

Bořivoj Šarapatka, Jiří Urban et al.

Organic agriculture



Prague 2009

**This publication was prepared within the IAEI Thematic Task for 2009
„Ecological aspects of a sustainable agricultural system“ - Task No. 27(4402)**

**Published by the Institute of Agricultural Economics and Information (IAEI)
in cooperation with the Czech Ministry of Agriculture, the PRO-BIO Association of Organic
Farmers, Bioinstitut o.p.s. and Faculty of Science of Palacky University Olomouc.**

**The text of this book includes outputs from the National Research Programme II
“Optimization of flood area land use with emphasis on biodiversity” (2B06101)
and other Czech grant agency projects.**



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ISBN 978-80-86671-69-7

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Prague 2009

ORGANIC FARMING - AGRICULTURE OF THE FUTURE

*Bernward Geier,
from 1987 till 2005
a Director at IFOAM head
office - International
Federation of Organic
Agriculture Movements*



When, as Director of the worldwide umbrella organisation for organic agriculture movements (IFOAM), I helped to introduce this organisation in Central and Eastern Europe in the extremely difficult conditions of the 1980s, I was pleased to meet some of the Czech pioneers of organic farming. At our first regional meeting in Poland in 1989 we agreed that the next meeting should be held in Czechoslovakia, as it then was.

It was the pioneer Richard Barták, later Deputy Minister for (organic!) farming, who, together with his friends Bořivoj Šarapatka, Jiří Urban and Jiří Chlebníček, decided to take responsibility for organizing a small – as we then thought – regional seminar. However, political events gathered dramatic pace and, with the political opening-up and newly gained freedom, the interest in organic farming grew rapidly. In winter 1990, right after the revolution, several hundred people met near Olomouc at a conference on organic agriculture. The charged atmosphere of the birth of something new will remain permanently etched in my memory. Top European specialists came to give lectures; it was a demanding event with unexpected impact, the pioneers of the young Organic Farming movement coped with the challenge excellently – thanks to what is typical for them to this day – their relentless commitment to a common aim, their flexibility, as well as their courage and their confidence that even the seemingly impossible can be achieved.

The enthusiasm and energy that flowed from this first OF meeting was the best ever basis for ensuing rapid development of organic farming in the Czech Republic which, since its very beginning, has been growing in mutual and close cooperation with similar movements in neighbouring countries.

You have remained loyal to this openness in a beautiful way, especially thanks to the now traditional Bio-academy in Lednice. As a lecturer and participant in Bio-academy I have myself experienced how lively

and dynamic the development of the organic movement has been since that meeting in Olomouc. It is mainly due to Bio-academy that the Czech OF movement has established itself in a certain leading role for the whole region. Not that you have claimed this role for yourselves; it has developed naturally, due to your commitment and the creation of the Lednice platform. The series of Lednice Bio-academies has given, and will continue to give, crucial stimulus for the further development of OF movements within the Czech Republic and neighbouring countries. Bio-academy remains a fertile field for the cultivation of international exchange of information and regional cooperation. In this context, great importance lies in the cooperation with the Austrian OF movement and especially with FiBL, the Swiss Research Institute of Organic Agriculture which, in the meantime, has supported the establishment of a new department - Bio-institut, o.p.s. - in the Czech Republic.

Throughout all these years, contact with the PRO-BIO Association has also been remarkably intense, sustained mainly by the friendship that was born in Olomouc in 1990 with Jiřina Pavelková, Jiří Urban and also Bořivoj Šarapatka from the Palacký University.

When my thoughts go back to that time, I realize what these pioneers have achieved: from an initial three organic farms, there are now more than 2,000 of them. With organic agriculture taking a share of approximately 10% of agricultural land (6% of what? of farmers, of total farm area, of volume of food production, of value of food market ???), the Czech Republic holds one of the leading positions in the entire European Union. Such success has not simply fallen from the sky; it is the result of a common vision and tireless effort. Together with inquisitiveness and willingness to cooperate, this has ensured that conversion to organic farming can offer Czech agriculture the opportunity for innovation and future perspectives.

The main task will be to develop OF in such a way as exponentially to increase not only areas of grassland, but especially of arable land as well as land for fruit & vegetables. To achieve this you need further to intensify your excellent advisory services and increase the transfer of knowledge into practice, thus making your specialist know-how and practical skills available to farmers interested in conversion to the organic system.

