



Reducing greenhouse gases, sequestering carbon – Harnessing the potential of organic farming!

Copenhagen Climate Summit: FiBL calls for worldwide promotion of organic farming

From 7 to 18 December the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change takes place in Copenhagen with the aim of agreeing a new global treaty on climate change, a post-2012 successor to the Kyoto Protocol. The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) is present in Copenhagen, working in close cooperation with other sustainable agriculture institutions to advocate the major potential organic farming offers as a climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy.

(Frick, 9 December 2009) Agriculture accounts for 10–12% of all greenhouse gas emissions. These are the direct agricultural emissions. If the emissions from ancillary industries (fertilizers, pesticides) and those resulting from land-use change (e.g. forest clearance for agriculture) are taken into account, the sector contributes 17–32% of all greenhouse gas emissions. For global warming to be stabilized at a maximum of 2°C, ambitious emission reduction targets must also be set for the agricultural sector.

Properly managed agricultural soils have an enormous potential to sequester carbon and thus to contribute to mitigating climate change. A new climate treaty must take this huge mitigation potential into account.

Organic farming adheres to and utilizes natural ecosystem cycles. By building a healthy soil structure with a high humus content, organic farming permanently fixes large amounts of carbon dioxide in the soil. Greenhouse gas emissions are further reduced since chemical fertilizers are not used in organic farming, crop residues are not burned but recycled into the soil, and organic fertilizers are used in an optimal manner.

The good soil structure in organic farming means that soils have a higher water retention capacity, have a more stable structure, and are more resistant to the impacts of climate change such as increased droughts, extreme weather events and erosion. The high diversity in organic farming and lower operating costs (no chemical fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides) reduce the risk of crop losses and farmer indebtedness, which is of particular significance to small-holders in developing countries. Organic farming systems are thus highly adaptable to climate change.

EXCELLENCE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Das FiBL hat Standorte in der Schweiz, Deutschland und Österreich
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Organic farming is the only system that fulfils the criteria of both the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for low-emission agriculture and of a range of institutions, such as the United Nations Environment Programme UNEP, for optimal adaptation strategies in agriculture. Hence, organic farming is a system functioning as a combined mitigation and adaptation strategy.

FiBL therefore calls for the recognition and utilization of this major potential of organic agriculture for climate change mitigation and adaptation. This should entail the promotion of organic farming worldwide as part of the programmes for mitigation and adaptation. FiBL Director Urs Niggli calls for "a massive increase in the share of farmland under organic management over the coming years and a massive increase in funding for research, training and extension in organic agriculture."

It should also be possible for the carbon sequestration provided by organic farming to be rewarded by receiving carbon certificates. Trade in certified emissions reductions is already taking place, but does not yet cover projects for carbon sequestration in agricultural soils. No matter what one's stance is on the trade in carbon credits, it is clear that the carbon market will continue to gain importance. It is therefore of utmost importance that the carbon market offers credits representing truly sustainable reduction performance. A further criterion should be the generation of additional benefits beyond emission reductions, such as improving the capacity of communities to adapt to climate change. Since organic farming combines mitigation and adaptation services in an optimum manner, it can provide these benefits.

FiBL is committed to achieving the above objectives by developing and consolidating the scientific knowledge base and by imparting this information to the Copenhagen Climate Conference.

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Further information

Further information on the issue of climate change and organic farming is available at <http://climate.fibl.org>. During the Copenhagen conference, FiBL will provide updates at www.fibl.org.

This media release on the Internet

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