australia. At the same time the industrial diet that had started to appear and the continued food shortages in many parts of the world, led many to fear the inadequacies of the agricultural systems. Separately several agricultural scientists and rural

thinkers began to look towards solutions to these problems, which they located in understanding the ecology of farms more adequately and devising ways of keeping agricultural practices in line with these biological limits.

These two approaches quickly forked between those who understood these methods in a way that was guided by mystical insight and those who preferred to gain them from a base in more conventional science. Rudolf Steiner and those who followed and later interpreted his teachings took the first path. Based on acute observation, rigorous management of the land and a range of special preparations that enhanced the land and crops, anthroposophical or biodynamic agriculture gained a small but loyal group of adherents. Whilst in the English-speaking parts of the world the work of the British agricultural scientist Albert Howard was more influential. Howard based his work on his experience of working in India, where he was impressed by the efficiency of traditional peasant farming and sought to empower it through the observations of Western science. These insights and arguments became distinctly minority views in the immediate years after the Second World War, as agricultural productivity was prioritized and the technological gains of the Green Revolution were systematically introduced across the planet (Perkins, 1997). In the face of the demands of the Cold War earlier concerns about the sustainability of agriculture were sidelined.

Organic agriculture was global from the very beginning; the first association of organic enthusiasts was formed in 1940 in New Zealand, whilst by the mid-1940s, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer a follower of Steiner, was introducing biodynamics to the USA. Books, journals, lecture tours and personal letters helped spread the word in the early years. The Soil Association, which was formed in London in 1946 aimed deliberately to have a global membership, after all they argued, the entire planet was at peril. In these early years there was a wide diversity of farming practices that counted as organic and indeed even the term was not widely agreed on. People conducted humus, lay, Clifton Park, natural and a variety of other forms of what we would now term organic farming. Equally, as the new pesticides and herbicides became available some organic farmers experimented with them, before they were discarded as incompatible with preserving the soil.

Steps were taken towards standardizing the understanding of what organic farming meant during the 1950s, particularly around the early attempts to sell organic produce to consumers who did not know the farmer. Lady Eve Balfour, the founder of the Soil Association, literally brought these standards back from the USA and fostered a discussion in the Soil Association's journal about what organic meant (Reed, 2004). The importance of the restrictive prescriptions of organic farming at that time – banning the new pesticides and herbicides - was confirmed by Rachel Carson's expose of the environmental damage wrought by these chemicals in *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1963). During the 1960s as antibiotics and synthetic growth hormones were introduced to agriculture the organic movement moved to exclude them from organic farming. By the end of the

## *Introduction*

1960s organic agriculture was generally known by that term in the English-speaking world and biological in continental Europe. In proscribing most synthetic agrochemicals, and insisting on the protection of the wider environment, organic agriculture was in many ways recognizably the same, as we know it today.

The provenance of organic food has always been of concern to the consumer, and certainly by the early 1950s there was some very small-scale international trade in organic produce. In these first experiments a range of grading systems were introduced by the retailer and these were refined to the first standards agreement, introduced by the Soil Association in 1967. In this agreement the farmer promised to abide by a set of rules that bound them to avoid a set of prohibited substances and practices, all that tied the farmer to this contract was their honour. The early 1970s saw an upsurge in the development of the organic movement. In 1973 the Californian organic movement not only introduced standards but a system of third party inspection as well, and that year the Soil Association did the same. Simultaneously the first international discussions were initiated to form an alliance of organic farming organizations across the world. Eve Balfour had tried this in the early 1950s without success but through the energies of the French movement, and literal offices of the Swedish organic movement, the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM) was born. All of this innovation took place years before the labelling schemes and farm assurance systems consumers are familiar with were introduced, and all of it took place without the assistance of the state.

Although the organic movement had created increasingly sophisticated ways of defining what it meant by organic and ensuring that farmers who subscribed to these rules followed them, all of these measures were voluntary. The first move to statutory regulation of organic farming really came with the introduction of European Community (EC) regulations in the early 1980s. In anticipation of this directive member states were to establish their own national systems of organic certification. For many states outside of the EC this also proved the impetus to introduce legal protection for organic production, to protect their valuable exports if not nurture their domestic market. The directive eventually came into force in 1992, along with a raft of other measures to protect the agricultural environment.

