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Ichihara, Saki; Bisgaard, Pia

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**Discussion Paper for  
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*Department of Economic, Politics and Public Administration*

*Aalborg University*

*Fibigerstræde 1*

*9220 Aalborg Ø*

## Discussion Paper for “Changes in interpretation of basic principles” <DRAFT >

Pia Johansen and Saki Ichihara in the Project “Organic Agriculture in Social Entirety- Principles versus Practices (OASE)”

### 1. Preface: Summary of OASE Project

This paper was written for the IFOAM Congress in Victoria in August 2002, on the basis of preliminary stage of the Danish project called “*Organic Agriculture in Social Entirety - Principles versus Practices (OASE)*”. Due to the limited time for preparation from the start of the project in May 2002, the scope of research and both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the fact were limited in this paper. The further elaboration of the project is awaited in the formal working papers, which will come out within coming two years.

Introducing the basic outline of the OASE project, it is the basic principles and the actual evolution of organic agricultural practices in Denmark that form the research field. The point of departure stems from two provisionally established facts; (1) organic agriculture is stated as a comprehensive notion considering both man, society, and nature that is wholly juxtaposed to conventional/industrial segregated agriculture; (2) the trajectory of organic agriculture actually observed in the last decade indicates that, in many ways, organic agriculture has had a tendency to mimic conventional agriculture. Thus, the *first objective* is to explain the apparent mismatch between stated principles and the observed trajectory. This objective will basically be achieved by answering whether or not the causes can be traced to inadequate principles and/or to social constraints. The *second objective* is to suggest where and how solutions to dissolve the current mismatch can be found. The fulfilment of the latter objective depends upon the results of the first. *Further* it is our *third objective* to conduce to the evolution of comprehensive approaches enabling in-depth multidisciplinary analysis of complex problems.

The project will be accomplished by means of a research group in dialogue with key actors and informants, a multidisciplinary Delphi-panel, and international experts, while communication primarily will take place by means of publications and a closing seminar. The research group is responsible for descriptions, formulation of conceptual frameworks and analyses; in addition the group will function as administrator for the Delphi-panel. The latter will be involved both *ad hoc* to enlighten and inform the individual members of the research group in the ongoing processes and progress made and as a whole to ensure consistent and coherent descriptions, conceptions,

and suggestions. The international seminars will be used to provide suggestions and assessments to ensure adequate quality in the process and deliverables.

The project is designed to facilitate a cognitive process where resolved questions and emergent issues deserved of further inquiry are interacting. The objectives and methodological frames are determined as indicated above while the descriptions of the two facts and the conceptual frameworks are the primary guidelines to be initially determined. They are initially *determined* because the project needs a conceptual basis for and descriptions of the problem to begin the process of inquiry. They are determined *initially* to enable an *open* search for a consistent and coherent recognition of the problem by means of the interplay between the research group, the Delphi-panel, informants, and international experts. Through this interplay the initial description and conceptual frameworks might turn up as inadequate and then be revised or supplemented according to current results.

Further information of OASE project can be seen at the homepage, <http://www.socsci.auc.dk/oase/>.

## 1. Introduction

This paper initially intends to depict and analyse the case of mismatch between organic principles and practices in Denmark. The irreversible fact is that, in Denmark, organic agriculture has been increasingly institutionalised in political, economic and academic sphere. Institutionalisation has so far linked up with a quantitative growth of organic sales, production, organically produced farmland and public recognition of farming. On the other hand, the diversity of concepts of organic agriculture and, consequently, organic practices appear to undergo a conflict within institutional activities that often attempt to regiment organic agriculture into conventional structure of agriculture.

The investigation overall aims to reveal some *changes in interpretation of organic farming* that may explain a cause of mismatch between principles and practices. As the point of departure of this objective, we employ the three basic principles illustrated by the user committee of the Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming (DARCOF) as the framework for discussing organic principles. The present paper then puts focus on the three crucial spheres regarding the development of organic farming, namely organisation, politics and market. The various

interpretations of the three basic principles suggested by DARCOF will be discussed through examining empirical trace of changes in these spheres. By summing up and examining these interpretations, we attempt to depict a general tendency at conceptualising organic farming and extract the element that is assumed to cause the tendency. Since this paper constitutes only the preliminary stage of the OASE project, our main intention is to *open discussions* regarding disparity between organic principles and practices.

## 2. Basic Principles of Organic Farming

This chapter aims to illustrate basic organic principles in the framework made by the user committee of the Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming (DARCOF), i.e. *cyclical principle, precautionary principle and proximity principle* (DARCOF, 2000). The overall goal is stated so as to ensure sustainability and further, the principles are based on two assumptions; (i) humans are an integrated part of natural systems, (ii) knowledge about consequences of human actions is imperfect.

It must be noted that we are aware of three organic principles stated by DARCOF are *an example* of interpretation of what organic farming should be, and such interpretation has constantly been occurring in our living world. Hence, the description of three basic principles in this study is not claimed as universal or fixed. Rather, we are based on the assumption that understanding of organic principles has evolved over the period of time we concern.

### 2.1 Cyclical Principle

The basic idea of cyclical principle rests on a conception of interaction between human production and reproduction on one side and natural life support systems on the other. It asserts that establishment of circuits should ensure versatility, diversity and harmony, in addition to recirculation of matter and the use of renewable resources in human production and reproduction. The concept of cyclical principle puts a significant importance on the interplay of each individual farm with surrounding natural system, and, on its extended comprehension, with society. This goes in contrast to conventional farming, which largely detaches a farm from those factors by applying an industrial notion into farming, namely one-way flow of input ---mineral and energy--- towards output ---commodities (Ingemann, 2001).

Farming could be understood a human activity that aims to convert natural resources into produce by means of human labour. In the notion of organic farming, this activity is embedded in the ecological productive forces, i.e. natural capital, natural mechanism etc., since it is self-evident that human cannot sustain its life without them, though natural system can carry itself without human activities. Such notion evokes humans' interest, or even a sense of responsibility, for maintaining the self-sustaining ecological system (Ibid.).

Hence, the foundation for cyclical principle construes a farm as an organiser of (nearly) closed cycles of biological activities within the farm. The focus is balanced nutrient flow and organic matters as well as nourishing and fertilising the soil preferably by using minimum external inputs, for example, farm-produced manure and compost. Mixed farming with various crops and animal husbandry is encouraged, since diversified production system is known, both by experiences and scientific researches, as crucial to enhance environmental quality. In addition, rotation of a wide variety of crops is promoted so as to maintain diverse landscape and to fulfil the needs of flora and fauna (FAO, 1998).

