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Dispute about the health benefits of organic

- FSA report
- US report
- For the most part no statistical differences between organic and conventional foods – what there are have little or no relevance for health
- Some opposing studies – Brandt, Butler et al, Lairon
- There are some differences – antioxidant levels, Omega 3/Omega 6 in milk
- But overall variability and inconclusive
- Is this to do with organic system management?

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Organic Farming is based upon a principle of health

- And its the only farming system that is and we are in trouble if we forget it
- Why?
- Is it sensible?
- We are not farming for health
- Can we?
- How did the principle of health come about

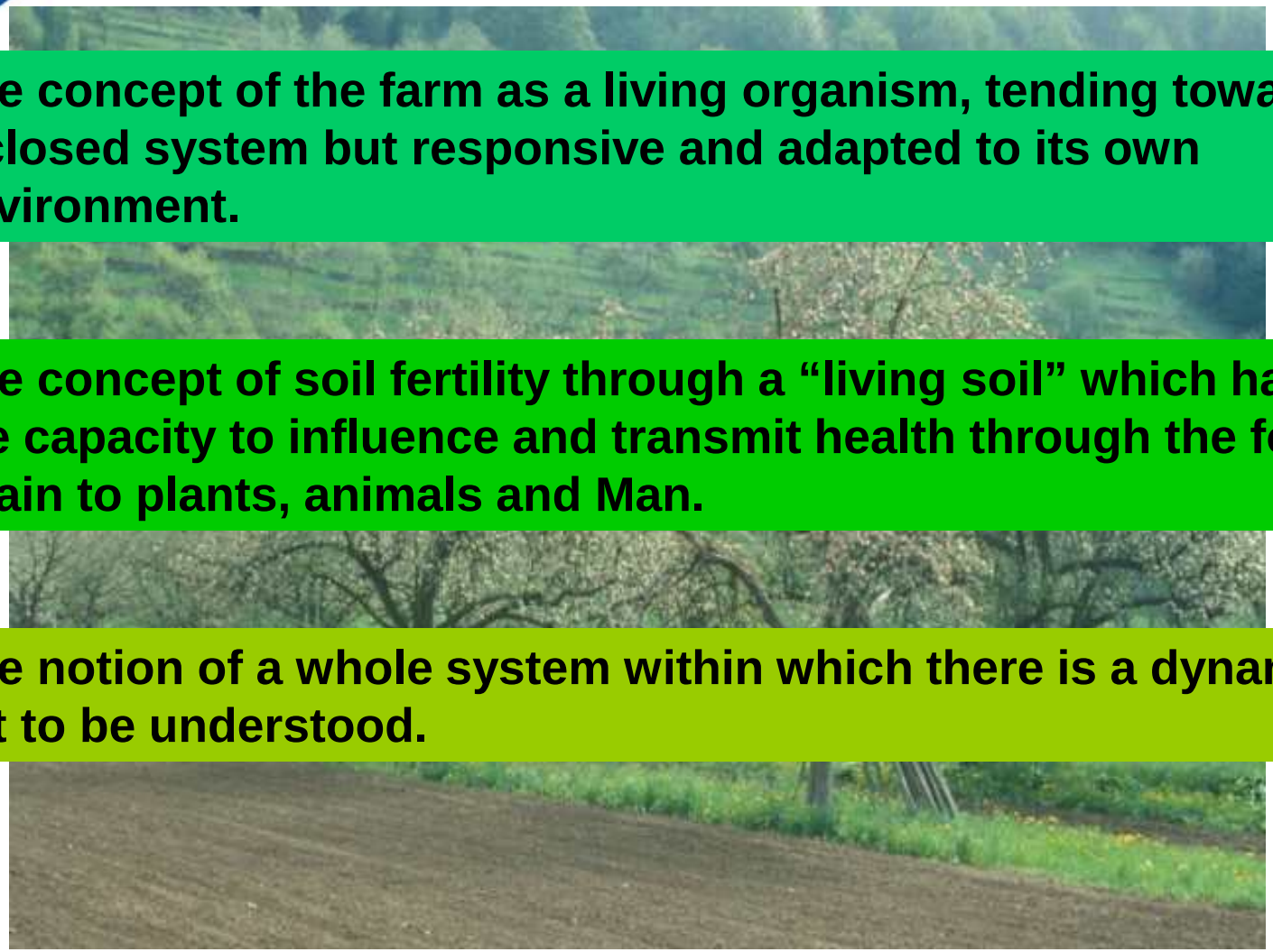
The IFOAM Principle of Health, Background and Development