Alongside legal protection of its status as a distinct product many states, particularly in Europe, introduced support for organic farming and began to view organic farming as a way of resolving many of the problems the state had with contemporary agriculture. For some it was a way of moving farmers to a position where they followed the market not subsidy provision, for others they hoped that the lower yields of organic agriculture would save them the expense of dealing with agricultural surpluses, others looked to it to lessen environmental pollution. Many farmers were happy to take up what they saw as a market opportunity as it appeared many wealthy, largely Western consumers were clamouring for organic produce. As the twentieth century came to a close the

global organic movement found that despite its great diversity it was unified under one set of global standards from IFOAM and an increasingly integrated global market for organic produce. In many nations it had moved from being the preserve of the sandal wearing health-food faddist to the concerned supermarket shopping soccer mum. Yet, at that moment came a crises of confidence for many, was that what organic farming was all about?

The turn into the twenty-first century saw a range of responses from the various national organic movements, as they faced a range of challenges. The European revolt against the introduction of GM technologies saw the organic movement leading the wider environmental debate for the first time. In different places these protests took different forms, in Germany naked consumers lobbied parliament and in the UK masked activists destroyed GM crops hoping to be arrested. Whilst in the USA a record mobilization of organic supporters lobbied Congress about proposed federal organic regulations that would allow GM crops to be grown as organic. Farmers in Africa began to experiment with organic farming as not only a range of farming practices that are sustainable but may offer access to world markets on favourable terms. At the same time some farmers were beginning to allow their certification to lapse in order to escape its costs and what they saw as the increasingly commercial tenor of organic farming. Success is not universally comfortable or welcome when it brings compromises that had never been envisaged. In thirty years organic farming has been catapulted from the margins to a globalized multi-billion dollar sector entangled with some of the most powerful corporations and complex states on the planet. Small wonder that not everyone was prepared for, or prepared to, work in this new and highly dynamic situation.

### **Rural Sociology**

Somewhere, it is believed, at the far end of the M4 or A12, there are 'real' country folk living in the midst of 'real' English countryside in – that most elusive of all rustic utopias – 'real' communities (Newby, 1984).

One of the challenges, but also one of the strengths of rural sociology has been that its focus on the rural has often meant that no further sub-specialism has been undertaken. Therefore individual sociologists will examine a wide range of topics under the heading of rural and so develop a body of work informed by a wide reading within sociology and beyond. If we briefly consider the farm, it can be analysed from the perspective of the farm business, or the farm family or the technologies used in food production. By only analysing one facet, important parts of the story may be overlooked, yet considering all simultaneously is a tremendous challenge. Too narrow a focus is not rewarded in rural sociology as it becomes quickly apparent that interconnections, synergies and flows are important. The constant presence of non-human nature, perhaps the defining characteristic of the rural, equally serves to ensure that how connections are

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formed and the mutual flows of influence are in the foreground of any discussion. To research and write about these flows and influences has become the central challenge of rural sociology in recent years and one that whilst happily is unresolved, is generating an enormous amount of energy and innovation.

Rural sociology has become a very diverse discipline and the sociology of organic farming and food demonstrates this very clearly. Historically the major client of rural sociology has been government departments and the other organs of the state that have been responsible for managing and improving the national farm. This has meant that often the funding for rural sociology has been provided by governments interested in implementing their policies more effectively than questions defined by rural sociologists themselves. Equally, it has shared with rural people the prejudice that in some way they are less sophisticated than their metropolitan peers. As this collection proves rural sociology is certainly as sophisticated as its urban equivalents and whilst it clearly maintains a strong relationship with rural policy, it transcends those concerns.