Yet, it could be said that not a few organic farming organisations envisage an organic farm in a bigger cycle than on-farm. For example, the Danish Association for Organic Farming refers to the linkage between an organic farm and neighbourhood town and food industry in order to maximise the function of re-cycling, and Soil Association uses the term, "entire organic production chain" as the target of organic farming.

It indicates that the cyclical principle could go well beyond the circulation of natural resources within a farm gate, but link an organic farm and social units (e.g. customer, consumer, local community etc.) into the circuit. Recycling of wastes from towns used as fertilisers for farms is one example of this approach. Furthermore, the cyclical principle could be extended to the interaction and re-circulation of more conceptual elements, such as social norms, that may create a mutual understanding and the notion of sharing responsibilities for food production and reproduction between farmers and customers.

## *2.2 Precautionary principle*

Precautionary principle is a concept that has gained wide popularity in the glowing discussion of environment, agriculture and health particularly after its inclusion in the so-called Rio Declaration in 1992. Although we can observe different variations of interpretation of this principle, some of

which are made by formal institutions such as national ministry and the European Commissions, the core message could be summarised as a conception of technology in which fighting symptoms should be avoided and damage to human systems prevented. In this light, reversible error-friendly technologies are preferred.

The principle is foremost based on the acknowledgement of nature as a very complex and coherent system and of limited knowledge of human in foreseeing the consequences of human actions. In this regard, error-friendly technologies and risky technologies could be distinguished in terms of “predictability” of the consequences. In contrast to the former technologies, which are predictable and allow a line of retreat, the effects of risky technologies are unpredictable. By putting significance on a long-term security on health, such ambiguity of risky technologies consists, according to precautionary principle, of *non-knowledge* or *ignorance*. In other words, an attempt to acquire more technologies for environmental solution does not always solve the problem, since it can cause even more ignorance of possible negative consequences. Hence, the principle firstly calls for the awareness of ignorance as the cause of environmental problems, and secondly the re-structuring of our technical life-style (DARCOF, 2000, p.11).

Yet, the above-mentioned concept of the precautionary principle does not necessarily eschew all technologies that may intervene the important factors for organic farming (e.g. environmental conservation, safety of human and animals, high product quality etc.). According to DARCOF, for instance, the precautionary principle does not directly reflect on the use of artificial fertilisers, since its techniques is well known and the consequences to nature is considered as predictable. Furthermore, along with its integration in the formal environmental policy discussion, the precautionary principle often comes into effect only when scientific validity of a new technology is put into question. In consequence, the discussions appear to result in defining “how much” of the risky technologies can be used, rather than how to define and avoid the risky technologies.<sup>1</sup>

However, limitation of the precautionary principle could be supplemented by other organic principles. For example, the use of artificial fertilisers is circumvented by applying the cyclical principle that inherently calls for balanced nutrient flow (DARCOF, 2000, p.23).

On the other hand, DARCOF states that the rationale behind the precautionary principle could be different in accordance with one’s conception of nature-human relationship. In the sphere of environmental movements two distinctive perspectives are often discussed, i.e. anthropocentric

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<sup>1</sup> The attempt of the national organic law by the US government in 1997 could be an example that reveals this tendency.



and ecocentric. From an anthropocentric point of view, the precautionary principle is of importance to avoid unpredictable consequences now and in the future. Such anthropocentrism brings about criticism of instrumentalism that construes nature only with human's use value. On the contrary, an ecocentric approach advocates intrinsic value of nature, which transcends human's evaluation. Based on this assumption, human bears an ethical duty to look after nature for its own sake, and therefore, ecocentrists often call for a radical life-style change.

It can be safe to say that such strict ecocentric ethics are often difficult to put into practice in a collective way. In addition, it could be argued that anthropocentric persons could also develop different kind of ethics towards nature by, for instance, introducing the concept of stewardship, which may generate the sense of responsibility. Nevertheless, the concept of functional integrity in organic farming necessitates some degree of human duty for maintaining and improving natural richness (e.g. bio-diversity), and the precautionary principle is assumed to have an effect in this context irrespective of different standpoints concerning nature.

### *2.3 Proximity principle*

The proximity principle could be characterised by its assertion that transparency and co-operation in food production can be improved by nearness. The principle is concerned with how to secure special *social aspects* of organic farming, such as transparency, safety, sense of local belonging, and peace of mind. In this light, adequate use of local knowledge in addition to social and cultural development at local level is accentuated (DARCOF, 2000).

DARCOF illustrates proximity with two lines. One is vertical proximity, which exists between the social players in the production, processing and distribution of organic foods. The other is horizontal or geographic proximity, in which the stream of nutrients is anchored locally in a naturally well-defined region.

Seeing the current dialogue around organic farming, the linkage of these two proximity concepts appears to become a central focus. Taking for examples, increasing awareness of locally based production and consumption is shaped into the promotion of box scheme, community supported agriculture (CSA) and the discussion of implementing food miles into the organic standards.

The emphasis of the proximity principle on “locality” in terms of both geographic and social/cultural boundary is often regarded as the basis of a new sustainable development, which is embedded in a closer relationship between rural and urban areas. In this context, the countryside is seen as a social organisation that constitutes the closest linkage between natural life support systems and local human activity (sometimes means traditions). This type of thinking stresses that an effective way for sustainable coupling between ecological and social systems is found in the interplay with the countryside (Ingemann, 2001). The proximity principle for organic agriculture consists of the crucial part of such development due to its ability to bring the local learning process through evolving direct and transparent producer-customer relationships. Through the process, difference between each (organic) farmer becomes more obvious so that customers can select produce by knowledge and experiences concerning the production process, not by indication on the package.

The notion of the proximity principle that fundamentally limits the geographic sphere of activities, however, comes into conflict with the dominant paradigm of global economy, which claims the principle as a tool for market protectionism. At present, some major organic farming organisations like IFOAM do not seem to contest global trade of organic agriculture. Instead, a new alternative for this issue tends to be sought in the integration of fair trade concept into organic agriculture that may give balance between the significance of locality and cruelty of mainstream global economy. Introducing the concept of fair trade may bring a social justification of global trade, while it may also raise the issue of social justice in the locality in the developed countries by applying the proximity principle. Hence, in order for fair trade to work properly in the context of the proximity principle, the trade of organic goods probably should be limited in the produce, which cannot be cultivated in own place, and high reliability in the network of importing organisation and exporting one must be foremost established.

