Dear Reader

Founded in June 2003, ISOFAR has recently arranged its 4th General Assembly, linked to the 18th Organic World Congress in Turkey. On October 12 at the Yeditepe University, Istanbul a new board was elected, and also a new President – Prof. Dr. Gerold Rahmann from Thünen Institute of Organic Farming, Germany.

The President expresses his aims and ambitions with ISOFAR in this newsletter. For the first time, a call for applications for a position as world board member was launched, and 21 candidates from 14 countries expressed their interest in this important task. Some former board members had decided to redraw, some did not succeed in a re-election, and some were re-elected. Hence, the new board has a good mixture of experienced board members, and newcomers with lots of ideas for our future activities. The future for ISOFAR looks bright!

If you want to read more about the 18th OWC, check this link.

The President 2011-2014, Prof. Dr. Sang Mok Sohn, and former board members, were acknowledged for their efforts for ISOFAR. Sang Mok Sohn was appointed as a Honorary President, following the first Honorary President of ISOFAR Prof. Dr. Ulrich Köpke who was appointed in 2011. The new board looks forward to a continued close cooperation, e.g. to arrange seminars and conferences, and not least the ISOFAR 2015 Goesan International Organic Expo in South Korea.

The scientific track of the 18th OWC was very useful to engage ISOFAR members in scientific activities. Many members kindly participated in the evaluation of papers, and further in the chairing of sessions, and evaluation of posters. The combined ISOFAR-ICROFS booth was a busy hub during the whole event, where people met, signed up for membership, found printed proceedings and made new friends. The poster prize competition became a great success, and is further described in a separate paper in this newsletter.

As usual, the newsletter does not only contain organizational news, but also papers describing scientific activities within organic agricultural research. Witzenhausen students have toured Norway, and report their impressions here. The FQH network recently arranged an interesting seminar in cooperation with FAO in Rome. When an influential organization like FAO considers to include an organic diet in their toolbox for sustainable development, it is truly an important step forwards. Prof. Dr. Carola Strassner has reported from Rome. An ISOFAR seminar on organic food and agriculture was conducted in Korea in July, as a part of the preparations for the Organic 2015 Expo. In Finland, FORI supported by ISOFAR recently arranged a seminar on organic food quality and policy. From both events, we report some impressions. Finally, the next OWC will be in India in 2017. We start the work to make ourselves more familiar with organic agriculture and research in this sector in India, by a paper describing the big challenges of ensuring food security with changing climate conditions.

The headline “New projects” is empty in this issue. However, that does not mean that no new international organic projects have been started since July 2014. For the next issue, you are all very welcome to submit some information about your projects! Other contributions to the newsletter are of course also required. Thanks a lot to all authors of the papers in this newsletter!

Anne-Kristin Løes, vice president of ISOFAR and editor of the ISOFAR newsletter
Vision for ISOFAR
2014-2017

Gerold Rahmann, ISOFAR President
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Dear members of ISOFAR

It is a pleasure for me as a new elected president of ISOFAR to give an outline of my vision for the work of ISOFAR in the period of 2014-2017. In 2003, ISOFAR was funded to network the isolated global organic researchers. Only academic persons are members, not institutions. In 2013, there were about 1109 active and passive members, coming from 97 countries all over the world.

The main work is to inform members about organic farming research with newsletters and conferences such as the scientific tracks at the Organic World Congress, and to give organic research a forum through a scientific journal of organic farming. Our journal Organic Agriculture, published by Springer, was launched in 2011.

The challenges for the future are to make more and more researchers active in organic research, to merge activities and informations and last but not least, to help to solve the future challenges: Food demand of an increasing global population, climate change, healthy environment, ending fossil fuel and changing public expectations and actions.

ISOFAR has to change its strategy from a pure scientific communication network into an active society to merge efforts and resources to have better arguments for the contribution of organic farming to solve future challenges through:

A. Regular global assessment of ongoing organic research in the countries: Who is doing what, and what are the results? The output will be networking actions and further, more relevant results.

B. Design of regional and global strategic research action plans, together with IFOAM and local actors: Giving visions to solve future problems.

C. Support and joining communication of organic farming in international and national committees with scientific based information. Our aim is to become a scientific voice for organic farming.

D. More members, and communication between the members.

Despite the problems of shortage of resources for organic research all over the world, increasing challenges to stay in communication with non-organic food systems, still too much isolated researchers, and too few research results on how organic farming can help to solve future problems, we should not give up but to do better: for the future of a healthy and secure humanity under the shelter of the four principles of Organic Farming: Health, ecology, fairness and care.

We need you – becoming a member, becoming active!
Report from the ISOFAR General Assembly

The General Assembly (GA) – always held in conjunction with the Organic World Congress every three years – was held this time in Istanbul on October 12, 2014. About 40 participants attended the GA.

The President Prof. Dr. Sang Mok Sohn (Dankook University, South Korea) gave the overview of the activities in the period 2011-2014. Several conferences have been organized and supported. The 4th Scientific Track at the Organic World Congress 2014 in Istanbul was the biggest challenge. Many ISOFAR members supported this preparation with their skills and resources. Thank you all!

The financial situation is „healthy and wealthy“. About 180 paying members make the work of networking possible. There have been no costs on administration. Many thanks to the treasurer during 2011-2014, Gerold Rahmann and the Thünen-Institute, Germany! We have made 2-3 newsletters per year and distributed to all „friends of ISOFAR“, which comprise about 2000 registered scientists.

In 2011, ISOFAR established the journal Organic Agriculture, and more than 80 papers are already available. All members have free access. Thanks to MSc Ilse Rasmussen at ICROFS, Denmark, who has been the contact person of the board towards the publisher.