Research on organic agriculture is comparatively new in that as outlined above until recently there has not been a great deal to enquire about. Virginia Payne conducted one of the earliest studies in 1970 about the development of the Soil Association. In this work Payne adopted the approach towards organic farming that was informed by the sociology of science. She was broadly interested in why organic farming rejected the combination of plant breeding, chemicals and machinery that had been so whole-heartedly embraced by the rest of agriculture. During the 1970s those considering it around questions of science dominated the sociological discussion of organic farming in the English language. Only in the early 1980s as organic farming began to grow did wider considerations of organic farming appear, principally around the question of the economics of organic farming. At the same time many of those early academic accounts attempted to follow the spirit of organic farming and consider the topic in a holistic manner.

The mid-1990s saw an explosion of sociological literature about organic farming. This took a range of forms, reflecting the different historical experiences of organic movements and the various forms of sociology the researchers favoured. Quickly a number of competing and contrasting approaches were adopted. Political economy inspired approaches were the main font for these discussions, which provoked a lively and ongoing debate. Julie Guthman and her colleagues in California argued, and with modification still do, that organic farming was being subsumed into the dominant forms of agribusiness to be found in that state. That whilst organic farming might once have represented an attempt to adjust the terms of trade and emphasis of conventional agriculture, it had not been able to overcome them and was increasingly being incorporated into them.

According to this scenario, organic farming is becoming a slightly modified version of modern conventional agriculture, replicating the same history, resulting in many of the same basic social, technical and economic characteristics (Hall and Mogorodoy, 2001: 399).

Its attempt to make agriculture more sustainable had been defeated by the power of multi-national agribusinesses. Hugh Campbell and colleagues in New Zealand met this with a rejoinder that attacked the conventionalization argument put forward by Guthman and her collaborators (Buck *et al.*, 1997, Coombes and Campbell, 1998). Arguing that matters were more complex and context specific than Guthman has allowed. As is apparent in this collection the conventionalization thesis still animates discussion and research.

Without political action, change cannot be institutionalized in complex societies, but movements increasingly act as new media by their very existence. When they escape the risk of pure symbolic counterculture or marginal violence, they fulfil their role and transform themselves into new institutions, providing a new language, new organizational patterns and new personnel (Melucci, 1996: 37).

Simultaneously, Hilary Tovey was advancing an argument that took into consideration the political sociology of organic farming, viewing it as a social movement (Tovey, 1997). Although several authors had previously noted the political intent of the organic movement and even called it a social movement, no one had seriously analysed it as a social movement. It took several more papers for Tovey to fully expand her conception of organic farming as a social movement and in that intervening period the movement had mobilized to challenge the introduction of GM technologies, illustrating the validity of her analysis.

Whilst in some nations the organic movement represented an aspect of social contestation in others it was becoming increasingly interwoven with the state. Tovey noted this in her first paper, suggesting that organic farming had been deliberately embroiled in an agri-environment scheme. The foremost area for this line of argument being developed has been in Scandinavia and particularly Denmark. The papers in this collection demonstrate the vibrancy and development of organic farming in Denmark where the state has played a particular role in developing organic agriculture. This has led to the argument that the organic movement has become institutionalized, that the vigour and outsider status that organic farming had become eroded. That rather than a challenger to the established way of doing things, it has become an adjunct to the administration of rural areas. Recently this argument has been adapted to view organic farming having been largely captured by the interests of the multiple retailers. Whilst academic Marxism informs the political economy approaches above, the arguments about institutionalization are based on the work of the neo-Weberians.

The early work on the economics of organic farming has been broadened and deepened by a series of European Union (EU) framework projects. These have predominantly focused on increasing the understanding of how the market for organic goods in the EU is expanding. It has also brought into question the workings of the market for organic products and in particular the role of the consumer. In this way a series of studies have mapped the border areas between market research, economics and sociology. These enquiries have drawn on a range of theoretical backgrounds and act as a balance to the largely productivist bias of agricultural economics in general.