### **3. Empirical trails of institutionalisation of organic agriculture**

This chapter depicts the path of private and public organisations getting involved in organic farming in Denmark. Special focus is put on the Danish Association for Organic Farming (LØJ)<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> The Biodynamic Association (FBJ) is the oldest organisation for organic farming in Denmark, which had come into existence as early as 1936. Yet, this study focuses more on LØJ due to its stronger influence on the organic development in Denmark especially in the critical time after the 1980s. FBJ and LØJ made a Co-operations Committee for Organic and Biodynamic Agriculture (CCOBA) around 1982, and have increased mutual understanding and collaboration.

and this organisation's interpretation of three fundamental organic principles, which were deployed in the previous Chapter 2, is analysed separately in accordance with the three periods: (1) before the enforcement of organic law in 1987, (2) from the enforcement of organic law until the mid 1990s and (3) from the late 1990s onward.

### *3.1 Before the Organic Law*

The prominent development and solidification of organic farms has begun since 1981 with the foundation of LØJ by the farmers, consumers and processors. Their principles and rules on organic production methods (such as which are acceptable and which are forbidden) were established on the basis of the IFOAM standard as a minimum requirement. Yet, those had been decided through the vote at annual general meetings, where everybody present could take part. It indicates that many parts of LØJ standards were derived from knowledge of active members (Michelsen, 2001, p.70). According to LØJ, the participation of consumers in the organisation for organic farming particularly had an important impact on encouraging the consumer trust and confidence to purchase the organic goods (LØJ, 1996).

Consequently, LØJ took a central role in the organic movement in Denmark. First of all, it became a non-governmental institute to control and to certify the farms in order to guarantee consumers that the products were really produced under organic methods. The certified products were allowed to put the logo of LØJ, which was the only certified organic label at the time. LØJ's rules controlled the way of marking the LØJ labels at co-operatives, middlemen, and direct farm selling with own sales stands. In addition, it also regulated the way of selling organic products; for example, the parallel sale of organic/non-organic products of the same kind was not allowed. Secondly, LØJ reorganised co-operatives in order to smooth production and distribution of those certified organic products, and they were mostly sold to small health food shops.

The significant change in institutional setting occurred in 1985, when LØJ (as a part of CCOBA; about CCOBA see footnote 2) reached an agreement with the Danish Family Farmers' Association (DFF) on establishing an organic advisory service within the DFF (Lynggaard, 2001, p.92). This involvement of conventional farmers' organisation in organic farming seemed to pave the way to the Danish way of organic development, which could be designated in its conjunction to well-established institutions. LØJ's action for the negotiation with the consumers' retail co-

operatives (later FDB) to sell the organic produce<sup>3</sup> from the middle 1980s was a step to indicate this trail.

The interpretation of three basic principles by LØJ in the period before the organic law could be analysed as follows:

- Recycling rests mostly within a farm, though re-using the waste of customers is recommended.
- Precaution is a means to avoid risks to nature and humans. The judgement is often based on the belief and intuition (common sense) of actors involved in organic farming.
- Proximity is made up of interplay among producer, customer and consumer involved in the development of organic agriculture.

### *3.2. After the Organic Law: around 1987 to the early 1990s*

As a result of discussion between LØJ and the Danish government initiated by both sides since around the middle 1980s, the Organic Foods Act, i.e. the national organic law was passed in 1987. At construction of this legal enforcement, the government established the Organic Foods Council (OFC), which consisted of the representatives from the ministries (the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Environment and Energy), LØJ, conventional farmers' associations, the consumer council, labour organisations, and some affiliated experts. The birth of the OFC is of exclusive importance in organic movement in terms of its impact on national agro-environmental policy. It has notably increased the institutional significance in the organic issues since 1990, when all the members of OFC became pro-organic farming, though conventional farmers' associations were still not fully collaborative (Lynggaard, 2001).

The institutional structure, which centred OFC, introduced LØJ and other civil actors to the negotiation table for designating the direction of organic farming (LØJ, 1999). LØJ gained a remarkable influence in this structure, since its knowledge on organic farming methods and certification of organic products was essential elements for the state authorities, namely the Plant Directorate, at practising the national organic law. Yet, at the same time, enactment of the organic law brought an end to the participatory procedure of standards building within LØJ.

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<sup>3</sup> A consumers' co-operative FDB has 33% of the domestic retail share with 1200 shops by running associated chains of Kvickly, Super Brugsen, Irma, and Fakta (IATP, 1998, p.33).

Michelsen observes some criticism of such democratic procedure, which had arisen for some years, claiming that it led to unstable standards (Michelsen, 2001).

Another crucial event was the formation of Organic Service Centre (OLC) in 1992 that consisted of organic trade organisations and that aimed to develop organic farming through distribution of information financed by the collective action of *organic sector* rather than by the public subsidies. According to Lynggaard, the establishment of OLC signified a direction towards expansion of organic market, and it was geared by the new generation of organic farmers, who were with a background in conventional farming. He points out that LØJ took an imitative in this course (Lynggaard, 2001, p.92).

Furthermore, the strategy for growth took a big step forward by the declaration of FDB in 1993 for the large cut of their margin on organic foods after the negotiation with LØJ (IATP, 1998, p.6). It resulted in an “explosion” of organic products in the market and led wide range of food producers and other retailers to consider the organic products into their market strategies.

Analysing the evidences during the period from 1987 to the early 1993, the LØJ’s interpretation of three basic principles in this period could be depicted as follows:

- Recycling rests mostly within a farm, though re-using the waste of customers is recommended.
- Precaution prioritises the consumer protection and avoidance of pollution. The critical voice towards conventional agriculture is toned down.
- Proximity mediates state authority in order to establish trust between producer, customer and consumer.

### *3.3. After the Organic Law: around mid-1990s to present*

Around 1994 and 1995 the effect of pesticide use, which was seen on fertility of oestrogen-like substances, was caught public attention and raised concern about food with pesticides residues and contaminated drinking water. The anxiety over such incidents appeared to have generated a strong growth in demand for organic foods and a quantitative increase of organic production (Goldenman, 1996, p.3). Simultaneously in 1995, the OFC was asked by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries to draw up the Action Plan for Organic Production. LØJ had continued its support for the expansion of organic sector through its work with OFC and the

Plant Directorate around the time. In consequence, the First Action Plan tended to concentrate on facilitating the condition for a larger conversion (e.g. subsidy for organic fodder production) so as to fulfil the market demands for organic goods (LØJ 1997).