A big project was started in 2012 with a contract to the Chungcheongbuk-do province in South Korea, to prepare the scientific contents of the ISOFAR 2015 Goesan International Organic Expo, to be held in September 2015 in Goesan, Korea. The ISOFAR board has prepared the scientific contents of 10 thematic halls and does advice the organizing committee in South Korea to transfer it into the elements of the exhibition by 3 consultancy meetings. Thanks for all the work to Prof. Dr. Sang Mok Sohn (local representative of ISOFAR) and Honorary President Prof. Ulrich Köpke (University Bonn, Germany) and the other board members to give all their skills and resources to make it a big event.

After the approved reports the new ISOFAR board for the period 2014-2017 was elected. We had about 21 candidates from all over the world and high scientific reputation – the election was not easy. The names of the “lucky winners” are shown along with the picture of the new board members.

From left, front row:
- Prof. Dr. Wu Wenliang, China Agricultural University, Beijing, China
- Prof. Dr. Mahesh Chander, Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Izatnagar, India
- Prof. Dr. Gerold Rahmann (President), Institute for Organic Farming, Thünen Institute, Germany
- MSc. Ilse A. Rasmussen (Treasurer), International Centre for Research in Organic Food Systems, ICROFS, Denmark
- Dr. Anne-Kristin Lees (Vice-President), Bioforsk Organic Food and Farming Division, Norway
- Prof. Dr. Ewa Rembiatowska, Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland
- Prof. Dr. Victor I.O. Olowe, Institute of Food Security, Environmental Resources and Agricultural Research, Abeokuta, Nigeria

From left, back row:
- Dr. Stefano Canali, Consiglio per la Ricerca e la Sperimentazione in Agricoltura, Rome, Italy
- Prof. Dr. Ulrich Hamm, University Kassel-Witzenhausen, Germany
- Prof. Dr. Raffaele Zanoli, Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy
- Dr. Reza Ardakani, Azad University, Karaj, Iran
- Prof. Dr. Peter von Fragstein, University Kassel-Witzenhausen, Germany
Posters are often neglected at scientific conferences. In Istanbul, close to 200 posters were presented. To emphasize the importance of these contributions, poster walls were put up in most scientific sessions, and the posters brought there to be presented and included in the discussions, before being brought back to the poster hall.

By kind assistance of a team of 20 very enthusiastic poster evaluators, ISOFAR was able to hand out 10 poster prizes a 200 Euro for the most excellent posters. This happened during the Congress Reception for all participants at the second evening of the OWC on October 14.

Diplomas were printed on site, most winners were identified, and we were able to hand out 8 prizes in personal during the Congress Reception. The remaining two were handed out during the next day. All winners were very surprised, and extremely satisfied. It was a real honor to be the one to inform the winners about the prize decision, because this was really a big, but positive, shock for all.

The 10 best posters at the scientific track of the 18th OWC are presented to the right, with their number in Organic Eprints. All poster authors are encouraged to send their poster as a pdf to ilsea.rasmussen@icrofs.org, so they can be added to this entry in the archive.

We want to express our great appreciation to the poster evaluators:

- Sabine Zikeli, Uni. Hohenheim, Germany
- Azim Khalid, Inst. National de la Recherche, Morocco
- Aliyaru K. Sherief, Kerala Agricultural University, India
- Ewa Rembiatkowska, Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland
- Hans Marten Paulsen, Thünen Inst., Germany
- Solveig March, Thünen Inst., Germany
- Frank Oudshoorn, Danish Inst. of Agricultural Sciences, Denmark
- Shaikh Tanveer Hossain, Friends in Village Development, Bangladesh
- Mohammmed Reza Ardakani, Azad University, Iran
- Jürgen Sanders, Thünen Inst., Germany
- Mahesh Chander, Indian Veterinary Research Inst., India
- Jochen Mayer, Agroscope, Switzerland
- Mohammadreza Rezapanah, Centre of Excellence for Organic Agriculture, Iran
- Atle Wibe, Bioforsk Organic Food and Farming, Norway
- Stefan Kühne, Julius Kühn Inst., Germany
- Hendrik Moos, Thünen Inst., Germany
- Victor Olowe, Federal University of Agriculture, Nigeria
- Daniel Neuhoff, Rheinische Fr.W. University, Bonn
- Muhummad Nazim, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Inst., Bangladesh

- Orsolya Papp, Hungary: On-Farm Examination Of Resistant Early And Maincrop Potato Varieties In Hungarian Organic Farming (orgprints 24353)
- Feifei Qin, China: Applications Of Signal Transduction And Xerophytophysiology By Exposing Hypocotyls In Organic Peanut Production (orgprints 23740)
- Agnes Salat, Spain: Short-Term Effects Of Crop Husbandry On The Weed Community Of A Cereal-Legume Rotation (orgprints 23807)
- Hendrik Sommer, Germany: Leaf Mass Of Clover-Like Legumes As A Protein Source In Organic Pig Nutrition (orgprints 24023)
- Katharina Zipp, Germany: Agitation Behaviour And Heart Rate Of Dairy Cows With And Without Calf-Contact During Different Stimuli In The Parlour (orgprints 23965)
A scientific seminar on “Organic Food 2014 – open, critical and collaborative approaches” was held in Mikkeli, Finland on November 5-7, 2014.

The seminar gathered 50 researchers and other experts of organic food and farming from Scandinavia, other European countries, and Canada.

Presentations were held under four themes:

- Current trends in organic food research
- Quality and origin of organic food
- Health reputation of organic food
- Organic food and society.