- The Biodynamic or anthroposophical school of Steiner
- The Organic-Biological school of Muller and Rusch
- The Organic strand of Howard, Balfour and Rodale
- The work of Schuphan and Voisin
- The ideas of post- Rachel Carson – Silent Spring – environmentalists
- The Schumacher perspective of human scale technology, with patterns of production and consumption appropriate to a world of finite resources

NEVER SYNTHESISED INTO A COHERENT CONCEPT

But were the source of the first IFOAM (organic movement) Principles

Core of Agreement



The concept of the farm as a living organism, tending towards a closed system but responsive and adapted to its own environment.

The concept of soil fertility through a “living soil” which has the capacity to influence and transmit health through the food chain to plants, animals and Man.

The notion of a whole system within which there is a dynamic yet to be understood.

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IFOAM-Principles, 1980

1. To work as much as possible within a closed system, and draw upon local resources.
2. To maintain the long-term fertility of soils.
3. To avoid all forms of pollution that may result from agricultural techniques.
4. To produce foodstuffs of high nutritional quality and sufficient quantity.
5. To reduce the use of fossil energy in agricultural practice to a minimum.
6. To give livestock conditions of life that conform to their physiological needs and to humanitarian principles.
7. To make it possible for agricultural producers to earn a living through their work and develop their potentialities as human beings.

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Why a review of the Principles

- **Continuous growth of Organic Agriculture and IFOAM membership required a revisiting of basic values; review of the common ground; an assessment of fundamental underpinning concepts**

- **And the whole thing was a mess**

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Inflation and devaluation

- 7 fundamental principles in 1980/81
- 17 in 1999.
- 15 in 2002
- innumerable “general principles” which were laid out in different sections of the standards document and which may or may not have an acquaintance with the fundamental ones
- Rewording over the years had effectively devalued some of the principles
- IFOAM General Assembly, August 2002 in Victoria, Canada agreed a review and revision procedure

Step 2 (May 2004)
Task Force identified thematic areas/values

'Holistic health'

'Livelihood – equity'

'Biodiversity'

'Soil'

'Animals'

'Local markets / accessibility'

'Cyclical systems'

'Precautionary principle'

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July 2004: First rough draft; 6 principles proposed

- **Principle of health / Principle of ecological health / Principle of holistic health**
- **The cyclical principle / The ecological principle / Principle of ecological integrity / principle of organic integrity**
- **Livelihood – equity principle / Principle of ecological justice**
- **The Precautionary Principle**
- **Principle of animal welfare / Principle of animal integrity / The Humane Principle**
- **Principle on Soil**

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Principle of health

Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal and human as one and indivisible.

Principle of ecology

Organic Agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.

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Principle of fairness

Organic Agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.

Principle of care

Organic Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.

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Principle of health

This principle points out that the health of individuals and communities cannot be separated from the health of ecosystems - healthy soils produce healthy crops that foster the health of animals and people. Health is the wholeness and integrity of living systems. It is not simply the absence of illness, but the maintenance of physical, mental, social and ecological well-being. Immunity, resilience and regeneration are key characteristics of health.

The role of organic agriculture, whether in farming, processing, distribution, or consumption, is to sustain and enhance the health of ecosystems and organisms from the smallest in the soil to human beings. In particular, organic agriculture is intended to produce high quality, nutritious food that contributes to preventive health care and well-being. In view of this, it should avoid the use of fertilizers, pesticides, animal drugs and food additives that may have adverse health effects.

Principle of ecology

This principle roots organic agriculture within living ecological systems. It states that production is to be based on ecological processes, and recycling. Nourishment and well-being are achieved through the ecology of the specific production environment. For example, in the case of crops this is the living soil; for animals it is the farm ecosystem; for fish and marine organisms, the aquatic environment.

Organic farming, pastoral and wild harvest systems should fit the cycles and ecological balances in nature. These cycles are universal but their operation is site-specific. Organic management must be adapted to local conditions, ecology, culture and scale. Inputs should be reduced by reuse, recycling and efficient management of materials and energy in order to maintain and improve environmental quality and conserve resources.

Organic agriculture should attain ecological balance through the design of farming systems, establishment of habitats and maintenance of genetic and agricultural diversity. Those who produce, process, trade, or consume organic products should protect and benefit the common environment including landscapes, habitats, biodiversity, air and water.