On the other hand, the entry of OLC into the Agricultural Council of Denmark (ACD), which is an umbrella organisation for all Danish general and specialised agriculture organisations, in December 1997 brought a new setting in the institutional structure. In order to maintain its position as an alternative to conventional farming, LØJ had withdrawn themselves from the OLC board before December, though the establishment of the House of Ecology in 1998 had shown on-going collaboration between LØJ and OLC.<sup>4</sup> The objective and potential of House of Ecology would be its twofold function in tactics; House of Ecology with collaboration with OLC can work for influence within the established system through the ACD, and LØJ, as an independent organisation, proposes its opinion, which does not have to compromise with the other agriculture organisations (Lynggaard, 2001, p.93).

Nevertheless, it could be safe to say that the diminishment of actual influence of LØJ on the organic issues has become obvious around the mid-1990s. It may partially be owing to the establishment of the EU organic regulation in 1993 that decreased the reliance of Plant Directorate on LØJ (Lynggaard, 2001) but also be owing to its weakening of linkage with organic farmers by the integration of state inspection/certification system and of organic advisory service into the conventional system. The situation got worse when the Danish Dairy Board, which practically represents the large dairies that process organic dairy products along with conventional, began to use the Plant Directorate for the inspection instead of LØJ. It later led to the withdrawal of LØJ from co-operation with the Plant Directorate, due to the conflicts about the way certification was done. As a result, the action of the Board meant that dairy producers no longer needed to contact LØJ. Since the organic dairy sector was one of a few sectors, which still had obliged the LØJ's organic inspection, its financial as well as organisational foundation became wobbled. According to a survey during 1995-1997, only around 33 to 36 percent of the organic farmers were certified under LØJ's standards (Michelsen, 2001, p.76). Under such circumstance the abolition of its own inspection and certification system was strongly discussed as the agenda of the 1998, 1999 and 2000 annual meetings. However, by the recognition of its role in bringing a dynamic development of organic production standards, which has not be done

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<sup>4</sup> In the same year, enterprises involved in organic production established their own association, called Ø-group (the Association of Danish Organic Processors and Suppliers).

thoroughly by the national standards, LØJ decided to maintain its own system. As response, LØJ in the late 1990s appeared to put more emphasis on development and diffusion of organic principles by re-establishing interactive relations with organic farmers. For instance, LØJ has worked on the development of a new type of inspection system, BUP (Farm Development Plans), which focuses on giving advice to organic farmers on how they can implement fundamental values of organic farming as well as the personal value of organic farmers into practice (Ibid. p.73).

In contrast to LØJ, OFC has increasingly established a position as an influential forum on organic farming policy. Especially, its work for the Second Action Plan “Developments in organic farming”, which was issued in 1999, illustrates the ability of OFC at bringing general consensus of trajectory for solving problems among organisations involving in the organic sector. For instance, OFC asserts in the Plan that rising problem of overproduction of organic goods, particularly milk, could be solved by export. Furthermore, it suggests “consumer-oriented production”, which is correspondent to the consumer behaviour and demands on organic foods. Such approach encourages the development of more conventional product categories such as ready-made goods. On the other hand, OFC introduces the concept of close collaboration between various actors as a way to develop organic farming. Taking for examples, it recommends knowledge transfer between research institute and organic farmers/ small medium sized organic entrepreneurs, partnership between organic farmers etc. In this context, OFC advocates “pluralist strategy” that opens to the diverse methods for organic farming, and it highlights the potential of alternative distribution chain such as box scheme by stating direct contact between consumer and primary producer as a crucial element for building consumer confidence on organic produce.

Examining above-mentioned evidence, the interpretation of three basic organic principles by LØJ during the period from the mid-1990s to present could be described as follows:

- Recycling is mostly farm based, though re-using the waste of customers is recommended.
- Precaution is derived both from knowledge of science and experience of farmers.
- Proximity is a crucial element for improving the organic principles. Particularly, close collaboration between LØJ and organic farmers is important.

### *3.4. Tentative conclusion*

It could be safe to say that the attitude of LØJ has gradually changed from common agreement among the members towards the national standardisation along with its collaboration with general farmers' organisations and the government since the mid-1980s. LØJ's approach to the development of organic farming has later become clearer in a direction of institutionalisation and quantitative growth that designated certain compromise in the realisation of organic principles. Yet, the role of LØJ as an initiator for organic farming has begun to decrease in accordance with a decline of membership by the integration of state-control inspection/ certification system and of advisory service in the general farmers' organisations, as well as rising significance of OFC as an influential forum for negotiation among stakeholders. Considering such circumstance, the current attempts to re-establish the relationship with organic farmer could be seen as a changing focal point of LØJ towards creating more innovative standards derived from farmers' understandings of organic farming.

## **4. Policy and politics on organic production and products**

This chapter illustrates the debates in the Danish Parliament from 1987 to 2002<sup>5</sup>. The focal point is the politicians' interpretation of organic farming, particularly with relation to the three basic principles. Tracing the changes of general attitudes towards organic farming in the parliamentary debate reveals certain directions that have designated how organic agriculture are treated in the political scene as well as the frame for the organic farmers.

During the time from 1987 to 2002 the law on organic farming has changed three times. Since its establishment in 1987, the law has been revised twice: in 1993 and 1999. We can also observe two non-passed bills during the period.<sup>6</sup> From 1997 to 2001 45 questions has been asked to the Minister of Agriculture. 31 of these questions were asked by the political party "Venstre" (Liberal Party).

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<sup>5</sup> All the debates in the Danish Parliament, which included the words organic, ecological, sustainability and environment has been read carefully with a focus on if the three fundamental organic principles were embedded in the argumentation. The procedure was repeated three times: On passed laws and regulation about organic farming, on non passed bills about organic farming and questions about organic farming and organic products asked to the Minister of Agriculture.

<sup>6</sup> One was concerning the environmental law, which was introduced first time in December 1997. Yet, it passed later in 1999. The other bill was introduced by Søren Kolstrup and Keld Albrechtsen both from Enhedslisten (Socialist Party). The bill was introduced on the 27 April 2001.



#### 4.1 Focus on product or production process

Already in the first debate in 1987 it was clear that organic product and organic farming was discussed as one and the same issue. It is not clear, if the members of the parliament are aware of the problem. In general, it can be stated that the focus of liberal-oriented political parties seems to be more occupied with the status of *product* than the left wing parties, which had a stronger focus on the *production process*. Furthermore, the parties, who put stress on the organic product and the consumer, tend to consider organic farming as a niche production or a new technique inside the agricultural sector.