However, health was one overarching perspective covering all the studies presented one way or another. Whether it was health indexes of French adults using organic food by emeritus Research Director at INSERM, Doctor Denis Lairon from Marseille, or systematic literature review and meta-analyses conducted by Newcastle University, which showed higher antioxidant and lower cadmium concentrations and lower incidence of pesticide residues in organically grown crops presented by professor Raija Tahvonen from MTT Agrifood Research Finland.

Professor Ernesto Guzman from University of Guelph, Canada shared some results of his studies assessing fungi and essential oils for their efficacy to kill varroa mites, which has become the most serious health problem of honey bees worldwide. In his presentation, doctor Michael Walkenhorst from Switzerland dealt with domestic animals and infectious diseases in organic farming – the need for alternatives to control (resistant) pathogens. In a closing session of the seminar senior research scientist Helena Kahlulto from MTT Agrifood Research Finland spoke about Global food crisis and future scenarios on organic food consumption.

These were just a few examples of the topics covered in the seminar by keynote speakers. Introductions and parallel workshops spurred lots of discussion and questions in the seminar, which was arranged in frosty South-Savo, a county known for organic farming. FORI warmly thanks ISOFAR for its co-operation and promotion of the seminar, and the visit of ISOFAR President Gerold Rahmann who attended the event.

Seminar presentations will be available on the seminar website soon! (www.luomuinstituutti.fi/en/organic-food-2014)
Witzenhausen Students Touring Organic Agriculture in Norway

Maria Ballhaus, Bachelor student of organic agricultural sciences, Kassel Uni., Witzenhausen, Germany

During June 13-22, 2014, students and teachers of the Faculty of Organic Agricultural Sciences at Kassel University-Witzenhausen set off to explore Organic Agriculture (OA) in Europe. This year Norway was chosen to be the destination. A separate project group, consisting of six Bachelor students, planned and carried out the study-trip, starting in autumn 2013. There was a lot of work to do before we finally hit the road in June 2014.

We had to collect money, visit many organic farms in Norway, choose the most interesting ones and program a feasible week. To plan a realistic route was probably the hardest task; there are too many interesting people and farms in Norway to fit in a one-week schedule. Finally, in the early morning of Friday 13th of June, we set out northwards. We were all in all 35 people, including Bachelor and Master students as well as five teachers. Our first destination was the Thünen-Institut in Trenthorst, Northern Germany, the leading research institute for OA in Germany. After an intensive input about organic farming in general and special questions at the research farm, we had a good base to start visiting practical farming in Norway.

We crossed Denmark, took a ferry and arrived finally at Larvik south of Oslo in the bright Nordic night at 2a.m Saturday 14th. After a few hours sleep beside a lake and a little swim and breakfast it was time to leave for our first farm. “Finding new ways” was our first day’s slogan. The first visit leaded us to Virgenes farm, a recently converted and well networked organic farm with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). We were impressed by the farmer, Tore Jardar Wirgenes’ courage to try new things, to break the tradition of traditional grain and pig farming in this area and at his farm. He dares to fail and doesn’t fail at all. He reaches people with his ideas of farming especially through the frequent use of new media to promote his farm.

Our next stop was at Grøndalen farm, north of Oslo. The creative dairy farmer Hans Arild Grøndahl wanted to stop the practice of separating cow and calf right after the birth. He worked out a sophisticated marketing concept how to finance the additional costs caused through „loss“ of milk to the calves which otherwise could have been sold. He created a “new” milk product, a sour, creamy and thick yogurt named “NÝR”, which he sold to...
gourmet restaurants not without telling the story about his happy cows and calves. A marketing concept straight from the book as we learn it at university.

We continued our trip northwards and were happy to come to our first bed at the biggest biodynamic farm, Fokhol, near the shores of Norway’s biggest lake, Mjøsa, in an area with very rich soils. Sunday was dedicated to the “pioneers of organic farming”. First we had a guided tour at Fokhol, heard a lot about the farm history and looked at the varied productions and some field work with horses. In the afternoon we visited the biodynamic farm Ommang Søndre and got an impression about traditional dairy farming and cheese making. At both farms it almost appears time is standing still, while at the same time they manage to produce and sell high quality products. We were impressed about the work quality, and how calm it was in the fields and in the barn, and at the same time wondered if these people ever take a break? We discussed if it wouldn’t be smart to use these special process techniques in their marketing. For example, in order to get an extra price for these values, perhaps they could inform customers about what is supporting the special milk quality: traditional cow-breeding, grass-fed, and milked by hand. In the evening, Morten Ingvaldsen held a lecture about the development of farming in general and organic farming in Norway.

Monday morning we were invited to visit the conventional semi-public plant breeding company Graminor. We heard some lectures about challenges in plant breeding and understood that the special conditions in Norway, short vegetation period with long and bright days and long and hard winters with short days, make it difficult to use cultivars from Central Europe. At the same time, Norwegian breeding is expensive and depends on subsidies, thereby on sufficient political will, as the Norwegian agricultural market isn’t big enough to make it profitable. Organic farming doesn’t seem to play a role, a niche market in a niche market. The statement “it is impossible to grow strawberries without use of pesticides in Norway” left a bitter aftertaste for the “best strawberries in the world”. We left these favoured plant production areas for the fjord and mountain areas of Western Norway, which are more characterized by animal husbandry. The landscapes were changing and we finally arrived at Aurland, where we were going to stay for the next days. Tuesday, we spent a whole “Diversity day” at the one and only 100 % organic vocational school for OA in Norway, Sogn Jord- og Hagebrukskule. Here, we experienced workshops concerning different agricultural topics about how manifold and important this education is.

