

Implementing biodiversity standards: The need for extension

Andreas Bosshard¹

Article in: Stolton S, B. Geier (Eds.), 2005: The Role of Organic Agriculture for Biodiversity – its contribution today and its potential tomorrow. Proceedings of the 3rd International IFOAM/IUCN Conference on Biodiversity and Organic Agriculture, Nairobi, 24.-26.9.04

Summary

The success of international biodiversity and landscape standards for organic agriculture will be determined by the acceptance as well as the ecological and taxonomic knowledge of farmers and certification bodies – and by the recognition of consumers, politicians and the conservation movement. Therefore a thorough extension and communication concept will be crucial. The article describes the target groups to be taken into consideration, their demands and restrictions, and possible contents and instruments to be elaborated.

Introduction

The development of international biodiversity and landscape standards for organic agriculture is progressing well (see Chapter nn). However, their success, i.e. their effect on nature and the improved sustainability of organic agriculture, will depend not only on their content, but to a wide extent on their acceptance, the background knowledge and recognition.

How can the implementation of these standards be positively influenced and guided? This challenge has to be answered with a thorough extension and communication strategy to accompany the introduction of the standards.

Developing such a strategy needs to take into account the following groups and consideration (see also table 1):

- **Certification Bodies** (CB's), which have to develop regionally adapted standards based on the IFOAM Basic Standards (IBS) – a particularly demanding task as the standards will be determined by the local context in which they are applied
- **Certifiers**, who will need the knowledge to assess, control and monitor the issues addressed by the standards
- **Farmers**, who will have to apply the standards requirements in the particular context of their farm; the more they understand the rationale for the standards, the potential benefits of their implementation and the potential problems and how to prevent these, more likely they are to be motivated to develop their own solutions, visions and concepts. Moreover, the approach of the biodiversity IBS section regards farmers to a certain extent as experts and involves their (potential) knowledge into the identification and implementation process. Accordingly, IBS does not prescribe each detail, but just defines fundamental principles and delegates the contextualisation to a certain extent to the farmers: Farmers must e.g. be able to identify priority species on the farm, and they must have some fundamental ecological knowledge on their needs. This knowledge has to be raised and/or further developed as a crucial requirement of accompanying measures to the standards.
- **Politicians and governments**, who will be to be convinced, with credible data, that organic agriculture contributes substantially to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and landscape quality – and that subsidies might be a suitable way to support this agricultural practice.

¹ Ecology and Landscape - Planning and Research Ltd., Litzibuch, CH-8966 Oberwil-Lieli, Switzerland, e-mail: abosshard@litzibuch.ch

- **Consumers**, who must understand that the 'landscape is edible' (as an organic PR-slogan in Germany states) – i.e. that the vitality, diversity and beauty of our landscape is directly influenced our decisions as to what food we buy.
- The **conservation and scientific community**, who should be persuaded to addressed to the high potential of organic agriculture for the enhancement of biodiversity and landscape conservation into their conservation strategies (e.g. in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity CBD, for recreational belts around cities, within buffer zones of national parks or other sensitive areas, etc.)
- And also **IFOAM and its member organisations**, who have to be made aware of the fact that effective biodiversity standards will be of high importance for organic agriculture, as they increase or assure the credibility of organic agriculture and open new perspectives for a synergetic cooperation between organic agriculture organisations, governmental authorities and/or nature protection organisations.

An extension and communication strategy has to consider principles of participative processes (Bosshard 2002) and has to assure, that the target groups:

- understand the issues, targets and reasons for the standards
- stand behind the rationale and topics
- recognise their needs and benefits
- implement and communicate the content with conviction and creativity.

To reach those goals, an extension strategy must evaluate all available instruments, expertises and experiences, such as,

- courses
- training
- regional projects as vectors for ideas and knowledge exchange
- excursions
- brochures
- teaching material
- user friendly internet information
- videos
- group education (a concept of training within groups of farmers and/or certifiers, consultants etc.), competitions ("who has the most diverse farm?")
- newsletters
- on farm-demonstration plots
- demonstration or pilot farms
- articles in newspapers or journals,
- etc., etc.

Furthermore other organisations or interest groups that are active in the field of agriculture and/or conservation should be involved into the process (Bosshard 2000).

In all continents there already exists a treasure of instruments, materials and experiences. It is up to the organic movement to bring them together and to form a pressure group which is highly motivated to contribute to this challenging and fascinating vision of an agriculture which is more than just a part of the food industry. Rather it is a multifunctional organism, which produces high quality food working with a rich, diverse, stable and healthy landscape.

Acknowledgements

The article was developed in close contact with the Section for Bio-dynamic Agriculture, Goetheanum, Dornach (Switzerland).

Table 1: Target groups to be included for an adequate development and communication of biodiversity standards, and practical requirement (from BDSC internal working paper, adapted)

Target groups/ Community of Interests	Prevalent Interests, aims, viewpoints	Requirement for the Standards
Organic Farmers, Organic Community	Synergies: Biodiversity and Productivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yield • Food security • Diversification of market opportunities • Resilience to climatic disasters • Respecting/supporting traditions, religion and existing knowledge • No additional costs, no additional work load, no bureaucracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective • Simple • Practical • Context sensitive (regional adaptations) • Understandable • Required know-how if missing provided
IFOAM / Standard Committee / Certification bodies / Certifiers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No more derogations • Short and clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective • Inspectable • Certifiable • No more derogations • Easy to communicate • Universal
Consumers / tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In sympathy with the landscape (aesthetics) • Diversity of (local) products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitive • Result oriented • Easy to understand
Food processor and distributors	Homogeneity/restricted produce diversity	
Politicians (subsidies)	Positive effect on the natural resource base (e.g. soil, nutrient, water)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WTO-compatible (green box) • Result oriented • Inspectable • Certifiable
Rural community and institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive effect on social and economic situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting marketing opportunities • Context sensitive / flexible
Conservation and Scientific Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective preservation of wild life/natural biodiversity • Positive effect on the natural resource base (e.g. soil, nutrient, water) • Awareness raising of consumers on relation food - biodiversity/landscape quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective • Verifiable (monitorable)

References

Bosshard, A., (2000); A methodology and terminology of sustainability assessment and its perspectives for rural planning. *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment* **77**: 29-41.

Bosshard, A., (2002); Participation of different actors in a landscape. In: Bastian, O. and U. Steinhardt (eds.): *Development and Perspectives of Landscape Ecology*: 424-432. Kluwer. ISBN 1-4020-0919-4.