##### 4.1.1 Focus on product

It could be safe to say that the focus on the product by the liberal, and conservative and parties concerns a protection of the conventional farmers, who are typically among their voters. By not adding attention to the production process they avoided discussions about the impact of conventional farming on the environment. Although the liberal party has recently referred to the production process, the argument was based on increasing resemblance between organic products and conventional ones in appearance, taste, smell etc. At this point, the issue of whether organic products are healthier and better for the consumer than the conventional product were discussed among parties,<sup>7</sup> and the lack of scientific evidence to prove such statements was pointed out.<sup>8</sup> At the same time Venstre expressed that monitoring the organic production could use almost the same method as the conventional production, since the requirements for environmental protection in the conventional farming have strengthened recently.

On the other hand, the discussion in 1998 indicates many politicians' positioning on organic law as a means for consumer protection from disease as well as for establishing consumer confidence in organic product.

The parliamentary debates focused on the organic *product* could be analysed into the following interpretations of the three basic principles:

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Henning Andersen from Konservativt Folkeparti (Conservative) stated that "organic product was not only environment friendly but also healthy" (13/1 87, 1. beh. af lov om økologisk jordbrugsproduktion I Danmark). Sønderby from Venstre did not agree that organic product was marketed as free of poison as it monitored conventional product as unhealthy (13/1 87, 1. beh. af lov om økologisk jordbrugsproduktion I Danmark).

<sup>8</sup> By the first treatment of the "Organic law" in 1998 Thorkild B. Frandsen pointed out the lack of evidences, which could prove that there was a difference between organic and conventional products (19/11 1998 1. beh. af L80). But already by the second treatment of the organic law in 1987 Damgaard Nielsen from Fremskridtspartiet asked for more evidence about the difference between organic and conventional products ( 12/5 1987: 2. beh. af lov om økologisk jordbrugsproduktion I Danmark)

- Recycling is not possible to trace.
- Precautionary should prevent illness among the consumers by consumption. Knowledge about veterinary becomes crucial.
- Proximity is carried out by authorities. The transparency is ensured through information and control. Expressed in the Ø-label.

#### 4.1.2 Focus on production process

In contrast, the approach, which put more focus on production process, seems to be more concerned with the attitude of farmer and the condition of nature. It could, for example, be illustrated by the statement of an middle party claiming that the whole idea about organic farming “*was to create a balance and harmony on the single farm*” *this was in relation to import of concentrates feed on the farm*”(13/1 87, 1. beh. af lov om økologisk jordbrugsproduktion i Danmark), or of another liberal middle party stating that organic farming was “*the learning about the recycling in nature.*” (13/1 87, 1. beh. af lov om økologisk jordbrugsproduktion i Danmark). Furthermore, the focus on the process has been emphasised in the argument such as concerning the significance of livestock on organic farm in terms of maintaining the nutrient balance, and the length taking for detoxifying and re-building soil fertility in order to convert from conventional farming to organic farming.

Over time there have been increasing discussion stressing the treatment of domestic animals, particularly since the late 1990s onward. Yet, despite rising criticism of long transport of livestock from animal ethic point of view, the bill regarding supporting small slaughterhouse and dairies close to the farmers and their local communities did not pass (B 196 af 27/4 2001).

The parliamentary debates that focused on the organic *production process* lead us to the following interpretations of the three basic principles:

- Recycling is a matter of balance and soil fertilisation on the farm
- Pre-cautionary is a matter of organic farming should meet the unknown risks to nature caused by conventional agriculture. Knowledge about ecosystems crucial.

- Proximity is a matter of information and control carried out by the authorities, expressed in the Ø-label<sup>9</sup>.

#### *4.2 Tentative conclusion*

It appears that the different focus on either product or production process at dealing with organic farming reduced the meaning of the principles. Neither of these two interpretations fit very well into the basic principles formulated by DARCOF, which was introduced in the previous chapter. There is a growing tendency of putting more focus on the product, though we can observe some focus on the production process especially related to animal ethics. The holistic approach, which is recognised in the basic principles formulated by DARCOF, has been subject to sectorisation and only smaller fragments are found in the debates.

### **5. Sales, distribution and marketing of organic product**

This chapter is an introduction to the many ways of sales, distribution and marketing the organic products. Big changes in this area have taken place within the last 40 years so we are not going into detail. The time will be divided into three periods: Before the Organic Law and the first authorised organic farmer in 1988, from 1988 to 1993 which is a period characterised as by a break up of old structures and the period from 1993 until now. We will keep some focus on the division noticed inside LØJ and in the political debate about whether the pivotal point is the organic product or the organic production. Especially in the last period this distinction will be underlined.

#### *5.1 Sales, distribution and marketing before Organic Law*

Before the Organic Law was passed in 1987 it could be safe to say that there was unrestricted possibilities for buying and selling organic goods. They were often sold through a sort of health food shops (groceries)<sup>10</sup>, which had a broad sales target such as natural/ eastern medicine, natural soaps, vegetables, conserves etc. Yet, actual possibility for a newcomer to utilise such unrestricted potential appeared to be limited, and in some case he/she was forced to join communities or establish their own network to get access to the organic market.

<sup>9</sup> Yet, non-passed bill from Enhedslisten, which suggested that the producer, the workers and consumer should be close around manufacturing of agricultural products, does not fit in this categorisation.

<sup>10</sup> The concept health care shops is now more oriented to nature medicine and different kind of diets, than it was in that time

Another sales routes could be illustrated by wholesales societies, which families in both cities and countryside joined and bought organic products in collies through wholesale dealers. Vegetables could be bought directly from the farmers, e.g. a weekly vegetable box delivery to household.

In this period before the Organic Law, only a few had knowledge about whether the products were actually organic or free of pesticides and fertilisers. It was only the Demeter label and the label from LØJ (1981) that signalled a difference between ordinary products and products produced by some lines of “biological” farming methods. It could be pointed out that it was mutual trust between producer (farmer) and consumer that drove organic trade in this period<sup>11</sup>.

Owing to the lack of available statistics, it is hard to estimate the amount of organic and Demeter product sold before the organic law. Yet, according to a statistics, 4.000 farms<sup>12</sup> produced some kind of biological products in the end of the period around 1987 (speeches by Sønderby (V) and Henning Andersen (KF) (13/1 87, 1. beh. af lov om økologisk jordbrugsproduktion i Danmark)).

Focusing on the way of marketing, non-governmental organisations for nature conservation and environment played a role, though it seems organic trade relied mostly on the mouth to mouth information diffusion. For instance, an organisation spread knowledge about alternative products through small newsletters, cookbooks and a calendar.

