

Developing Organic Farming in Norway through Systemic Action Research

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Abstract - A systemic action research approach to gain insight into the present situation of the agroecosystem, to envision scenarios, and to accomplish workable outcomes is performed. This process is to be accomplished in a participatory way that empowers stakeholders to continue the learning process and system development in an ecologically friendly, socio-culturally feasible and economically viable way.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

Organic farming systems are linked to explicitly expressed, multiple goals concerning ecological, economic and social perspectives. It is a challenge for stakeholders concerned with the systems to clarify multiple goals, to elucidate how the goals interact, and to decide how improvements in organic food production and consumption may be brought about without compromising long-term goals of multifunctional and diverse agroecosystems. This particularly applies to grain production in organic farming, as a regionalisation policy practiced for several decades largely has removed the potentials and benefits of mixed crop and livestock farming and increased the distance between producers and consumers.

SYSTEMIC ACTION RESEARCH

Within the research programme "Organic cropping systems for higher and more stable cereal yields", systemic action research (Checkland & Scholes, 1990; Reason & Bradbury, 2001) is an approach to gain insight into the present situation of the agroecosystem, to envision future wanted scenarios, and to accomplish desirable and workable outcomes. It is important to make this happen in a democratic and participatory way that empowers stakeholders to continue the learning process and system development in a ecologically friendly, socio-culturally feasible and economically viable way. Consequently, a farm case study, which involves stakeholders both within and outside the farming system is in progress. The objectives are to 1) *promote an on-going self-development and informed action towards shared goals and improved sustainability of currently existing organic farming systems*, and 2) *handle multiple stakeholders*,

perspectives, criteria and methods in concert in order to learn from the process of working with/in complex real-life situations.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Within a framework of soft systems methodology (Checkland & Scholes, 1990), interviews with stakeholders (Kvale, 1996), dialogue conferences (Gustavsen & Engelstad, 1986), "Future workshops" (Jungk & Müller, 1989) and multicriteria evaluation (Munda *et al.*, 1994) are being applied. Qualitative and quantitative data from the case farm and pre-knowledge from other studies are used to enrich the database and inform the development of conclusions.

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