In the evening we had an exchange with students and teachers from the school in form of a “World Café” with the topic: „From Norway’s extensive mountain meadows to imported soybeans from south America – How sustainable is Organic Agriculture?”. We discussed social, ecological and economic challenges and tried to find solutions. Of course we didn’t manage to solve the planet’s challenges in one evening, but we found ways and shared with other people who think in the same directions.

On Wednesday we set off to explore the agriculture in the fjord area. In the morning we visited a little mountain farm, Skjerdal, with goats, sheep, traditional milk processing and eco-tourism. We went up the steep slopes, where the family is making hay and ensilage the whole summer, and enjoyed the taste of the goat cheese combined with the nicest fjord view. In the afternoon we climbed up to the traditional summer farm Sinjarheim in Aurlandsdalen, where the students learn about traditional dairy farming without electricity. We completed this fantastic summer day with a “cultural evening” at the Fjordcafé, singing, dancing and eating together with other groups, which also were attracted by this little centre for organic agriculture, Aurland.

The next morning we went up to another mountain goat farm, Vikeland, completely different from the ones we visited the day before. Some years ago they had to take a decision about the future of the farm. They decided to go for effective production of goat’s milk instead of pursuing a diversification strategy like Skjerdal. The alternative was to give up goat farming, as had already been done by many farmers in Aurland. They built a brand-new modern barn for 200 goats with all possible technical details. They are going to continue to
deliver all the milk to Norway’s largest cooperative dairy Tine, who also helped planning and financing this expensive project. This farm was a bit of a contrast to all the simple barns with much manual work that we had previously seen in Norway.

In the afternoon we changed the focus to fish farming, a rather unknown sector for us German students. We visited a fish farm for mountain trout, and the Wild Salmon Centre in Lærdal, and got a brief insight into the practice and problems with fish farming.

We left Aurland and Western Norway for a nice detour to Aschim Vestre, north of Oslo, this evening. At Johan and Kristin Swärd’s farm we heard about the qualities of traditional varieties of cereals and about their work to preserve them in cooperation with other farmers. We visited their fields and mill and took a closer look at the soil structure. Finally, in the evening we celebrated midsummer at the farm in Swedish style.

Later that night we left this beautiful country with its hospitable inhabitants. We headed back to Germany, minds and luggage filled with plenty of new experiences and impressions. One week was too little time to get the whole picture of Norwegian agriculture, but enough to get an insight. Compared to Germany, especially the older generation felt transported back to the pioneering time for OA in Germany in the 1980’s - 1990’s. In Norway, OA seems to be a little niche, which is beginning to come into public focus only the last few years. But why has it taken so long? Where does the scepticism of Norwegians towards organic agriculture come from? These were questions, which we asked people we met on our trip and ourselves. Perhaps the basic trust in national produced food plays an important role. Norwegians mainly hear about food scandals from other European countries. The awareness that Norwegian agriculture is not always “pure”, “healthy” and “natural” is only slowly developing in society. Although the difficult geographical and climatic conditions make industrial agriculture as commonly practised in Germany almost impossible, also in Norway negative effects of pesticides and mineral fertilizers are on the agenda. The large import of protein feed from South America and China is criticised, and the image of the romantic and natural Norwegian agriculture begins to crumble in the consumers’ minds. Here we see a huge opportunity for Organic Agriculture. The increasing consumer interest is also reflected in the growth of CSA-farms, which often arise through consumer initiatives. Consumers themselves are driving what the policy so far has failed. In 2013, the share of organic cultivated area was 4.5%. The current proportion of organic consumption is above 1%, but rapidly increasing.

When we looked at the Norwegian agricultural area and the size of the holdings, we were sure that it would never come to a mass production of organic food such as in Germany. In Norway, as in other countries, agriculture develops rapidly by structural change and economic competition. The insular Norwegian agriculture has so far been relatively unaffected by the world market. With a new, conservative government in 2013, this situation is now changing due to the increasing abolition of custom duties. The staggered subsidies, which should ensure agriculture over the whole country, also in difficult areas, will be changed, and possibly significantly reduced. We heard that many small farmers are concerned about the situation. They do not see themselves as being in a position to compete with farms in favoured agricultural areas in Southern Norway or abroad. Maybe they should not keep up the competition, we thought, but stand out from the crowd. Regional, handmade and organic produced food is in high demand. Perhaps this is their chance: Creativity, courage and skills to oppose the broad mass-production of cheap food. The Norwegian farmers we visited have shown us in a very impressive way that this can well be carried out in practice!
Witzenhausen - the “Organic Faculty” of Kassel University

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The Faculty of Organic Agricultural Sciences is part of the Kassel University. Since 1995, the faculty dedicated its focus in teaching and research on organic agricultural sciences. The preservation and improvement of livelihood and food resources are the basis of all activities at the Faculty. At Witzenhausen, research as well as teaching are based on the precautionary principle in terms of contents and methods. The Faculty is dedicated to the foundation and support of an agrarian and food culture that

- secures sustainable food and resource management
- enables a human – nature interaction oriented at the utilization and strengthening of self-regulating processes
- interacts with farm animals in a respectful and gentle way
- contributes to the development of secure social and economic conditions in rural areas.

The Faculty has a truly international orientation, a long tradition in Witzenhausen. Therefore, the Faculty is especially endeavoured in raising awareness concerning the risks e.g. of global change or cultural diversities. Foreign guest scientists and students enrich the daily university life and give the university location of Witzenhausen a multicultural face. A special commitment to the international dimensions of scientific work can be seen in the many international research co-operations and university partnerships, the regular international training programmes and co-operation with alumni activities of German universities and Summer Schools.