I am therefore very pleased to hear of this “Organic Farming” book which will provide anyone interested in this type of farming with a practically focused textbook. In this book you have a basic summary of work covering all relevant themes in which the most competent authors, coordinated by Bořivoj Šarapatka and Jiří Urban, provide definitive contributions valid not only within the Czech Republic.



Dear readers,

Organic agriculture (OA) or organic farming (OF) has found a firm position in the world. This is because OF provides an answer to numerous questions and problems of contemporary agriculture and of rural life in general. It relates to food quality and thus also to human health. Organic farming is a multifunctional model with economic, social and ecological goals. It relies on local resources, requires more labour than conventional farming, is more considerate to the natural environment and produces good quality foodstuffs. It is based on long-term sustainability, economic viability and regard for nature, for animals and for people for whom it also provides work and especially for whom it produces safe food of good quality.

It is pleasing to see ever-improving cooperation between all those involved in the development of OF, i.e. farmers, government bodies and consumers. The role of advisers, researchers and educators is also growing. It is for all these specialist groups that we have written this book, for practical agriculture but also as a textbook for teachers and students.

The real value of this book is in the fact that it has been compiled by a number of OF specialists and institutions focusing on this area of agriculture. Their projects added a wealth of interesting new data to the text.

Neither could the book have been published without the help of many institutions and people to whom we wish to express our thanks.

Our great thanks go to the Czech Ministry of the Environment for supporting the publication of the Czech version of the book with money from EU sources and from the state budget. Also to the Czech Ministry of Agriculture for their work on publishing this English version. We believe that it will find much wider use than only within the Czech Republic.

The book could not have been published without the technical help of the Institute of Agricultural Economics and Information (IAEI) in Prague and without the technical work of Reprotisk s.r.o. printers in Šumperk.

We also thank FiBL CH-Frick, BLE D-Bonn, the Faculty of Science of the Palacký University in Olomouc and other institutions for their specialist material.

We believe you will find useful information in this book that will be of help to you in your practical activities as well as in further studies.

Olomouc, 2009

Bořivoj Šarapatka and Jiří Urban

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(Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16, coordination of the team of authors, editing of the whole text).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Further texts by Ing. Květuše Hejátková, Ing. Milan Hluchý, Ph.D., prof. Ing. František Hrabě, CSc., Ing. Tomáš Klejzar, prof. Ing. Jiří Petr, DrSc., Dr.h.c., Ing. Jaroslav Pražan, Josef Sklenář, MUDr. Hana Šarapatková, Ing. Miroslav Vraný, prof. Ing. Iva Živělová, CSc. and others were used in this book – thanks to all for your help in processing these materials.

