

Dear Reader,

Thirty-five years ago FiBL organized the first international IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) research conference entitled “Towards a Sustainable Agriculture”. This conference was of historic significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, it consolidated the global organic movement. Today IFOAM is an important international non-governmental organization. In November 2012 it celebrated its 40th anniversary in Bonn, Germany, and IFOAM and FiBL still work closely together to this day. Secondly, with this conference the organic movement was the first to send a strong signal of commitment to sustainability. Agricultural policy only began to give consideration to sustainability after publication of the 1987 UN report by the then Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. And thirdly, at this occasion FiBL made itself known both nationally and internationally as a pacemaker of progress in farming and nutrition, a role FiBL fulfils to this day working from its now three offices in Switzerland, Germany and Austria.

Many people already consider the term “sustainability” to be worn out and arbitrary. However, the fact that this term has been misused should not lead us to abandon it given that we contributed to defining it. Consequently, a number of years ago FiBL integrated it into its claim of “Excellence for Sustainability”. Despite the proliferation of green-washing, the term contains the robust message that many of the resources needed for our survival are finite and no amount of human

ingenuity can replace them. For example, humus lost through decomposition takes decades or centuries to build up again. And in fifty to a hundred years we will have lost forever all the phosphorus washed into rivers and oceans with eroding soils or through the sewage systems. These are two of the areas where organic farming practices are a model of sustainability and which are amongst FiBL's work priorities. With drive and determination, FiBL works on the further technical, ecological and societal development of organic farming. This is not an easy undertaking given that considerably lower government funding is devoted to specifically organic solutions and given that due to the small market share the agri-food industry has little interest in developing e.g. organic plant protection products, highly adapted organic cultivars or very gentle food processing methods. The activity report presented here outlines the innovations and solutions FiBL is working on with increasing success.

Organic farms are not lands of milk and honey that just burst with abundance without much work being put into them. Rather, organic farming is an attempt at marrying local farming knowledge with agro-ecological scientific knowledge and modern technology. Organic farming is thus not retro-farming – that could not feed us. Approaches and solutions which advance organic farming should help “green” the entire farming sector. Therefore, FiBL is always keen to tackle issues openly and engage in partnerships.



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