More than 1000 students are studying in the following programs: Bachelor and Master “Ökologische Landwirtschaft” (German language) as well as the international master programs “Sustainable International Agriculture” and “International Food Business and Consumer Studies” (both in English language). Additionally, Dual Studies in Agriculture are offered where practical, vocational and higher education are combined. For the public, the Faculty offers congresses, farmer field days and presentations.

The ecological profile is reflected in the study objectives, teaching and learning methods, in the organisation of study as well as in the process of evaluation. A systemic-oriented network of disciplinary thinking can contribute towards future-oriented solutions in agriculture. This conviction is effective in many interdisciplinary lectures.

Study has not only to do with the transfer of knowledge. It has much more to do with giving students space and stimuli to acquire scientific and professional competences like analytical skills, comprehensive thinking, willingness to take on responsibility and creativity in teamwork in finding solutions. This quality of teaching and learning is often supported by co-operation with farming enterprises, associations, public offices and last but not least by the Faculty’s current research projects.

The Faculty’s research is carried out by 20 sections with modern and well equipped laboratories, and further by a 340 ha organic teaching and research farm with dairy and egg production and a wide range of arable crops, as well as a tropical greenhouse with 400 agricultural plants of the subtropics and tropics.

Further reading
On the
ORGANIC CONTRIBUTION
to a sustainable diet

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About 30 scientists joined the International Workshop on Assessing Sustainable Diets within the Sustainability of Food Systems on 15th-16th September in Rome this year. Participants were invited by the Agricultural Research Council – Research Centre on Food and Nutrition (CRA-NUT), who also hosted the workshop, and the International Research Network for Food Quality and Health (FQH).

The interest for sustainable diets is steadily increasing; for active stakeholders from all agro-food sectors the broader and complex context of the sustainability of food systems is highly relevant for policy and practice. Defining a theoretical methodological framework for the assessment of the sustainability of diets presents many challenges. The definition reached in 2010 at the Conference organized by FAO and Bioversity and the associated four dimensions (health & nutrition, environment, economic, socio-cultural) provide a starting point for a list of indicators serving assessment.

The traditional Mediterranean diet, scientifically well-characterized as a healthy dietary pattern, appreciated for its lower environmental impact and acknowledged as a cultural heritage, is used here as a model to assess sustainability of diets and food consumption patterns in the Mediterranean area. We from FQH thought to use the opportunity to explore the Organic Food System as a case study and see what support for sustainable diets we could come up with.

Two important issues were addressed at the workshop:

1. The need to foster a scientific debate on how to address the question of sustainable diets within organic production/consumption concepts and achievements, and, what contribution the organic part can provide to the ongoing discussions;
2. The need to finalize ongoing collaborations on identification of indicators and methods for assessing sustainable diets within the improvement of the sustainability of food systems, using the Mediterranean diet and the Mediterranean area as a case study.

Organic Contribution
Flavio Paoletti from CRA-NUT introduced the first of the two issues with a reminder of the context of our diets within food and agriculture systems and the global challenges compelling us to address the issues. Ewa Rembialkowska, Warsaw University, took us on a chronological journey through the development of the organic food system. She showed that the history of the organic movement has a clear and logical sequence: First came the philosophy and teachings, which were based on observation of nature and respect for natural laws. In turn, the organic pioneers transformed these principles into practical farming methods. Today organic is a worldwide food system. Johannes Kahl, FQH Chair, took us from the Organic Vision all the way through to the metrics. He described the Vision of the Organic Food System as a food system that raises incomes and increases food security and food safety at both ends, furthermore as one in which the environment is preserved while farmers and workers have fair access to the means of food production. In so doing he showed that Organic is defined through the principles of organic farming and food production. It is regulated by EU, national and private standards including a certification process. Today, 86 countries around the globe have organic legislation. Organic food quality is defined through process and product related aspects. And finally, evaluation is performed through criteria, indicators and parameters that can be organic specific.

Considering the Organic Food System and sustainability, Christian Schader of FiBL explained the framework for
Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture systems (SAFA) used for farms and companies. Divided into four dimensions (environment, economy, social and governance) it covers 21 themes and 58 subthemes with defined objectives. Sirli Pehme of the Estonian University of Life Sciences probed environmental impacts more deeply. Overall organic food production shows good environmental performance per ha, but also per kg of food in many categories. She drew attention to the system boundary challenge, indicating that other steps after farming and processing need further investigation, and that on the diet level the functional unit (the function of the diet) needs to be specified. Sirli was passionate about nutrient cycling as oppose to nutrient mining. Learnings from nutrition, economy, society and culture were presented by Carola Strassner, UASM Germany.

Key messages included the observation that there is no traditional, food-groups-based “organic diet” but that the consumption of organic food within a diet exhibits certain recurring characteristics, such as a shorter chain in terms of the degrees of separation to the primary producer. Carola posited that the diet is economically fair and affordable, if the diet is sustainable according to the definition. Nic Lampkin of the Organic Research Centre in the UK elaborated on the agro-ecology perspective of the organic food system. He also spent some time on certification, underlining its value in helping translate the organic principles into practice through definition of relevant practices and technologies. Nic stressed that the concept of certification should be a foundation to support innovation, not a ceiling to constrain it. While it enables markets to reward producers for adopting specific practices, ensuring financial viability of systems, all the while protecting consumers, it can lead to bureaucracy and institutionalisation, disregarding delivery of the broader goals.

