

## *Special topic 3*

# Contradictions of principles in organic farming

John Ikerd\*, University of Missouri, USA

\*Prof Emeritus John Ikerd, College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, University of Missouri, 5121 S. Brock Rodgers Rd, Columbia Missouri 65201, United States of America. Tel: +1 573 874 0408, Fax: +1 573 874 0408, Email: JEIkerd@aol.com

Organic farming has been as much a philosophy of life as a means of food production. Organic farming was a self-renewing, regenerative process, based on nature's principles of production. Recent trends, however, are transforming organic food production into an extractive, exploitative process, based on the principles of industry rather than nature. Economic demands for greater productivity, for consistency and uniformity of product quality and for dependability and timeliness of delivery, are encouraging organic food producers to standardise, specialise and consolidate control. The principles of productivity now driving organic food production are direct contradictions of the historic principles of organic farming.

## **Philosophical history of organic farming**

Organic farming is rooted in the concepts of biodynamic farming, first articulated in 1924 by philosopher Rudolph Steiner in a series of lectures, and later taught by biochemist Ehrenfried Pfeiffer and others during the 1930s and 1940s (Steiner 1974, Pfeiffer 1947).

According to the Bio Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association (2004):

Central to biodynamics is the concept that a farm is healthy only as much as it becomes an organism in itself – an individualised, diverse ecosystem guided by the farmer, standing in living interaction with the larger ecological, social, economic, and spiritual realities of which it is part.

In this context, the term 'organic' refers to the organisation of the farm as a living system, as an organism. In addition, biodynamic farming was clearly spiritual as well as biological. Steiner was concerned that food grown on increasingly impoverished soil could not provide the inner sustenance needed for spiritual health.

Early advocates of organic farming believed that human health was directly connected to the health of the soil. Soil scientist, William Albrecht, wrote in 1952 (Albrecht 1952):

Human nutrition as a struggle for complete proteins goes back [...] to fertile soils alone, on which plants can create proteins in all completeness.

He later wrote (Albrecht 1966):

We are slow to study the importance of soil fertility to the quality of food, for this is not yet to our economic advantage in the marketplace.