Organic researchers have for some time noted the tendency to conventionalize research on the organic sector. There have been calls for the use of more interpretive (post-modern, pluralist and constructivist) methodologies that challenge the purely positivist and/or economic approaches and give greater attention to the distribution of costs and benefits, and differences in perceptions amongst stakeholders (Padel, 2002). A 'social deepening of the logic of market relations' (MacLeod, 2000) has diverted theories of economic development away from productivist neoclassical interest in the hard infrastructures of markets and towards the soft infrastructure of institutions and has revived interest in the temporal dimension of relations and evolutionary frameworks (Marsden *et al.*, 2000). Indeed, the need to diffuse hard economic theory with an assessment of real world problems and situations is increasingly recognized by economists. In a recent economic assessment of the European diet the authors concluded that,

Challenges for the future include finding ways to lower high consumption levels for livestock products, and define new or find back to old but healthier food consumption patterns. To do this will require a deep understanding of the food choice process and how its parameters can be influenced to change diets. This implies a profound input from several social science disciplines (Schmidhuber and Traill, 2005).

Consequently, methodologies based around a more flexible, context-specific paradigm that are able to examine complex and interdependent relationships and situations involving opportunity costs and trade offs have become popular. In particular, sociological science within the agrifood sector has turned towards the body of ideas, generally described as Actor Network Theory (ANT). This method of analysis makes the social world strange by an act of radical symmetry where it starts from no assumption as to what the most important social actor might be (Latour 1993). Rather than looking immediately to the human it looks to animals, plants and machines and their inter-relations. Whilst ANT may be tremendously intellectually stimulating it has presented considerable problems when attempted as a research project outside of the laboratory or closed technological system. Yet as is apparent in this collection, the challenge it represents has been met head on by several authors.

Historically, agricultural marketing, a branch of agricultural economics, focused on improving returns to producers faced with constraints arising from a) the structure of the agricultural industry, composed of many thousands of small farms, b) the undifferentiated (commodity) nature of agricultural products, and c) the remoteness of farmer from consumer. In the period 1930-60s when large companies dominated manufacturing, the market was driven by price and governed by seasonal availability. Agriculture and food manufacturing controlled which foods were available to retailers with consumers having no direct influence (Wheelock, 1986). Since the 1960s, saturation of food basics and the necessity for value-added products have eroded mass markets and niche marketing has come to the fore (Wardle, 1977).

Most recently, due to the loss of guaranteed markets as Common Agricultural Policy moves away from production-oriented support, producers have been compelled to reconsider agricultural marketing and the need to reconnect with consumer demand. At the same time there are more opportunities than previously for product differentiation at farm level (Padberg *et al.*, 1997). EU policy has begun to recognize the need for farmers to be able to differentiate their product, as demonstrated by the introduction of a controlled designated name for food from a specific geographical region.<sup>1</sup> This has led to a merger of contemporary agricultural marketing with the methods and approach of food marketing.

Just as the EU has had a role in fostering the development of organic standards and to that extent a planetary market in organic products, it has also commissioned research on the development of the organic market. In this, rural sociology has played one of its traditional roles in helping to explain and map the emerging market. The construction of this research effort has led to transdisciplinary pan-European teams of researchers, which has generated a considerable body of research. It is this crossing of boundaries between disciplines and across cultures that has been one of the most distinctive features of the sociology of organic farming.

Our daily consumption of food fundamentally affects the landscapes, communities and environments from which it originates (Pretty, 2002: xii).

In the shadow of the World Trade Organization and on-going processes of globalization many people have turned to view how their local agriculture shapes not just the food they eat but the landscape and communities around them. The international flows of food and money have started to influence how organic farming and food is viewed. Organic food and farming has not stood outside of this process as questions have been asked about whether organic farming produces social benefits and if it does who enjoys these advantages.

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<sup>1</sup> 1992 EU Council Regn. 'on the protection of geographical indication and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs'.

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This unpicking of the costs and benefits of organic food and farming crosses social, economic and ecological boundaries demanding that not only new analyses are conducted but also that new forms of research are devised. At the same time some forms of farming are seen as cultural resources for communities, embodiments of tradition that are inscribed on the landscape and ingested by consumers. Trade and an open market are seen as cultural threats, which raises questions about organic farming and belonging that have long haunted the movement. This has led to an increased interest as to whether organic farming offers a fast route to rural development.