Two case studies provided some insight into practice. Ivana Cavoski, Mediterranean Organic Agricultural Network (MOAN), linked the Organic Food System to the Mediterranean diet with her work on organic durum wheat in the Mediterranean diet: Old varieties and traditional bread making. Ivana’s presentation demonstrated that it is possible to bring traditions and our cultural history successfully into modernity. Meanwhile, Anne-Kristin Løes of Bioforsk in Norway explained how organic food in public procurement was studied in schools, where meals are a most important public service for youth. The CORE-Organic I project iPOPY showed that organic food and farming is well suited to discuss and experience sustainability in practice. Analysis showed that an organic school policy promotes healthy eating: Schools with a healthy food policy also support organic food.

Mediterranean Diet Contribution
Lluis Serra Majem, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, introduced the second issue on Nutrition Indicators to Assess the Sustainability of the Mediterranean Diet. Contributions in this second session took up from work conducted since 2010 to develop, test and refine a methodological approach to assess sustainability of food consumption patterns in different contexts. Denis Lairon, Aix-Marseille University in France, and Elliot Berry, Hebrew University in Israel, presented a draft of a background document on various measures.

Selected nutrition indicators included:
- Diet-related morbidity and mortality statistics (Lorenzo M. Donini, CIISCAM)
- Fruit & vegetable consumption (Aida Turrini, CRA-NUT)
- Vegetable and animal protein (Barbara Burlingame, Deakin University in Australia)
- Dietary energy supply (Angela Polito, CRA-NUT)
- Dietary diversity (Aida Turrini, CRA-NUT)
- Dietary energy density (Denis Lairon, Aix-Marseille University in France)
- Nutrient density & quality (Denis Lairon, Aix-Marseille University in France)
- Biodiversity composition & consumption (Barbara Burlingame, Deakin University in Australia)
- Nutritional anthropometry (Lorenzo M. Donini, CIISCAM)
- Physical activity (Angela Polito, CRA-NUT).

A spirited discussion on the merits and shortcomings of indicators suitable for the assessment of diet sustainability followed in the presentations’ plenary session and into the delicious Italian workshop dinner at a local restaurant near the FAO headquarters on that warm Monday evening.

Bringing it together to assess sustainability of diets
The third and final session sought to bring the various contributions together under the umbrella of Assessing
Sustainable Diets in the Context of Sustainable Food Systems. Vincent Gitz, Coordinator of the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition described frameworks for sustainable diets and sustainable food systems. This was followed by a number of perspectives from the Mediterranean, including Hamid El Bilali (CIHEAM), Rekia Belahsen from Chouaib Doukkali University in Morocco and Antonia Trichopoulou from the Hellenic Health Foundation in Greece. Felice Adinolfi, University of Bologna, addressed the economic dimension and Milena Stefanova, ENEA, addressed the environmental dimension.

Denis Lairon gave a detailed presentation on the profiles of organic food consumers as studied in the French Nutrinet cohort. The results were in astonishing agreement with those from the German study on organic consumers using data from the National Nutrition Survey II as presented by Carola.

Regular consumers of organic products in both the French and the German cohorts exhibited:

- a better dietary pattern (more plant food-based)
- a diet fitting food-based and nutritional recommendations markedly less overweight and obesity
- a higher level of physical activity
- a non-smoking routine.

Denis showed that regular consumers of organic products have healthier life-style profiles – this is valid for the German cohort too - and thus a better compliance with the sustainable diet concept (more plant foods, better nutrition, better safety, better lifestyle and health, to minimize energy/water uses and environmental impacts). In so doing we came full circle to the definition of sustainable diets (see box insert above).

Carola summarised the organic support for a sustainable diet by pointing out that the Organic Food System is a Living Lab. It has a definition, it has the principles, it has the standards, it has the metrics. And today it also has the data.

The Organic Food System shares with the Mediterranean diet putting the land (agri-cultura) back into the diet, indeed, it is the land from which the diet in toto is shaped.

As head of the Sustainable Food Systems Programme, a joint initiative established by the FAO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Alexandre Meybeck (FAO) led the final discussion and conclusion of the International Workshop. This included a deliberation about which organic-related measures might be useful in the sustainability assessment of diets and the notion of characterising organic value chains from a sustainability perspective on the basis of the dimensions discussed (health & nutrition, environment, economic, socio-cultural). All in all a very fruitful and inspiring workshop!

The workshop received the patronage of the EXPO 2015 which will be hosted in Milan from May 1st to October 31st next year around the theme of Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life, and a contribution from the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies (MiPAAF). Furthermore, it enjoyed technical collaboration with the FAO Sustainable Food Systems Programme, the National Research Council (CNR), the Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development (ENEA), the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), PTBio Italia and the International inter-university center for Mediterranean food culture studies (CIISCAM).

Workshop Proceedings are to be published shortly. Interviews follow on page 12.
Sustainable diets represent the link between sustainable food consumption and production, and both have to be dependent on food requirements and nutrient recommendations.

Q: What attracted your attention most at the Rome workshop?

During the preparation of the workshop, I noticed the strict correspondence between the principles on which the organic agriculture and food production is based (health, ecology, care, fairness), and the definitions of sustainable food systems and sustainable diets. Among several common traits, the stress on health (human health, animal health, environment health) was the most attractive to me.

Considering the data on the crop categories in organic agriculture worldwide, as well as scientific papers describing the profile of organic consumers, I got a sense of the principles of organic agriculture, their transformation into regulations and application in practice that are able to orient somehow both the production and consumption patterns in a way that they are “naturally” in tune with the recommendations for healthy dietary patterns.

Q: In your opinion, what are the main results from the Rome workshop?

I might say that the main result is that we will have a lot of work to do for the future and this is good news for researchers.

