

How can organics play the dual
societal role expected in the new
Council Regulation?

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*Development pathways of organic
agriculture: Lessons from
comparing Austria and France*

As an introduction....

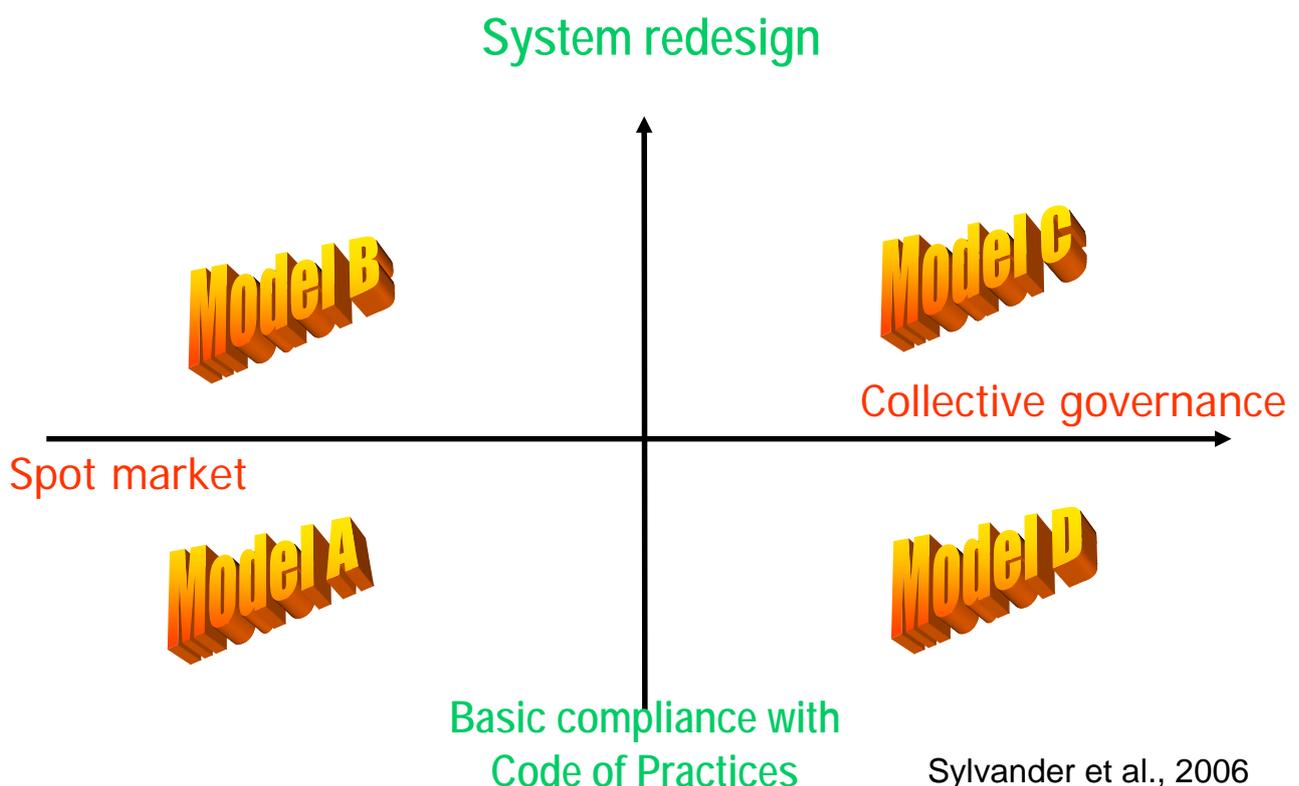
Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91

- **Whereas (1):**

Organic production is an overall system of farm management and food production that combines best environmental practices, a high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources, the application of high animal welfare standards and a production method in line with the preference of certain consumers for products produced using natural substances and processes.

The organic production method thus plays a **dual societal role**, where it on the one hand **provides for a specific market** responding to a consumer demand for organic products, and on the other hand **delivers public goods** contributing to the protection of the environment and animal welfare, as well as to rural development.

Why «Organics»: Four models for OF&F



Issues and challenges...

Some pending questions

- A « **new deal** » for OF&F (OF&F development plans, a new french agricultural model...) BUT:
If «niche», how big can it be/who to accomodate?
If «prototype», what elements and agricultures?
If «generalized extension», what systems/ areas?
- A mainstream approach in terms of « problem solving », detrimental to the integration of several dimensions included in OF&F
- Socio-technical « lock-in »...