Examining the above-mentioned evidences concerning sale, marketing and distribution before the enforcement of organic law, we recognise the following interpretation of the three basic principles in the organic market:

- Recycling was mostly farm based
- Precautionary was a matter of common sense, beliefs and intuition
- Proximity was expressed through a fundament for the trust between producer, customer and consumer

<sup>11</sup> These information is mainly based on personal experience and interview with 30 old friends living different places in Denmark and buying organic products in that period

<sup>12</sup> In 1988 only 219 applied for being registered as organic farmer. The number of registered organic farmer in 2001 is 3532 (Danmarks Statistik: Antal økologiske brug 1988-2001)

### *5.2 Sales, distribution and marketing after Organic Law: from 1988 to the early 1990s*

The situation changed for most farmers in 1988 by the enforcement of organic law stating that organic products must wear the “Ø” label to be marketed and sold as organic. This could be underlined by the change in the number of organic farmers. As mentioned before, it is assumed that about 4.000 “organic” farmers had existed before 1987. During the period from the entrance of the law until 1993, the number of “authorised” organic farmers grew only from 219 to 640.

In the beginning there was some confusion with products, which suddenly became “not organic”. One firm tried to deal with the problem by giving the products different symbols in their catalogue. The products in the catalogue were divided into following groups: the product they could not guarantee as organic, the product controlled and approved by certified control organisations either to be organic or biodynamic, and the product produced by farmer converting their production into organic<sup>13</sup> (Kampa, 1990).

Both LØJ and the authorities appealed to the consumers only to buy Ø-labelled products. However, as we can see from the limited number of organic farmers, there were only few products in the market with Ø-label. At the same time, sales gradually moved from the healthcare groceries to wholesale dealers to retailers.

Already before the Ø-label was introduced some retailers became more open to the organic products. Taking for examples, the retailer chain “IRMA” has started selling organic vegetables in 1988 and in 1989 the retailer chain FDB went into the organic market. FDB introduced organic pork in 27 divisions in Copenhagen and Aarhus (the second biggest city in Denmark) and increased the variation of organic food products over time. Furthermore, for the farmer closer to provincial towns it was possible to sell directly to local divisions of FDB. Another possibility was to sell to one of the new co-operative firms (1990). It packed the products and distributed them to FDB’s central stores, which again distributed the products to the local divisions of the retail chain. It is often mentioned that this period from 1988 to the early 1990s is of significance in terms of the rise of the sale of organic products. However, the actual rise appears to have gone rather slowly (Abrahamsen and Ingemann, 1998).

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<sup>13</sup> It takes 3 years rearrangement on the production unit to get the Ø-label

Examining the above-mentioned empirical evidences in the period from 1988 to the early 1990s, it could be said that organic market had begun to be polarised into “state certified” and “non-state certified” by the entrance of the organic law. The state certified system, namely Ø-label, was supported by the state and organic farmers organisations, while non-state certified organic activities were still somehow accepted in the market and attempted to adopt themselves into the new organic market framework. Yet, the organic trade within non-state certification crucially relied on a mutual trust between producer and distributor (retailer) and/or between producer and consumer, which should be sufficient enough to consider that the product was reaching the expectation of consumers as “organic”. Considering those factors, general interpretation of three fundamental principles within the organic market in this period could be analysed as follows:

- Recycling is farm based.
- Precautionary is linked to the increasing regulations, the product and the Ø-label. However, common sense, beliefs and intuition are still relevant.
- Proximity is linked to the increasing amount of product chains

### *5.3 Sales, distribution and marketing from 1993 and until now*

Concerning the sales, distribution and marketing period it is generally the retailer chains that is regarded as the “professional” and a central actor after 1993. Many organic farmers who sold their products directly in one or the other way were most often left out of the debate about the sale of organic products, though some initiatives have been taken to make the direct sale farmers more visible. Referring to the product / production division recognised in the parliamentary debate discussed in the previous chapter, and examining the documents about sales, distribution and marketing, it seems like the retailer chains are most occupied by the product. On the other hand, the direct selling organic farmers are occupied by the branding of their production process.

#### The product oriented approach 1993 and until now

In the beginning of the period most big retailer chains in Denmark still had reservations to the idea of organic products. As stated above IRMA started to sell organic products in Copenhagen before the Organic Law, but FDB is generally acknowledged as the retailer chain which first went into the organic product market<sup>14</sup>. Over time even more retailers has opened up to the organic

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<sup>14</sup> IRMA was bought by FDB.

products and today it is possible to buy organic milk and other organic products in most shops and retailers, even at the gas stations.

In 1993 there seems to be some stagnation in the demand for organic products, at least in the retailer chain FDB. The stagnation made FDB to start an intensive sales campaign for organic products. At the same time they lowered the prices on the products so that the difference in price between organic and conventional were only marginal. It is often recognised that these initiatives were the beginning of an increase in sales of organic products.<sup>15</sup> In 1997 FDB repeated the initiative and started another campaign for organic products (Abrahamsen and Ingemann, 1998). To support the sale of organic products FDB's retailer divisions gave the customer 5% bonus on organic products compared to the conventional products on which the bonus were only 3%.

During the last year there have been some debate about the sale. It seems that the sale from the retailers has stagnated again and that might be a signal to the organic farmers indicating a decrease in sale of organic products. On the other hand, new ways of distributions, like box schemes from the biggest organic farm in Denmark, has been introduced in the organic product market.

About the same time FDB started their campaign in 1993, the way of distributing the organic products also became more centralised. As mentioned above, it used to be possible for the farmer to deliver the organic products directly to the nearest division of FDB<sup>16</sup>. The local division ordered the products directly from the farmers. These procedures were changed, so that the local division ordered through the headquarter, which then asked their distribution divisions to deliver it at the local division of the retailer chain. Hence the farmers were asked to deliver their organic product at the distribution division. The geographical distance from the farmer to the distribution division could be over 100 km, so obviously this change in distribution made some difficulties for the farmers. Another possibility for the farmers to hand over their products, was to deliver at the packing firms which then packed and distributed it to the divisions of the retailer distribution.

In addition to the geographical distance, the centralisation of the distribution implicated farmers in the problem of the amount. When the retailers' distribution division ordered the amount

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<sup>15</sup> It is not possible to get statistical material on the sale, because there is no tradition in Denmark to hand over the sale figures.

<sup>16</sup> FDB embeds several kind of divisions, some of them are still more independent and are allowed to order by local producers.

became bigger, as all the orders from the retail divisions were added. Many smaller and medium sized farms could not meet the demands and still be diverse in their production. Even to deliver to the packing firms required a certain amount of products to pay for the transport.