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OBSAH

1 Introduction to organic agriculture	13	5.4 Breeding and propagating Seed for Organic Agriculture.....	63
1.1 Development of organic agriculture (oa) and its significance.....	13	5.5 Soil Tillage	64
1.2 Agro-ecological and environmental Aspects of Organic Agriculture	17	6 Soil	69
1.3 Aspects of Health and Quality of Organic Products	20	6.1 Biologically active Soil, the Foundation for Organic Agriculture	69
1.3.1 Human Health and the Risks of industrialisation of Agriculture	20	6.1.1 Living Soil Component	70
1.3.2 Quality of Organic Produce	21	6.1.2 Inanimate Element of Organic Matter.....	73
2 The History and present Status of Organic Agriculture (OA).....	27	6.2 The Effect of Agronomic Measures on Soil Properties.....	76
2.1 The Beginnings of Organic Agriculture in Central and Western Europe	27	6.2.1 Crop Rotation	76
2.2 Methods of Organic Agriculture	27	6.2.2 Soil Tillage	77
2.2.1 Natural Agriculture	27	6.2.3 Fertilization	78
2.2.2 Biodynamic Agriculture (Biologisch-dynamischer Landbau)	28	6.3 Soil Analysis on an Organic Farm.....	79
2.2.3 Bio-Organic Agriculture (Biologisch-organischer Landbau)	28	6.3.1 Taking and Treatment of Soil Samples	80
2.2.4 Organic Agriculture in English-speaking Countries	29	6.3.2 Types of Analysis	81
2.2.5 Biological Agriculture in German-speaking Countries (Biologischer Landbau).....	29	7 Plant Nutrition and Fertilization.....	83
2.2.6 Biological Agriculture in French-speaking Countries (L'Agriculture Biologique).....	30	7.1 Theory and Specifics of Plant Nutrition in Organic Agriculture..	83
2.3 Development of Organic Agriculture in recent Decades.....	30	7.2 Farmyard Fertilizers and their Management	84
3 Legal status of the organic agriculture method	33	7.2.1 Manure	85
3.1 European legislation for organic agriculture.....	33	7.2.2 Slurry	87
3.2 Other important areas of legislation	35	7.3 Composts and Composting	88
3.3 Plants grown organically.....	36	7.4 Methods of applying Farmyard Fertilizer	90
3.4 Organic animal-husbandry.....	36	7.5 Green Manuring	92
3.5 Production of organic foodstuffs.....	38	7.6 Fertilizing with Mineral Fertilizer	94
3.6 Trading in organic foodstuffs	39	7.7 Nutrient Balance	95
4 Environmental Effects of Organic Agriculture	41	8 CULTIVATION OF MAIN CROPS.....	99
4.1 Soil in Organic Agriculture, its Quality and Biodiversity	41	8.1 Cereals	99
4.2 Organic Agriculture and the Quality of Groundwater and Surface Water.....	42	8.1.1 Common Wheat (<i>Triticum aestivum</i> L.).....	99
4.2.1 Leaching of Nitrates.....	43	8.1.2 Rye (<i>Secale cereale</i> L.).....	103
4.2.2 Pesticides	44	8.1.3 Barley (<i>Hodreum vulgare</i> L.).....	104
4.2.3 Conclusion	45	8.1.4 Oats (<i>Avena sativa</i> L.).....	106
4.3 Biodiversity and Organic Agriculture	45	8.1.5 Maize or Indian Corn (<i>Zea mays</i> L.)	108
4.3.1 Levels of Biodiversity.....	45	8.1.6 Buckwheat (<i>Fagopyrum vulgare</i> Moench)	109
4.3.2 Biodiversity in Agro-ecosystems	46	8.2 Legumes	111
4.3.3 The Agro-ecosystem and the Possibilities of enhancing Biodiversity	50	8.3 Oil Crops	112
5 Plant Production	53	8.4 Root crops	114
5.1 General Principles of Organic Plant Cultivation	53	9 Weed Control.....	119
5.2 Crop Rotation in Organic Agriculture	53	9.1 Weed characteristics	119
5.3 Choosing Species and Varieties in OA	61	9.2 Weed Control before beginning Conversion.....	120
		9.3 Types of weed infestation	121
		9.4 Methods of Weed Control	121
		9.4.1 Preventive Weed Control	121
		9.4.2 Direct – mechanical weed control	124
		9.4.3 Thermal weed control	130
		9.4.4 Mulching	131
		9.4.5 Biological and biotechnical methods of weed control....	131