The Mediterranean Diet (MD) has been taken as a case study for the assessment of the sustainability of diets. MD is a model whose healthy benefits have been scientifically demonstrated. However it is a model in crisis that probably needs to be revitalized, because the non-adherence of current dietary patterns to the MD model is increasing trend in almost all Mediterranean countries. In my opinion there is the need to go through concrete situations, to analyse different geographical, social, cultural contexts, to understand and assess how far current dietary patterns are from the definition of sustainable diets.

In the workshop, the issue of sustainable diets has been considered within the more general issue of the sustainability of the food systems. During the final discussion it was proposed to investigate the organic food system as a case study for sustainable food systems. There was a general agreement on this proposal. This is an important result of the workshop, because it offers new perspectives and scenarios for the research in organic and the development of the organic sector.
Organic symposium in Korea: Preparing the 2015 Expo

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The ISOFAR 2015 Goesan International Organic Expo and Industry Fair are still almost a year away, but its hosts and organizers have long been on their feet for the preparation of this grand event that will highlight organic agriculture under the theme Organic Life, Science Meets the Public. The occasion is expected to gather about 620,000 domestic and 40,000 foreign participants from various sectors from all over the world in the vicinity of Dongjincheon in Goesan-eup of Goesan-gun, Chungcheongbuk-do, Republic of Korea on September 18-October 11, 2014. This long exposition will highlight the value of organic agriculture in life and environment through thematic halls, outdoor experiences, exhibitions of medical and beauty products, food and beverage products, farm products, and other related trade and industry products. It will also conduct a series of academic events such as symposia and seminar, and also hand-ons, cultural performances and other organic experiences.

The preparations were reviewed by members of the ISOFAR world board 2011-2014 during a 2-day consultation meeting held at Chungcheongbuk-do, Geosan, and Dankook University on July 22 and 24, 2014.

The activity, which was just one of the series of consultations since January, 2014, was attended by members of the organizing committee and officials of Chungcheongbuk-do, Goesan-gun and ISOFAR. Business promotion and event organizers of the expo were also present during the meeting. ISOFAR was represented by its President, Prof. Dr. Sang Mok Sohn and board members Mohamed Benkheder (Tunisia), Peter von Fragstein (Germany), Laszlo Radics (Hungary) and Carmelita Cervantes. It is expected that all roads will lead to Goesan for the ISOFAR 2015 Goesan International Organic Expo, and that it will contribute to position Korea as the center of organic agriculture in the Asia Pacific region.

The consultation meeting was accompanied by an International Symposium on the Development of Korean Organic Agriculture and Industry, held at Jungwon University at Goesan, Republic Korea on July 23, 2014. In a plenary session, Sang Mok Sohn, President of ISOFAR and Chairman of the symposium Organizing Committee, presented the speech Development tendency of Organic Agriculture and Its Related Industry. In the session of international speakers, four other world board members (2011-2014) were invited as keynote speakers, presenting the following papers:

Mohamed Benkheder: Organic Matter Management in Organic Plant Nutrition

Peter von Fragstein: Multi-functionality of the Living mulch in Organic Vegetable Production Systems


In a session of local speakers, five Korean speakers presented papers significant to the development of Korean organic agriculture and industry.

The symposium was organized by the Chungbuk Province, Geosan County and ISOFAR primarily to generate information and strategies for the upcoming Expo. The activity was highlighted by the commitments and full support of the national as well as the local government, academic sector, farmers, industry and media, which is promising with respect to the success of this large event. The Korean officials present in the event were Lee Sijong, Governor, Chungcheongbuk-do Province, KyoungJae Hur, Secretary General of the Organizing Committee of the Expo, Dr. Chang-Khil Song of Jeju National University, Dr. Byunghwan Ahn, President of Jungwon University, and other officials and representatives from the academic institutions, heads of local as well as national government, farmer organizations, industry, private and media groups.
The General Assembly of IFOAM (further reading at www.ifoam.org) is an important part of the Organic World Congress, and was arranged in Istanbul, Turkey during October 15-16, 2014.

One of the very exciting topics to be decided was the venue of the next OWC.

For the first time, as many as four countries competed to present the best approach: Brazil, China, India and Russia. IFOAM delegates had no easy choice, but the engaged speech from India, promising to take the OWC back to the roots of farming and integrated thousands of Indian organic farmers in the event, was obviously convincing. India won!

ISOFAR has one board member from India, Dr. Mahesh Chander, but also active members like Dr. A. K. Sherief. This is a good starting point for a close cooperation with Indian research organisations and institutes to produce an excellent scientific track of the OWC in 2017.

The paper on the next page, written by A.K. Sherief, presents some of the current challenges that organic agriculture is facing in India, and serves as a good background for further work of ISOFAR in this region.

India: Venue of the OWC 2017

Challenged by Climate Change

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On October 1, the ERA-Net Core Organic invited leading scientists, stakeholders and funding bodies to the third seminar under the European research program CORE Organic. The seminar was a way to let project leaders share knowledge from their projects and to create an opportunity for scientists to network with stakeholders, funding bodies and each other. The overall receipt of the meeting seemed very positive.

Willemine Brinkman from the EIP-Agri Service Point especially highlighted the user perspective of the seminar and noticed that a lot of the projects had farmers involved in the entire research process.

“There is a need for more practice-oriented research. Scientists are often judged on whether their articles are published in peer reviewed journals, and not on whether farmers use this new knowledge. The ultimate goal for agricultural research is that it should benefit farmers and society as a whole,” she said, highlighting the philosophy of innovation that that EIP-Agri (The agricultural European Innovation Partnership) is looking to nurture within all levels of agricultural research and practice. The EIP-Agri is dedicated to foster innovation for competitive and sustainable farming and forestry.