When FDB in 1993 started their campaign they not only lowered the prices but also put more attention to the products. From the beginning the organic products were up against two images: one was the consumer image, certain ideas about the characteristics of person who bought organic products kept other consumers away because they did not want to be identified within these characteristics. The other image was linked to the product e.g. that organic carrots and cabbage were full of worms. FDB and other retailer chains coped with the problem in cooperation with the packing firms and the organic trade associations. The quality of the products was ensured by i.e. washing the carrots and the potatoes, so that worm bites could be discovered. They also took over different kind of standards from the conventional products, for instance, concerning the difference in size of potatoes or carrots in the same packing. The wrapping and packing was standardised so the organic products looked like the conventional products except from the Ø-label. Only a few of the packing firms and bigger farms had access to buy the standard packing, which the retailer chains required. Hence, the farmers who still wanted to deliver directly had to buy the packing by these firms and farms.

Lately there seems to be a tendency that the each retailer chains is trying to brand the organic product with not only the Ø-label but also with a name.

In 1999, a company which sales fresh organic products including meat and dairy product on the subscription/box scheme based sales system on Internet called [www.aarstiderne.com](http://www.aarstiderne.com) started its business. Though there are some distinct differences between the retailers and “Aarstiderne”, the branding part is also what “Aarstiderne” is trying to do with the box scheme. Such attempt of Aarstiderne is new, not because of the idea but because of the size of the farm. It is organised by Barritskov, which is the largest organic farm in Denmark, in partnership with three other farms in Eastern Jut land.

Due to the relatively early integration of organic sales into supermarket on the basis of contract with the largest organic co-operative Biodania, box scheme in big scale has not been popular in Denmark. Therefore, the attempt of Aarstiderne could be seen as a new challenge for organic farmers to pave a way to establish an alternative to the mainstream organic marketing structure,



which has increasingly demanded lower prices and production of certain produce.<sup>17</sup> Yet, it can be safe to say that the marketing strategy of Aarstiderne still relies much on general consumer demands, which do not necessarily prioritise environmental feature of organic farming but own health, convenience, food preference etc., as we can see it trades imported fresh organics. In this light, the Danish term “aarstiderne,” which means “the seasons,” may not fully reflect its practice.

Apparently some changes in sales and distribution has taken place over the last two or three years, but the implication seems rather unclear. Hence, we will not include this period as a period of its own in the conclusion.

Examining the above-mentioned evidences during the period from 1993 to the present, interpretation of the three basic principles by the product-oriented approach to the organic market could be analysed as follows:

- Recycling is farm based.
- Precautionary is linked to the regulations, the product and the Ø-label.
- Proximity is linked to the increasing amount of product chains.

### The production oriented approach

At the same time as the retailer chains developed and widen out their range of organic product, with some consequences for the farmer as mentioned above, some other organic farmers decided not to go into that kind of sales and distribution. It is hard to find material about these farmers because of the strong focus on the farmers who produced for the retailers. In the late 1990s the first registration of organic farmers who sold their products directly was made. In the book it is possible to see what kind of products and services that are offered at each of the farms. The range of services and products is wide, but many of the farmers in the book focus on a few products and/ or services. On the web side it is possible to find over 100 farmers with direct sale spread over the country. This could be seen in contrast to the FDB retailer divisions Kquickly, which include about 76 local retailers<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Barritskov itself is not the member of Biodania. Yet, some producers under the system of Aarstiderne are the members.

<sup>18</sup> FDB include the retailers: kquickly, Brugsen, SuperBrugsen, Fakta, Obs and IRMA

Most often direct sales imply a few products, by which the farmers try to brand by the name of the farm. Besides the “branded” products, the farmers also have a range of other organic products. Several of these farmers have more or less local agreements with other organic farmer about exchanging of products for sale.

The network of organic farmers for selling their products directly to consumers has been developed through mouth-to-mouth way, the consultants from the agricultural organisations and LØJ and newspapers and web pages created by “green” organisations. The amount of products exchanged from one farmer to the other was seldom bigger than the farmer could pick it up himself or it could be forwarded by post.

These organic farmers advertises their products in the local newspaper, or have a booth in the local market square, deliver directly to the consumers, sell to local restaurants or/ and have farm shops and booths at the road. The consumers must be more active to find these organic farmers and their products in contrast to the retailers. Often the consumer heard about a specific organic farm through friends or colleges. That is one reason why the branding is important.

Interpretation of the three basic principles by the production-oriented approach during the period from 1993 to the present could be analysed as follows:

- Recycling is farm based but some of these farmers are recycling the waste of their sold products also.
- Precautionary is a matter of beliefs and intuition, it is affected by the awareness of the consumer and the regulation of the authorities
- Proximity is the fundament for trust among the organic farmers and the consumers. It secures the farmers to maintain diversity in the organic production.

#### *5.4 Summary and tentative conclusion*

Our investigation in this chapter illustrated different interpretations of organic farming in accordance with the general trend of the organic market changing by time.

Before 1987, the year the Organic Law was passed, organic goods had been marketed on the basis of mutual trust within a somewhat closed circle of producers and customers. This condition changed by the enactment of the Law, which appeared to polarise the organic market into a

group following the state-control system and the other attempting to maintain or develop own system outside the state-control. Yet, it was demonstrated that the sales and distribution methods boosted by retailer chains have consisted of a mainstream during the period from 1993 onward, and such retailers' market activities tended to put focus on the status of organic product represented by the label. On the other hand, non-mainstream producers have tried to develop own ways through, for example, direct sales and creating an alternative distribution chain to big retailers. The actors in this line of non-mainstream activities appeared to put more focus on production process, partially as a means to differentiate own product from popular labels, namely Ø-label.

Overall, we observed an increasing distance between organic producer and user. Such distance appeared to induce the division of user into customer, who has direct access to producer, and consumer, whose relationship with producer must mediate a customer, namely a firm.

## 6. Initial conclusion and hypothesis

The main purpose of this paper was to uncover the mismatch between the basic principles of organic farming stated by DARCOF (see chapter 2) and the practices at dealing with the principles.

At investigating such objective, three crucial spheres involved in the development of organic farming, namely organisational, political and market, were discussed in the previous chapters. In chapter 3 we sought for the changes in attitude of organisations with special emphasis on LØJ. The focus was turned to the politicians in Chapter 4 by examining debates in the parliament. This task uncovered two different approaches to organic farming. In this paper, we identified one approach with focus on *product* and the other with focus on *production process*. These two approaches embedded two different interpretations of the basic principles. The context of interpretations by two different approaches did not seem to change over time, though it seemed that the product approach increasingly became more influential in the late 1990s. Such two approaches were also found in the organic market activities, as chapter 5 described through the empirical evidences regarding sales, distribution and marketing. Furthermore, the chapter expressed that increasing distance between organic producers and users has induced two types of users, i.e. customer and consumer.

