

# Organic Agriculture and Nature Conservation a cornerstone for sustainable regional development

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The convention on biodiversity (CBD) is part of the conference on sustainable development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and describes for the first time officially as equally important for the global responsibility for our natural resources: the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and a fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of such a sustainable use (e. g. between the owners and the users).

However, modern type intensive agriculture that relies on vast amounts of external inputs is still one of the main threats to biodiversity through:

- Conversion of natural habitats to agricultural land
- Intensification, monocultures, uniform plant and animal species and the use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers
- Degradation of soil, eutrophication of surface and ground water
- Uniforming the landscape
- Use of GMO's

The answer to this threat is a multifunctional, nature resource farming that considers all products of farming, not only food but also quality and amount of water, energy use and production, the maintenance of biodiversity and cultural landscapes and also considers farming as an excellent tool for education and recreation. At present, organic farming is the best available farming system that takes this multifunctionality fully into account through its 4 basic principles: Health, Ecology, Fairness, Care.

The principle of health was summarized by Lady Eve Balfour in a very clear way and explains what the underlying goal of organic farming is: Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible. This has led to farming practices which support and not replace biological processes. Therefore, organic farming

- Contributes to preservation of biodiversity
- Protects ground water from nitrate and pesticide pollution
- Produces healthy food
- Ensures jobs in agriculture, food processing and marketing
- Strives for a largely closed farm cycle
- Preserves soil fertility
- Preserves air, soil & energy resources
- Provides for adequate animal housing

At present the integration of nature conservation into farming is a realistic option with organic farming only. This combination will allow the support of regional economics and culture. Organic farming has a higher demand on labour force on farms, which is a rather good option for maintaining jobs and infrastructure in the countryside, thereby supporting rural development. The increase in added value in rural areas through protected areas with sustainable (organic) land use has been amply demonstrated, especially in Nature Parks and Biosphere Territories in Germany, looking at the examples of Nature Parks "Altmuehltal" (plus € 18,2 mio. turnover p. a.) or Biosphere Territory "Rhoen" with a tremendous increase in regional production, including food processing and marketing. It also has given a real boost to eco-tourism in these rural areas. This clearly demonstrates that the synergy of organic agriculture and nature conservation is a realistic option for sustainable regional development.