

IFOAM 50th Anniversary Commemorative Conference Goesan, South Korea 1-3 October, 2022



Founded in 1972, IFOAM - Organics International is a membership-based organization working to bring true sustainability to agriculture across the globe. As part of its 50th anniversary celebrations, a commemorative conference was organized at Goesan in South Korea from 1-3 October, 2022. Dr Mahesh Chander participated and shares his experiences from the conference here.

THE CONTEXT

Food and farming systems are currently facing multiple challenges ranging from increasing hunger, environmental pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss to farmers, and food workers not earning a decent income. The way food is produced and consumed can either alleviate or exacerbate these conditions. [IFOAM - Organics International](#) (Box 1) aspires to be a part of the solution. During the period from 30 September to 16 October 2022, as part of its 50th Anniversary, [several activities were organized](#) with support from Goesan Province, South Korea. It was attended by current and former World Board members and presidents, representatives of regional bodies and sector platforms, as well as many organic product pioneers and youth leaders including farmers and scientists.



The theme of the conference, 'Organics for all' was aptly chosen, since it means growing food in a way that nourishes soils and animals, preserves biodiversity, and also tackles climate change. It also means shaping a food system that pays all those in the organic value chain fairly, such as farmers, farm workers, processors, traders, transport industries, chefs and cooks, and consumers. This means giving everyone access to organic knowledge and safe, organic food. The IFOAM Organics International, on this occasion, recognized and honored the people who have been making an impact in organics. The event was hosted by [IFOAM-Asia](#), with generous support from Goesan Province, government of the Republic of Korea.

Box 1: IFOAM-Organics International

As the global organic umbrella organization, IFOAM-Organics International has been advocating the organic food and farming movement since 1972. It has been building the capacity to facilitate the transition of farmers to organic agriculture, raising awareness of the need for sustainable production and consumption, and advocating for a policy environment conducive to agro-ecological farming practices and sustainable development. Its work profile includes biodiversity, climate change, food and nutrition security, gender equity, health, soil, strengthening livelihoods, and sustainable development. Over the years, it has been achieving its mission through campaigns and awards, facilitating organics, training, regulation and Policy, Standards & Certification. IFOAM Organics International has a World Board democratically elected by the membership of IFOAM. The World Board is a 10-member team responsible for overseeing and supporting its work of growing the global organic marketplace, communicating the benefits of organic products, training organic program leaders, and facilitating capacity-building for organic farmers. IFOAM - Organics International raises awareness of the solutions organic brings to global challenges and how organic agriculture can help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has members in over 100 countries and territories and has formed regional bodies and sector platforms to promote its mission.

THE PROGRAMME

Inaugural session

The inaugural session was short and crisp with brief speeches from administrators of Goesan Province, welcoming the international guests to the event, expressing the support of the Korean government and best wishes for the success of the event. Also, Ms Karen Mapusua, President, IFOAM – Organics International and Dr Gerold Rahmann, President, International Society of Organic Agriculture Research (ISO FAR) greeted all. It was followed with experience sharing by the organic pioneers, who were mostly past presidents of IFOAM – Organics International. There were interesting sessions – dialogue between generations, wherein, a mix of old and young shared their experiences giving ideas on the changes in organic movements over the years. The representatives of sector platforms on animal husbandry, seeds, technological innovations and INOFO (Intercontinental Network of Organic Farmers) discussed the challenges they face and the strategies they want to pursue to develop the organic sector. The event also included an Expo reflecting various facets of organic agriculture development.

Reflecting on the founding of IFOAM - Organics International, Hardy Vogtman, Honorary President, reminisced, "The first General Assembly had about 40 people and raised 2600 Swiss francs to get things going at the FiBI office in Switzerland." Fifty years later, he believes "We don't just need to transform our food systems, we need to transform society." He further said, "Organics is one of the only ways we can achieve the UN SDGs."

Reflecting on the many challenges he faced, Andre Leu, former President of IFOAM – Organics International, commented, “Being able to do the impossible is a challenge I always want to take on.” He added, “Industrial agriculture is a threat to our planet and we need to get across the need for an organic world to ensure we have a future.” [Bob Quinn, organic farmer and founder of Kamut](#) spoke of the reactions he encountered when he started his journey into organics “Was I gonna go broke first or give up, that was the talk in the coffee shop.”



Hardy Vogtman delivering his keynote address & Bob Quinn (American farmer) sharing his organic journey

Young leaders in the organics field spoke of what motivated them to become part of the organic community. Ms. Sarah Compson, IFOAM World Board member shared, “I came to organics after reading *Silent Spring* (Rachel Carson 1962). The organic movement is doing the impossible. The challenge is building bridges.”



Dr Gerold Rahmann, President, ISOFAR, sharing his experiences on organic agriculture research

Dr Knut Schmidtke, Director of Research, Extension & Innovation at [FiBL Switzerland](#), talked about why it’s important to continue developing organic farming through practice and research and where the potential for this process lies. Commenting on the event itself, Schmidtke said, "I am very happy to have taken part in this extraordinary event, we in organic farming have to make sure we are always one step

ahead!” He further said, “I was able to meet many globally active stakeholders of the organic farming movement in person and could discuss joint steps for cooperation with FiBL.”

“Empathy with farmers is important; we need to see farming not only as the external influencers but from the perspective of farmers who have multiple challenges”, said Ms. Shamika Mone, an Indian organic farmer and President, [Intercontinental Network of Organic Farmers Organizations](#) (INOFO).