Organic farming has often been characterized as the food of choice of the venial or narcissistic Westerner, able to indulge their whims without regard to hard social realities. In contrast to this jaundiced image organic farming has started to make inroads in the South of the planet and amongst those who are most vulnerable. Organic farming, as writers such as Vandana Shiva passionately argue is pertinent to subsistence farmers or those who are looking for high value access to global markets (Shiva, 1991). Not reliant on expensive and dangerous agrochemicals, based on understanding and improving the local environment, sustainability may be the only option for the global poor. It is as Parrot and Marsden (2002) argue the 'True Green Revolution'. The challenge being taken on by the sociology of organic farming is to understand and inform this process.

### **The Organization of the Book**

This book has five sections, which reflect the continuing development of organic farming and the diversity of the sociological approach to organic food and farming. Each section focuses on a shared theme, discussing it from different perspectives deriving either from using contrasting sociological methods or because they speak from a different part of the planet.

#### ***Organic movements in North West Europe***

The following three chapters speak of the many shared experiences and interconnectedness of the organic movement in western Europe, but equally to the process of discovering and investigation that goes on within the various national movements about their own activities, either in the present or the past. In Chapter 2 Oliver Moore takes up the contemporary in his analysis of the phenomenon of the farmers' market in Eire. Firmly rooted in post-structuralist theory, Moore describes the immanence of a social movement, how it is always in the process of formulating and re-formulating itself. He conveys the dynamism of the movement but also the controversy that is an inherent part of it. Just as Schmitt conveys the early disagreements (see below), Moore finds organic farmers describing themselves as post-organic. That they have moved past registration and certification to a point where the producers' direct

relationship with the consumer is of primary importance, without the involvement of the wider movement. Moore picks up the theoretical work of Tovey and, leaving the work of Habermas and moving towards that of Melucci and Foucault, follows the formation of identities within the movement, focusing at last on how individuals realize their needs.

Whilst retaining a focus on social movement theory, in Chapter 3 Matthew Reed shifts the emphasis of interest towards political sociology. Through his account of the manner in which the Soil Association mobilized both movement actors and those peripheral to it, Reed depicts a counter-hegemonic contestation of the rationale for GM technology in the UK. During a period of mobilization any social movement becomes publicly visible, as it moves out from the private sphere and often seeks to dramatize the differences it has with the rest of society. Reed investigates how the Soil Association as the main representative body of the British movement has entangled itself in the issue networks around agricultural policy in the UK. In doing so he starts to sketch out the terrain between traditional accounts of movement activity focused on protest and the work of NGOs interested in policy formation, illustrating the often close relationship between the two actors.

Mathilde Schmitt's chapter (Chapter 4) starts with a theoretically informed position to unpack the history of the micro-networks of collaboration and solidarity that underpinned many organic movements but her focus is the German movement. Through an examination of the exchange of letters between various women interested in organic and biodynamic farming they describe the way that relationships were built within the German speaking parts of Europe but also to the English speaking world. Through this microanalysis the authors reveal the important role those women played in diffusing organic agricultural methods in Europe.

### ***Organic food quality and the consumer***

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 concentrate on consumer perceptions of organic agriculture and organic food purchasing behaviours. Since the emergence of the 'consumer revolution' in the 1980s (Ritson and Hutchins, 1991) both the markets for food, and the study of demand for these markets have undergone rapid and often surprising changes. Both markets and researches have, of necessity, due on the one hand to a maturing food industry in search of new products and the other to a greater collaboration and search for synergy between academic departments and disciplines, transformed the 'foodscape' into a plethora of markets that link product attributes to consumer 'lifestyles' under the concept of a 'niche'. However, even within this collection of research findings, which the authors hope provides one of the few holistic commentaries on the ideological and geographical nature of the organic sector, the difference in approach to production and consumption becomes apparent. Within consumer research fields there has been an ongoing assessment of consumer preference for several

decades, which is reflected in the level of sophistication of methods currently employed in consumer research, such as means-end chain analysis.

