International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements

Kavita Doekharan, William Chung and Bernd van der Meulen

I. Introduction

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) was founded in 1972 as an independent, global non-profit organization. IFOAM consists of more than 750 member organizations including organic farmers groups and cooperatives, processors, trade firms, scientific organizations, consulting firms and certifiers, in some 110 countries. Members organize themselves according to geographic regions or sectoral interests. The Federation’s activities are carried out through various committees, working groups and task forces. Representatives of the members take fundamental decisions at IFOAM’s General Assemblies. During the General Assemblies, the World Board is elected. Staff at IFOAM’s Head Office in Bonn, as well as people working in Uganda, the USA, and Italy serve the World Board and its entire membership (IFOAM Program 2011: 2).

IFOAM has made it their mission to lead, unite and assist the organic movement in its full diversity. They try to realize this mission by:

Leading the organic movement worldwide; the Federation implements the will of its broad based constituency – from farmers’ organizations to multinational certification agencies, ensuring the credibility and longevity of organic agriculture as a means to ecological, economical, and social sustainability;

Uniting the organic world; the Federation provides platforms to stakeholders for a wide range of purposes. Through international conferences, committee meetings, and other forums, IFOAM facilitates the ongoing and constructive dialogue about the future and status of organic agriculture;

Assisting its Membership; the Federation implements specific projects that facilitate the adoption of organic agriculture, particularly in developing countries.

IFOAM also represents the organic agricultural movement at the United Nations and other intergovernmental agencies. It has observer status, is a Member, or is otherwise accredited by international institutions including the
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Task Force on Harmonization and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture (ITF), and the International Social and Environmental Labelling Alliance (ISEAL) (IFOAM 2007).

The Federation has the central goal of the global adoption of ecologically, socially, and economically sound systems that are based on the principles of organic agriculture (IFOAM Program 2011: 2). The following sub-goals were set by the IFOAM World Board for the period 2009–2011:

- Be the international authority and most effective voice on all matters organic;
- Increase market share for organic products and access to them at local, regional, and international levels;
- Enhance the capacity of the organic sector to sustain growth and development;
- Strengthen IFOAM as a democratic global action network;
- Create ‘think spaces’ to cultivate the organic future;
- Ensure an effectively managed organization with sufficient and sustainable resources.

According to Geier, their mission will continue to ensure that the organic movement remains current and up to date by offering a platform for innovative and intensive discussions and consultations (Geier 2007).

II. Origins and Development

IFOAM’s origins can be traced to an international congress on organic agriculture organized by the French farmers’ organization Nature et Progrès in Versailles on 5 November 1975, when the late Roland Chevriot, President of Nature et Progrès, conceived of a worldwide appeal to come together to ensure a future for organic agriculture. There were five founding members present representing different organizations in attendance:

- Lady Eve Balfour representing the Soil Association of Great Britain;
- Kjell Arman representing the Swedish Biodynamic Association;
- Pauline Raphaely representing the Soil Association of South Africa;