Dissemination was a specific goal of the seminar, as Niels Halberg, director of ICROFS, and coordinator of CORE Organic, said in his welcoming speech.

“In my experience scientists are not good at disseminating during the project period and that is why we need to arrange seminars like this,” he said and encouraged for discussions and possible cooperation in the following workshop in which each of the project leaders presented their project to small groups of listeners.

“Maybe the things you believe is important in your project are not what others see as important,” Niels Halberg continued.

The curly tails

At a closing panel discussion, project leaders from all the projects answered questions from stakeholders and audience and discussed among other things how to better communicate their research to the broader society.

There seemed to be a shared perception that it is difficult to share complicated research results with the consumers – they choose food based on prize and trust. In order to make consumers buy organic, trust is the main issue, many agreed.

Project leader of the ProPig project, Christine Leeb from BOKU University of Natural Ressources and Life Sciences, noted, that the organic farming has the advantage of “the curly tails”.

“It is complicated to explain about space allowance and provision of straw. So we need to find easy ways of communicating. And in pigs eg. we have the curly tails which is an animal based indicator of the system showing integrity, that the food is okay and the housing. It’s an iceberg communicator,” she said.
A Climate smart Organic Agriculture: The future strategy for present farming in India

Climate change is one of the most serious challenges facing nations, governments, business and citizens of today and future decades. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its fourth Assessment report warns that by 2100 the conditions will be worse than previously expected, with a probable temperature rise of 1.8°C to 4°C and a possible rise of up to 6.4°C. As temperatures continue to rise, the impacts on agriculture will be more significant. These impacts are already being experienced in many countries.

Poor farmers, especially in developing countries are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change because of their geographic exposure, low incomes and greater reliance on agriculture as well as limited capacity to seek alternative livelihoods. An effective combination of sustainable agriculture and climate change policies can boost green growth, protect the environment and contribute to the eradication of hunger and poverty.

Organic agriculture optimally combines different practices in a systematic manner and sustains agricultural production in resource-limited regions. The FAO regards organic agriculture as an effective strategy for mitigating climate change and building robust soils that are better adapted to extreme weather conditions associated with climate change. The IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report also recommends the use of practices which are standard in organic agriculture for adapting climate change.

Scientific research is needed to determine which agricultural techniques, practices and systems will achieve actual climate change adaptation. The scaling-up of organic agriculture would promote and support climate friendly farming practices.

“Climate-Smart Agriculture” is gaining increasing popularity as a unifying concept on climate change and agriculture. It is possible to have higher yields, more carbon in the soil and greater resilience towards droughts and heat. ‘Climate-smart’ agriculture seeks to increase productivity in an environmentally and socially sustainable way, to strengthen farmers’ resilience to climate change, and to reduce agriculture’s contribution to climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon storage on farmland (World Bank, 2011).

As ‘Climate Change’ is one of the most important challenges affecting the livelihood of people all over the world, the importance of adopting climate smart practices, has been growing. In India, agricultural scientists are now investigating the effectiveness of organic farming for climate change adaptation in comparison with conventional farming. The degree of vulnerability towards climate change in respect of conventional farming and the extent of adaptive capacity in respect of organic farming have to be analysed.

A tool for measurement of Vulnerability Index (VI) and Integrated Adaptive Capacity Index (IAC) are to be developed. This will help planners to formulate suitable developmental programmes in areas where the indices are high or low. It will further help to focus on to the future research studies related to climate change adaptation.

The Indian sub-continent is bestowed with a unique agro-climatic and ecological situation that mimics almost the entire world’s climatic and agro-ecological situation.

Agricultural practices of India date back to more than 4000 years, and organic farming is very much an indigenous practice in this country. Vedic period farmers possessed a fair knowledge of soil fertility, seed selection, plant protection, sowing seasons and sustainability of crops in different lands. Today, India has about 528,171 hectare area under organic agriculture (including certified and area under organic conversion) and account for about 0.3% of total agricultural land. Kerala, one of the smallest states of India, has already started the process of conversion to organic farming by 2020. Scientists have developed organic farming practices for demonstration by integrating crop husbandry with animal husbandry, fish culture or mushroom cultivation in homestead farming.

This is one of the strategies to tide over the financial crisis when there is income decline from any single farming practice. However, there is a need to develop a comprehensive framework that integrates organic farming practices with climate change, and technology diffusion with reciprocal knowledge flow from farmers, scientists and local innovators.

The scientific track of 19th OWC 2017 in India will be an ideal platform to address the above issues, among others.
Membership services

• We would like to remind all ISOFAR members, and people wanting to become members: Please send to the ISOFAR Head Office (info@isofar.org) the keywords related to your professional expertise, and contact details. The Head Office needs your information for future joint research activities among members, organising lecture requests, etc.

• All members are kindly invited to provide contributions to the ISOFAR Newsletter such as reports on your ongoing activities and other interesting or useful information.

• Important: Don’t forget to inform us on any change of your address!

Newsletter contact:
Contributions (text files and separate picture files) should be sent to:
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Board member Dr. Mahesh Chander (to the left) recently joined the Asian Biofach and made efforts to advocate the ISOFAR World Expo in Korea 2015. Here with Mr Mathew John, IFOAM world Board Member, Jennifer Chang, Executive Director of IFOAM Asia and Lim Kak-soo, the Mayor of Goesan county, Korea.

OrganicDataNetwork videos
Three videos have been produced within the OrganicDataNetwork project by Thomas Alföldi, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), Switzerland. They describe what the intention of the project was and its main achievements.

See the videos here