Consumer research provides information on decision-making that allows companies to target specific behaviour groups. The niche market mechanism is based on the development and marketing of products designed to anticipate consumer wants and capture values, behaviours, and preferences of significant minority groups within a culture. Niche products are distinguished from mass markets through product composition and packaging. Market segmentation allows potential market opportunities to be identified and exploited and enables consumer behaviour to be predicted with greater accuracy. Traditional methods of segmentation are based on demographics however marketing approaches in socially complex, plural, societies are increasingly based on the more multi-dimensional concept of consumer lifestyle as a basis for understanding and explaining behaviour (Cowan, 2004).

However, there is no core consumer behaviour research theory. The industrialization of food manufacturing and growth in product differentiation triggered the offshoot of food marketing from the business and management sciences, which focused on finding ways for products to appeal to the consumer. Subsequently, researchers effectively employ quantitative and qualitative methods from other social sciences, including economics and behavioural sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology), to analyse and interpret market data, predict relationships between price and profit and develop marketing strategies. Increasingly, transdisciplinary methodologies serve to identify key differences between stakeholders in the agrifood systems, including consumers, and areas of potential common ground, through an examination of: values and objectives, resources, influence, authority and power, competing interests, networks and coalitions. Tools for analysis process typically include maps, typologies and matrices delineating ‘problems’, ‘players’, ‘profiles’, ‘positions’ and ‘paths’ (Chevalier, 2001).

### ***Problems for organic farmers around the globe***

Often the focus of comment about organic agriculture is on the story of unproblematic and massive growth. This section brings together chapters that focus on challenges to organic farmers that reflect the experience of particular nations and communities. Some of these factors are internal to those nations reflecting the policies, preferences and politics of those communities; others are driven by choices made elsewhere on the planet. As is apparent in these discussions the organic farmers and academics are very aware of the global forces that are at work within the organic sector.

Pernille Kaltoft and Marie-Louise Risgaard’s chapter (Chapter 8) is about the question of reversion amongst Danish organic farmers (see also Noe’s Chapter 13). Not every farmer who converts their farm to organic production makes a success of it or finds that it is as rewarding as they had hoped. Generally during

periods of growth in the organic movement those surrendering their certification have been matched or surpassed by new entrants and the sector has continued to grow. As Kaltoft and Risgaard discuss in this chapter contemporary trends in Denmark suggest that the level at which Danish farmers are giving up formal certification indicates that there may be a net decline in the number of organic farms. They discuss the reasons for farmers giving up organic farming and suggest that the condition of the market in Denmark is leading farmers to stop farming organically. That is not the same as suggesting that they no longer think that organic farming is a better way of farming.

The conventionalization debate has been raging for some years amongst academics and journalists as noted above; Sangeeta Jordan, Hisano and Riichiro take up the argument in Chapter 9 with regard to trade between Australia and Japan. In a incisive manner they summarize the conventionalization debate and apply its analysis to a number of small organic businesses that trade with Japan. In doing so they illuminate the debate which many of the other chapters refer to and offer a localised counterpart of the questions that Kaltoft and Risgaard ask about the organic movement in Denmark. In both chapters the question is discussed of how close to large scale agribusiness organic farming can be and still remain both economically viable and true to its ideals.

This question is approached in Chapter 10 from the new perspective of the relationship between multiple retailers in Europe and those who supply them in New Zealand. Unlike the organic label these standards are not disclosed to the consumer but form part of the retailers quality management standards. As Hugh Campbell *et al.* make clear in the context of New Zealand, these standards are threatening to eclipse organic farming as a choice for export orientated growers. In part this is because these standards offer access to a wider market but also because they discuss areas that are beyond the normal scope of organic certification, covering labour relations and farm management. Whilst the earlier two chapters in this section have focused on the question of economic power, this chapter charts how the intersection of bureaucracy with economic power is conditioning the organic market.

The emergence of a new organic farming sector is exciting and occasionally perilous for those farmers who are using their farms and holdings as the backbone of the attempt. In Chapter 11 Katharina Niemeyer and Jan Lombard analyse the challenges that the emergent sector in South Africa faces. The profile of these pioneering farmers, their motivations and the barriers that the sector faces are carefully dissected. Examples of the emergence of other national sectors are drawn on to provide some comparison, as many of these were surprisingly recent. Ultimately the route followed by the South African sector will be unique and reflect the conditions of that country. Just as the examples of the other chapters in the section have demonstrated there is often a common experience between organic farmers, but equally even in a rapidly globalizing world where you stand on the planet has a profound influence.