The Technical Sessions

The technical sessions were coordinated by ISO FAR, in the form of five Workshops spread over five sessions. These sessions dealt with the following topics:

Workshop 1: How to scale-up organic farming in Korea?;

Workshop 2: From farm to fork - healthy organic food systems;

Workshop 3: Climate smart organic agriculture;

Workshop 4: How can research help to make organic more productive?;

Workshop 5: Novel organic and urban agriculture innovations for global food security.

[The proceedings of these workshops](#) is available on the [ISO FAR Home page](#).

I presented a paper, ‘Organic Agriculture: Sustaining the sustainability via research’, which emphasized the need for research on organic methods to generate problem solving technologies for enhancing sustainability of organic farming.



The Field Trips

Well-organized field trips have always been an integral part of IFOAM conferences. This time too, we visited some organic farms including a farmers' cooperative. It was remarkable that the farmers' cooperative was having facilities for farmer training, processing of farm produce, cold storage, farm implements, and vehicles for transporting farm produce. Detailed explanations were given about the functioning of this farmer cooperative, and we were also served cabbage juice produced by the farmer cooperative.



Me & IFOAM

I had attended the 11th IFOAM Scientific Conference held in Copenhagen, Denmark, 11-15 August 1996 to present a paper, '[Organic Farming: Implications for Rural Extension Services](#)'. Ever since, I have participated in several conferences organized by IFOAM, and have also attended meetings of various IFOAM committees. I have been serving as the IFOAM International Organic Standards Committee since 2007 under the [Organic Guarantee System](#). I [wrote on organic agriculture](#), presented papers and contributed in several platforms for development of the organic sector. When [IFOAM Academy](#) introduced the Organic Leadership Course (OLC) in 2012, I was among the participants of the very first batch, OLC-South Asia, followed by OLC Master Class. I [wrote a meeting note for AESA on my participation in Organic Master Class](#) organized by IFOAM Academy in 2017 at Goesan, South Korea.



I had two distinct roles in this event: (i) presentation of a scientific paper in the International Workshop hosted by [International Society of Organic Agriculture Research ISOFAR](#), being one of the elected members of ISOFAR World Board since 2014; and (ii) presenting the progress of IFOAM's sector platform- [IFOAM- Animal Husbandry Alliance](#)– as one of the founding Steering Committee Members since 2012. I presented the progress made by IFOAM- Animal Husbandry Alliance, apart from presenting a paper in the ISOFAR workshops.

Stay, Food and Cultural events

We were accommodated well, with sumptuous meals offering a variety of Korean delicacies and a cultural evening showcasing glimpses of Korean culture. We must, in our turn, learn to appreciate other cultures and cuisines as we expect others to do when they visit our country.

Epilogue

The conference participants worked on a [conference declaration](#), **Organics for All**, on how to shape the future we want. The below mentioned 10 actions were recommended that can help achieve this.

The declaration's action points:

1. Revive the concept of holistic organic agriculture. Make organic farming the driving force to build resilient eco-regions and communities.
2. Value indigenous peoples' knowledge and being, and engage with them to deepen the common understanding of organic agriculture, culture and lifestyle.
3. Facilitate access to land by creating clearing houses for interested land leasers and potential leases, encouraging establishment of organic to feed local populations.
4. Increase capacity building and education at all levels (youth-to post graduation and mentorship programs) to empower organizations and individuals to drive organic transition.
5. Build on knowledge and know-how of farmers and other stakeholders, and expand organic entrepreneurship, by providing comprehensive training, facilitating access to context-adapted information and opportunities to exchange with peers.
6. Actively use the current shifts in financial regulations that advance environmental, social and governance investing criteria, to motivate investments in organic agriculture, processing, services and trade.
7. Develop ambitious organic policy at the national and local level with goals, investments and actions to upscale organic farming and research and accelerate organic market development, including organic public procurement.
8. Utilize organic agriculture actively in holistic policy solutions to crises in climate change, biodiversity loss and food security, and shift public subsidies to sustainable practices.
9. Coordinate and harmonize all policies for organic throughout all ministries, agencies and departments at all levels of government.
10. Mobilize with market actors to actively promote the value of organic products, develop strong and fair value chains, and make healthy organic food and products available for all.

MY IMPRESSION

The extension professionals in India can draw a lot of lessons from the work profile of these global organizations, how best they are aligned to the global priorities and how they work towards making impact. The central and some of the state governments in India are pursuing the agenda of promoting

organic agriculture and natural farming in a big way, including developing curriculum for organic and natural farming. A number of programmes including the recently launched outscaling of natural farming under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) have also been initiated to promote organic and natural farming. However, these programmes can only succeed when Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) develop competencies in these areas too. We need to upgrade ourselves in these emerging areas so that we can help farmers and other stakeholders in developing sustainable organic supply chains. This will boost the exports of organic and natural products from India. At the same time, we should also develop an understanding of Agroecology and [how extension & Advisory services \(EAS\) can help promote agroecology](#), since organics, including natural farming, are closely woven with the principles of Agroecology.



[IFOAM Asia](#) has done very hard and sincere ground work to see the event running smoothly from 30 September-15 October, 2022. It was perfect on all counts, for which all the organizers deserve accolades. Congratulations to the President of IFOAM Asia, Mr Mathew John and other [IFOAM Asia Board of Directors](#). Special mention is to be made of the [IFOAM Asia Management team](#) led by Ms Jennifer Chang-Executive Director, who saw to it that the event went well and became memorable for all, making a positive impact on organic sector development. It was my pleasure to attend and be a part of this significant event.

Dr Mahesh Chander, Joint Director (Extension Education), ICAR-Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Izatnagar-243122 (UP), India. He can be contacted at Email: mchanderivri@gmail.com

**AESA Secretariat: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP),
Road No.10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad- India -500034
www.aesanetwork.org Email: aesanetwork@gmail.com**