10 Plant Protection.....	133	12.6 Vegetable-Growing	178
10.1 Principles and Strategy of Plant Protection.....	133	12.6.1 Seed and Seedlings	178
10.2 Indirect Plant Protection Techniques: Prevention	133	12.6.2 Pre-cultivation of Seedlings	178
10.3 Direct Means of Plant Protection	136	12.6.3 Sowing and Planting	178
10.3.1 Biological Plant Protection Agents	137	12.6.4 Irrigation	179
10.3.2 Mechanical Means of Plant Protection	138	12.7 Harvesting and storing Vegetables	180
10.3.3 Chemical, mineral and organic Substances.....	139	12.8 Treatment and Sale of Vegetables	180
10.3.4 Plant Extracts And Oils.....	139	12.8.1 Market preparation	180
10.3.5 Pheromone Traps	140	12.8.2 Sale	181
10.4 Examples of Protection Strategy	140	13 Organic fruit-growing	183
10.4.1 Grapevines	141	13.1 Establishing orchards	184
11 Permanent Grassland in Organic Agriculture.....	145	13.2 Choice of variety.....	189
11.1 Diversity of permanent Grassland in Organic Agriculture.....	145	13.3 Soil cultivation and fertilization.....	189
11.1.1 Structure and species composition of grass-herb vegetation.....	146	13.4 Growth and Fertility Control	193
11.1.2 Risks that current farm management poses to biodiversity of permanent grassland	146	13.5 Plant Protection against Disease and Pests.....	195
11.1.3 Variability of Permanent Grassland	147	13.6 Harvesting, Packing, Processing and Sale of Organic Fruit.....	201
11.1.4 The Quality of Fodder from species-rich permanent Grassland.....	149	14 Organic Viticulture and Wine-making	203
11.1.5 Farming Principles.....	149	14.1 Varieties Suitable for Organic Viticulture	204
11.1.6 Proposed ways of Meadow and Pasture renewal by increasing Species Diversity	150	14.2 Establishing a Vineyard	204
11.2 Permanent Grassland with lower Species Diversity in Organic Agriculture	151	14.2.1 Preparation Work before establishing a Vineyard	204
11.2.1 Methods of establishing grassland	151	14.2.2 Planting a Vineyard	207
11.2.2 Treatment and Improvement of Grassland.....	152	14.2.3 Care of young Vineyards	208
11.2.3 Weed and Pest Control.....	153	14.3 Cyclical Work in a Vineyard	210
11.2.4 Nutrition and fertilizing permanent Grassland.....	154	14.3.1 Vine Pruning	210
11.2.5 Pasturing.....	159	14.3.2 Other Work in early Spring	211
11.2.6 Utilisation of permanent Grassland and Quality of Fodder.....	162	14.3.3 Green Work	211
11.3 Conservation and Storage of Bulk Feed.....	166	14.3.4 Disease and Pest Control	212
11.3.1 The Significance and Principle of Haymaking	166	14.3.5 Soil Maintenance in Vineyards	214
11.3.2 The Significance and Principle of Silage-Making	167	14.3.6 Harvesting Grapes	216
12 Organic Vegetable-growing	169	14.4 Principles of Organic Viniculture	216
12.1 Agricultural and personal Prerequisites	169	14.5 Principles of Organic Production of table Grapes.....	217
12.1.1 Climate, Site	169	15 Animal Husbandry and Organic Farming.....	219
12.1.2 Soil	169	15.1 Significance of Livestock in Organic Farming.....	219
12.1.3 Organisation, Labour Force	170	15.2 Negative aspects of conventional Husbandry and, Organic Farming as a Chance to give Animals a better life.....	220
12.1.4 Machinery and Equipment	170	15.3 Animal Protection and Welfare	222
12.1.5 Sales	170	15.3.1 Animal Protection Ethics	222
12.2 Choosing the System of Cultivation, Cultivated Species, Crop Rotation.....	170	15.3.2 Concepts.....	224
12.3 Soil Tillage and Fertilization	173	15.3.3 Animal Consciousness and Suffering	225
12.3.1 Healthy Soil	173	15.3.4 The most serious Causes of Suffering in Animal Husbandry Systems.....	227
12.3.2 Soil Tillage	173	15.3.5 Right action	230
12.3.3 Fertilization	173	15.3.6 Animal Protection and Welfare in Organic Farming.....	231
12.4 Weed Control	174	15.3.7 Legislation on animal protection and welfare.....	233
12.4.1 Preventive Measures	175	15.4 Veterinary Care in organic animal husbandry	234
12.4.2 Direct control	175	15.4.1 Methods used in Prevention	234
12.5 Plant Protection	176	15.4.2 Therapeutic methods in organic farming	235
12.5.1 Pests	176	15.4.3 Unacceptable Methods.....	235
12.5.2 Fungal Disease	177	15.4.4 Approved Methods.....	235