« Lock-in » examples

- Eligible inputs, selection criteria (VAT, DHS..)
- Performance criteria (yield as a leader)
- Processing and transportation (long chains)
- Contradictions between an ecological agriculture and mainstream agro-food commercialization as a structural incompatibility (Latacz-Lohmann and Foster, 1997)
- Right price and distribution of added values
- Integration and accountancy of «externalities»

Four challenges:

- Combining OF&F growth and development + integrity (beyond quantitative objectives)
- Increasing OF&F technological mastering and reinforcing its relationships with environment
- Anticipating the consequences of upscaling OF (territorial organisation: «spots» vs general extension; complementarities among farms..)
- Overcoming discrepancies between production and consumption

Opportunities

As an ecologically-based agriculture, OF&F tends to internalize societal costs of production

and with its bottom-up governance and initiatives to promote shorter food chains, OF&F tends to move the producer closer to the consumer

Is it enough?

1. OF&F A “PROTOTYPE” FOR CONCILIATING PERFORMANCES? (from Sautereau et al, 2010)

11. Quantity versus quality and ecological value

Environmental performances

OF environmental benefits are acknowledged in literature (eg. reviews on biodiversity Letourneau et al., 2007). Ecosystem services have been studied recently (Benett et al., 2007; Kareiva et al., 2007; Sandhu et al, 2008).

Agronomic performances

- *The quantity issue: what about the OF's yields?*
Encouraging conclusions for OF (review by Badgley et al., 2006; scenarios of conversion by Halberg et al., 2006) are debated by others (Kirchman et al., 2008). In general, OF presents lower yields (10-30 % less in the developed countries).
- The quality of OF&F's products
OF's food quality benefits remains an issue of debate between many authors (Dangour et al., 2009; Lairon, 2009...).

1. OF&F A “PROTOTYPE” FOR CONCILIATING PERFORMANCES?

1.2 OF&F socio-economic performances

The issue of labour

- *Quantitative* : the question of performances concerning work on farm is ambiguous.
- The “modernization” of agriculture aims at “less work”, but since OF&F generates more work, it can also be considered as an asset in the sense that it maintains or creates rural employment.
- *Qualitative* : The quality of labor is considered more positive in OF because the work is more diversified and less repetitive (Jansen 2000), but Trewavas (2004) argues that the work on organic farms is harder.

The link production-consumption

- Studies underline that organic farmers are more involved in **direct-marketing** (Gigleux & Garcin, 2008), which is more connected to **community involvement** than selling through brokers and export (MacKinnon, 2006)..
- Profitability comparisons with conventional farming..
- A compilation of various studies shows that ecological systems generate larger economic benefits than equivalent conventional systems (Reganold et al. 2001, Nieberg & Offermann 2003), but the **variability** of the results can be high, particularly for vegetable and fruit crops
- *Economic returns per ha for ecological systems as a percentage of the economic return for equivalent conventional systems* (Offermann & Nieberg, 2000; Alonzo & Guzmàn, 2004). **Importance to work on the validity domain of comparisons (Nemes, 2009).**

2. OF&F CHALLENGES and CONTRIBUTIONS in TERMS OF PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

- **Terms of reference for comparisons**: non organic farms can have more beneficial effects on environment & quality than the “intensives ones” in OF (Kirchmann & Bengström, 2008).

-Differences in OF&F definitions (variable and dynamic standards according to countries); and variety of OF’s interpretations and implementation. **OF as an heterogeneous entity**

-Average results linked to the variability of the situations and the multiple involved factors in the performances (e.g. Carbonaro et al., 2002; Fauriel et al., 2009). **Need to upscale to optimize performances**

- Cumulative effects and the dynamics of transition. **Need to take into account the temporal gap of the response of an ecosystem managed in an ecological way.**

-Redefining performances criteria, an their multidimensional form (Geniaux et al., 2005). **Need to switch assessment**

Conclusions

- OF principles and values are only partially codified in regulations, interpretations are possible. The organic standards tend to focus on allowed/disallowed inputs and on practices that are easy to codify and audit through the certification process (cf. “**conventionalisation**” thesis).
- This affects agroecological system values such as biodiversity and nutrient recycling, as well as the lack of social considerations. Subsequently, OF&F is sometimes considered as “below” Agroecology, or under its umbrella...
- At stake in France : new dynamics in the organic networks to study new organic standards in order to promote more consistency practices than those eligible in EU Regulations
- Identify possible pathways to combine performances, although OF&F is a good candidate
- Value comparative studies and develop «advocacy»