### ***Principles and practice of organic farming***

As part of the project of trying to understand organic farming and food, social scientists have tried to push their methodology forward, Chapters 12 and 13 are by authors who are attempting just that. Both Chapters 12 and 13 and are firmly routed within very traditional sociological approaches to agriculture but are looking for ways to refresh the approach to the topic.

Hilde Bjørkhaug is considering the female principle in organic farming, that women have a particular affinity and facility toward organics that is missing in other forms of agriculture (see also Chapter 4). Other researchers have pointed to greater participation by women in organic farming or their importance in the decision to convert to organic farming; Bjørkhaug takes this one step further. Through a detailed statistical analysis of Norwegian organic farming she rigorously searches for signs of the feminine principle. In a debate that has been characterized by qualitative research and theorizing this is a fascinating attempt to quantify the prevalence and tendencies of gender in organic farming.

For some years Egon Noe has been working on a way of conceptualizing the organic farm as a system. In Chapter 13 he considers the topic of organic farmers reverting to conventional production. Drawing on nearly ten years of research with organic farmers he considers whether the long term strategy of the organic movement in Denmark is undermining its chances of success. In doing so he is obviously discussing the same issues as Kaltoft and Risgaard but he does so by drawing on both a different perspective, and another body of research.

### ***New directions for organic sector development***

As is becoming apparent organic farming and food is highly diverse, and Chapters 14 to 17 in this section describe this and the ways in which it is directed and guided by the needs of a range of social actors. From the public kitchens of Denmark to the church front Farmers' Markets of São Paulo, Brazil by way of the Austrian Tyrol and the Bavarian organic sector, new social imperatives are informing the development of organic food and farming.

The mountains and high valleys of Austria have for several years been some of the most concentrated areas of certified organic land. Markus Schermer's Chapter 14 highlights that with large areas of contiguous land with organic status it is now possible to consider areas larger than individual farms as being organic. He considers how this fact can be used to guide and inform the process of rural development. Whilst the situation in Brazil is radically different to that of the Tyrol the use of a organic farming as a tool of social development remains. In Chapter 15 Stephan Bellon and Lucimar de Abreu analyse the role that organic horticulture can play in developing the livelihoods of farmers in the São Paulo area. This chapter once again raises the question of the role that organic farming could play in creating more cohesive and healthier

communities. As in many discussions of the book, organic farming as a route to community development is brought into the foreground. Unlike in other chapters the authors discuss how this can occur without the intervention of the state. As this section demonstrates organic food is commonly found at the forefront of social innovation that is focused around food and farming.

Astrid Dahl and Niels Kristensen in their discussion in Chapter 16 of the appearance of organic public catering, highlight the importance of state, local or national plays in fostering the Danish organic sector. Providing organic food to young and old has been a long term goal of the organic movement that in Denmark is moving towards realization, at least in some places. Melissa Schafer and her colleagues in Chapter 17 discuss how they are working towards analysing the profound changes that are occurring in German agriculture. The shock of the impact of BSE on the German society has caused a policy and cultural turn to embrace organic farming. What that means in the present and the future for Bavarian farming is what Schafer and her colleagues are attempting to discuss in their chapter.

In the final chapter of the book we take up the twin task of considering the future of organic food and farming as well as research into it, in the light of much of the discussion that takes place in the chapters we have outlined above. At this point we stop our commentary and allow the authors to represent themselves.

#### Acknowledgements

The editors would like to express their gratitude to all those academics that have devoted their time and efforts to the advancement of organic research in Europe and in international development. In so doing, academics that have gone before have provided the authors in this book with both a solid foundation for their studies and wise insights on which to build their analyses. In particular, it is pertinent to pay tribute to the work of Nic Lampken and Sue Padel in founding the Organic Centre Wales, which has for many years been recognized in Europe as a hub of organic farming research activity, and to Johannes Michelson for the many vital statistics that have helped to shape our understanding of the size and spread of organic farming in Europe.

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