16 Cattle-breeding.....	237	18 Pig-breeding	297
16.1 Ethology and Welfare of Cattle	238	18.1 The Significance of Pig-breeding in Organic Farming	297
16.1.1 Basic Characteristics of the Species.....	238	18.2 Ethology and the Requirement for ethologically suitable Stabling of Pigs	297
16.1.2 Domestication and Division of Breeds	238	18.2.1 Basic Characteristics of the Species and a rough Outline of evolutionary Development.....	297
16.1.3 Factors affecting the Behaviour and Ethology of Cattle..	239	18.2.2 Basic Behaviour, Groups of basic Reflexes, critical Phases of Development	298
16.1.4 Grazing, feeding, ruminating and drinking.....	239	18.3 Pig-breeding – Production Aims, Suitability of Breed.....	302
16.1.5 Social Behaviour of Cattle.....	240	18.3.1 Production Characteristics of Pigs.....	302
16.1.6 Mutual Communication	241	18.3.2 Suitability of Pig Breeds	302
16.1.7 Sexual Behaviour, giving Birth and Behaviour after Birth.....	241	18.4 Nutrition and Feeding.....	303
16.1.8 Learning and Development of social Behaviour.....	242	18.4.1 Feedstuffs in Organic Pig-breeding	303
16.1.9 Abnormal Behaviour.....	242	18.4.2 Feeding particular Categories of Pig in Organic Farming Conditions.....	304
16.2 Cattle Stabling.....	242	18.5 Stabling Systems in Pig-breeding	307
16.2.1 Breeding: environmental Factors	243	18.5.1 Possible stabling Systems for Pigs in Organic Farming ..	307
16.2.2 Stabling dairy cows.....	245	19 Poultry Breeding	311
16.2.3 Stabling other Types of Cattle Categories (except non-dairy cows).....	247	19.1 The Significance of Laying Hens in Organic Farms	311
16.3 Cattle Nutrition in the Organic Farming System.....	250	19.2 Ethology and Welfare of Poultry	311
16.3.1 Feed in Organic Farming (general requirements and conditions).....	250	19.2.1 Domestication and current Breeds and Hybrids	311
16.3.2 Cattle Nutrition in Organic Farming in Terms of harmonizing the physiological Needs of Cattle with OA Principles	251	19.2.2 Social Behaviour	311
16.3.3 Specific Examples of Dairy Cow Nutrition in Organic Animal Husbandry	253	19.2.3 Sensory Perception	312
16.3.4 Calf Nutrition in Organic Farming.....	254	19.2.4 Scratching and Feeding	313
16.3.5 Nutrition of non-dairy Cows	254	19.2.5 Biorythm	313
16.4 Cattle-breeding focusing on Dairy Production or Dairy and Meat Production	256	19.2.6 Sexual Behaviour	314
16.4.1 Cattle Breeds.....	256	19.2.7 Growth and Development	314
16.4.2 Dairy Breeds	256	19.2.8 Problems in conventional Breeding	315
16.4.3 Multi-purpose breeds	257	19.3 Breeding Laying Hens, Suitable Breeds	315
16.4.4 Other suitable breeds of Russian origin.....	259	19.3.1 Organic breeding of Laying Hens	315
16.4.5 Herd Management - Knowledge of Cattle-Breeding	260	19.3.2 Suitability of Breed	316
16.5 Breeding Organic Beef Cattle	262	19.3.3 Natural hatching and rearing of Gallinaceous Poultry.....	317
16.5.1 Conditions for Organic Beef–Cattle Breeding	262	19.4 Nutrition and feeding of Laying Hens	318
16.5.2 Beef-breed characteristics	264	19.4.1 Feedstuffs in Organic Poultry breeding	318
16.5.3 Living Conditions	266	19.4.2 Nutrition in Organic breeding of Hens	319
16.5.4 General Principles of Breeding and Reproduction of Beef Breeds.....	269	19.5 Housing Laying Hens and Broiler Chickens.....	320
16.6 Fattening-up Cattle in Organic Farming	271	19.5.1 Requirements of Council Regulation No 834/2007 for housing laying hens and broiler chickens	320
17 Farming Sheep and Goats in Organic Farming.....	275	19.5.2 Laying Hens and Broiler Housing Systems	321
17.1 The significance of farming sheep and goats	275	19.6 Meat Poultry breeding (waterfowl and gallinaceous poultry).....	322
17.2 Stabling, ethological aspects and construction suggestions	276	19.6.1 The Significance of Table Poultry in Organic Farming.....	322
17.3 Nutrition and feeding	280	19.6.2 Ethological Requirements of natural Poultry breeding for Meat.....	323
17.3.1 Feed requirement and feeding method	281	19.6.3 Poultry Breeds and Hybrids suitable for Meat Production	324
17.3.2 Grazing systems	284	19.6.4 Poultry raised for Meat - Nutrition and feeding.....	325
17.4 Breeding – production based breed selection and organisation of reproduction	287	19.6.5 Housing Meat Poultry	327
17.4.1 Breeds	287	References.....	328
17.4.2 Production aim.....	288		
17.4.3 Organising reproduction	290		
17.5 Breeding systems	291		
17.5.1 Grazed system	291		
17.5.2 Handling animals – reducing stress to a minimum	292		
17.5.3 Health programme of a herd	294		