

WELCOME ADDRESS

Ms.L Clay

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Greetings everyone.

It is indeed a pleasant occasion to be here in New Zealand. It is a great honor to represent IFOAM at this Seventh International Kyusei Nature Farming Conference. The sponsor, the International Nature Farming Research Center is a part of our organic family, and it is rewarding to be updated on the latest developments being undertaken. It is also wonderful to see so many faces from all over the world.

My participation brings memories of coming to the IFOAM conference here in Christchurch in 1994, where I was first exposed to the concept of Kyusei Nature Farming and EM. I recall being wondrous and excited about the potential of EM both from a practical farming perspective, as I am also an organic farmer, and also from the role of extending my understanding and appreciating the complexities and the interrelationships of nature.

At the onset, I do convey the greetings from IFOAM Headquarters in Germany, especially from Mr. Berward Geier, who was due to attend this conference. I also bring with me the very warm and sincere wishes of the Vice President of IFOAM, Ms Suzanne Vaupel, who was also due to attend, but was unable due to sickness. She sends her greetings and apologies from her sickbed.

I wish to state a few words about IFOAM. It is the worldwide umbrella for organic agriculture, established in 1972. Currently IFOAM has over 700 members from over 100 countries. Its mission is to represent the worldwide organic movement and provide a platform for exchange and cooperation, just as we are doing here at this conference.

The structure of IFOAM is very democratic; we meet every two years, soon to become once in three years, at a General Assembly, where decisions are made on the direction of IFOAM and its activities. The World Board is elected at the General Assembly, and its mandate is to carry out the wishes of the assembly. I hope to see all of you in Canada at the next IFOAM congress in August this year, and also at the General Assembly, which follows soon afterwards.

Brief outlines of the major activities of IFOAM are-

- Exchange knowledge and expertise among members
- Inform the public about organic agriculture.

These are done through conferences, trade fairs and at the BioFac Trade exhibition.

The first took place in Japan in December, last year, and the next will be in Nuremberg, Germany in February of this year. These programs have associated activities developing in many places, such as in North and Latin America. We also represent the organic movement at policy making fora. For example; IFOAM has consultative status with the United Nations, especially with the FAO and IUCN, the agriculture and nature conservation arms of the UN. Recently, we have opened an office in Rome, Italy to liaise closely with the UN, and now we have a very close association with that super national organization. Another major task of IFOAM is to review and develop IFOAM basic standards for agricultural produce. The General Assembly takes part in developing the standards and defining what is organic. We have our accreditation programs and Bio-Grow NZ is accredited with us. This accreditation is the international guarantee system, which assures a standard organic product on a global scale. Another agenda of IFOAM is to build a platform for all stakeholders in organic agriculture. This includes farmers, farm workers, consumers, processing industries, trade and society at large. The membership of IFOAM is spread geographically and sector wise globally, and hence IFOAM is in a unique position to be the platform for dialogue within the agricultural sector and also with actors outside, such as governments, international and regional organizations and also with conventional agriculture.

Some of the specific programs that are being carried out at present by IFOAM are-

- Harmonization of the definition of organic agriculture through IFOAM accreditation programs and the development of standards
- Programs in the third world on sustainable development
- Food security and the role of organic or nature farming in promoting food security throughout the world
- Promoting the social agenda of requirements and needs of the organic community
- Lobbying against genetic engineering
- Biodiversity

I would however like to consider one aspect of these, namely food security, as it is important, interesting and strongly related to the work being done through nature farming.

Despite significant increases in overall food production through industrialized agriculture, it has not succeeded in establishing food security. Affluent regions and social classes struggle with surplus production and consumption while close to 20% of the world's population live in situations very close to undernourishment. This imbalance is primary due to social and economic world orders or local systems, which are unable to distribute available resources equitably. To support this claim, we quote the UN's State of the World Report of 2000, which states that nearly 80% of all malnourished children in the developing countries in the early 1990s lived in nations that boasted of food surpluses in the past.

The question of how and if organic or nature farming can provide for food security is complex and needs discussion. Even if the size of the population is not the reason as to why people starve, one must consider population growth. As the population expands,

more and more of Earth's natural resources are required to secure the needs of humankind. In the short term, food requirements have been met with increasing use of fertilizers and agricultural chemicals. Currently, with the situation of soil degradation, these systems will lose long-term productivity and the capacity to provide sufficient food.

One must ask the question - Who needs the food most? Increased food production does not automatically increase food security. What is important is that the producers must have access to technology and knowledge to produce food and the people having the purchasing power to acquire it. The conventional wisdom states that to double food supply, one needs to redouble and modernize agriculture. While this has been successful in the past, there is a doubt of the capacity of these systems to reduce poverty. The poor and hungry need low cost and relatively freely available technologies to increase local food production.

We do have a few choices to achieve this. One is to expand areas by converting new lands to agriculture, but the resultant effect is that services of forests, grasslands and areas of biodiversity are lost. The second option is to increase per hectare production by the exporting countries, which are mostly industrialized and developed, so that the food can be transported and sold to those who need it. The third is to increase total farm productivity in the developing nations, which really need food.

The success of modern agriculture in the recent decades has greatly masked the significant externalities affecting natural and human capital, and agriculture itself. The environmental and health problems of modern agriculture have been documents widely, but it is only recently that the scale of costs has been appreciated. Thus the central issues are-

- The extent to which farmers can improve production using low cost and locally available technologies with locally available inputs.
- The achievement of greater production without further environmental degradation.

Under these circumstances nature farming systems and also technologies such as EM have a significant role to play in the future of food production, the people and the future of our planet.

In conclusion, what remains fundamental to organic agriculture is the health and welfare of the soil. However the real role of organic agriculture is not only within the farm or with marketing opportunities. The real role for organic agriculture and nature farming is to be a seed for a change in the whole of our societies. Hence, for whatever reason and motivation that we are gathered here at this conference to be a part of the organic movement, let us breed the seed into a beautiful flower. This should be our aim.

I wish you all a very good conference.

Thank you.