Throughout the investigation, three periods that could denote the general changes of organic farming were recognised: the period before the establishment of organic law in 1987, from 1988 to 1993 and from 1993 onward.

### *6.1 Initial conclusion*

In terms of the cyclical principle, our investigation in the previous chapters depicted that such actor groups as government, customers and consumers have mainly considered “recycle” within organic farm(s). LØJ has envisaged the concept of recycling that utilises the waste from town and food industry as fertiliser for agriculture, though it remains recommendation. On the other hand, as the empirical trace of organic market in chapter 5 illustrated, some organic farmers have attempted to put the idea of “from soil to table and from table to soil” into practice throughout the time. Overall, the national Organic Law has given influence on all the actors in organic farming regarding practising the minimum requirements for the cyclical principle by setting the ceiling on the input of external nutrients as well as on the distance of transport of nutrient inputs, for example.

The investigation of the precautionary principle demonstrates that the purpose of the principle and the relevant knowledge for the judgement of assessing risks have changed particularly after the Law was established. Before the Law, it was generally “knowledge among ordinary people” that consisted of the notion of safe technology. Meanwhile, customers and consumers purchased organics on the basis of trust in producers, who were supposed to keep the shared notion of safety. Such a relationship was replaced by the Law that has begun to guarantee the safety instead of individual organic producers. The new relationship implied that scientific knowledge has become increasingly important for actors like LØJ and government. In consequence, consumers tend to be left out from increasing expert terminology in organics, while it increases consumers’ dependence on the information through various kinds of media for obtaining reliability in organic products. However, we also observed another line of tendency between a group of government actors and some organic farmers that has attempted to stress the production process. They appear to put more emphasis on know-how of organic farmers.

The proximity principle, as similar to the precautionary principle, shows general change after the Law. Before the Law, social vertical proximity rested on the close interaction among non-governmental actors participated to organic movement within the limited geographical proximity.

In contrast, after the Law, more and more actors began to embrace wider geographical proximity, while their social vertical proximity has seemingly gone towards de-linkage of producers and consumers. One way to explain this tendency may be the increasing influence of authority as well as the state controlled “Ø- label” in the social vertical proximity, which circumvent a direct contact between producers and consumers.

We have observed a certain propensity of *codification of knowledge* at understanding organic principles in Denmark. Particularly after the Law, many actor groups have begun to presume transparency to be achieved by implementing scientific knowledge into organic agriculture. In consequence, it has become authoritative actor groups such as government, who control the organic label, that generally designate the status of organic principles. Yet, it can be safe to say that such codification of knowledge, in contrast to the knowledge based on common sense, has actually brought more ambiguity in both organic product and organic production process among consumers. In this light, it could be explained that standardisation of organic farming through the diffusion of state controlled organic label or/and even emerging private brand labels pushed by the firms has resulted in elimination of interaction among non-scientific expert actors, such as between producer and consumer as well as between organic farmers (Figure 1).

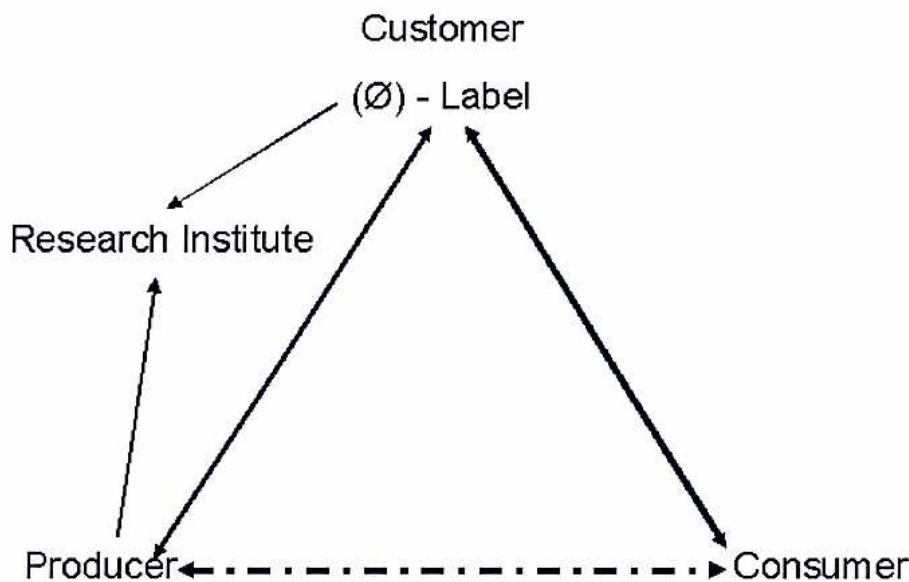


Figure 1: Elimination of interaction between farmer and consumer

### *Hypothesis*

The findings of this paper lead us to hypothesize that an explanation for the mismatch between organic principles and practices may stem from different understandings of organic principles derived from each actor's focus on either *product* or *product process*. In this light, we could point out that the current rising focus on product, rather than production process, appears to link to the codification activities, especially through organic standardisation. Although standardisation was initially assumed to unify the disparity in organic farming, its increasing science-based elements have actually worked for widening the gap between the concept of consumers and even farmers about how organic farming should be and the reality. This factor may somewhat exclude the diverse understandings of organic principles and practices, which have actually occurred frequently within a close relationship between producer and consumer. The recent changes in attitude of some actors like LØJ towards re-establishing an interactive relation with organic farmers, as well as the current success of an alternative distribution chain based on box-scheme, may therefore imply a line of attempt to recover the missing link between producer and consumer.

Based on these assumptions, this paper presumes a future basis for presenting general interpretation of organic principles in Denmark as follows:

- On-going standardisation based on Ø-label.
- On-going standardisation based on private label.
- Simplification of standards based on close interaction between producer and consumer.

Especially with regard to the third point of simplification, we can open a discussion concerning “Who is going to take the initiative?” At this point, this paper assumes potential of both LØJ and an emergence of new organisation(s).

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12/5 87: 2. beh. Af f. t. l. om økologisk jordbrugsproduktion i Danmark

Betænkning o. lovf. Om økologisk jordbrugsproduktion 17/3 1993  
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19/11 1998: 1.behandling af L80

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