



## Memories and Notes on the Beginning and Early History of IFOAM

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The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, abbreviated and best known as IFOAM, began life in a very historic place - Versailles, France on November 5th, 1972. It all started during an international congress on organic agriculture organized by the French farmer organization Nature et Progrès. The initiative came from the late Roland Chevriot, President of Nature et Progrès. There were 5 founding member organizations at the cradle of IFOAM: The Soil Association from Great Britain represented by Lady Eve Balfour, the Swedish Biodynamic Association with Kjell Arman, the Soil Association of South Africa in the person of Pauline Raphaely, Rodale Press from the United States of America whose representative was Jerome Goldstein and of course, Nature et Progrès with Roland Chevriot.

The aims of the new organization were reflected in the chosen name: International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. The founders hoped that the federation would meet what they saw as a major need for the organic movement - the diffusion and exchange of information on the principles and practises of organic agriculture of all schools and across national and linguistic boundaries. From the very beginning the need for information exchange between national and regional organic movements was seen necessary not only for the economically developed but also for developing countries. IFOAM was supposed to act as a much needed counter to what was already then perceived as the disastrous impact of "chemically-based" agriculture on the environment and peasant societies. The Federation also had the task to show the global relevance of organic agriculture as part of the solutions.

Right from the beginning it was decided to offer a voting membership to groups and associations, whose published aims were in line with the principles of organic agriculture and also with the possibility for individual non-voting members to join as supporters. Contributions to an international bulletin which would reflect and share the common experience, were invited. The responsibility for the secretariat and for gathering material for the bulletin was undertaken for an initial period by Nature et Progrès. There the task of nursing the infant organization into active life was entrusted to Denis Bourgeois with help from the organization's staff and voluntary workers. It should be recorded that a generous contribution of "seed" money from the Rodale Press helped to make these early developments possible, because Nature et Progrès, and the other founding members, were struggling groups themselves depending on the contribution of their members and with few resources to spare for such an ambitious enterprise.

New members joined at first in a trickle. They came together at the second international congress organized by Nature et Progrès in 1974 again in Paris. There it was decided to accept the offer made by Nature et Progrès to undertake responsibility for a further two year period with Anton Pinschof engaged to edit the bulletin.

The third IFOAM General Assembly took place at Seengen, Switzerland in 1976, where Hardy Vogtmann (then Director of the Institute of Biological Husbandry at Oberwil, Switzerland) agreed to become Honorary Secretary. Jerome Goldstein from Rodale Press took on the responsibility for an English language bulletin and shortly afterwards Dagmar Kieffer of the Stiftung Ökologischer Landbau launched an IFOAM German language bulletin.

Hardy Vogtmann was uniquely qualified for the task to weave together the various strains of what has to become a real worldwide organization. He had held an academic position in Canada as an agricultural and food scientist before assuming directorship of the famous Institute of Biological Husbandry in Oberwil. The Institute was dedicated to comparative trials of different methods of organic cultivation and to show

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effects of each on food quality. Through his work he was in touch with movements that informed both research and practise in different parts of the world about organic agriculture.

The oldest of these, inspired by the insights of Rudolf Steiner, was the biodynamic movement, which was mostly influential in German speaking countries. Another, based initially on the work of Sir Albert Howard in India and later associated with the name of Lady Eve Balfour, was the Haughley experiment in Great Britain, best known in English speaking countries all over the world. Then, there was also the method developed by Hans Müller in Switzerland and based on the scientific work of Dr. Peter Rusch.

With, and on behalf of, the newly organized IFOAM research group, Hardy Vogtmann assumed the responsibility for organizing the first IFOAM international scientific conference held the following year (1977) at Sissach, Switzerland and hosted by the Institute for Biological Husbandry. This conference brought together many distinguished speakers from all over the world and set the pattern for the regular biannual scientific conferences organized from the on in turn by member groups. On each occasion the conference is followed by a General Assembly of the IFOAM members, which assures the democratic and grassroots-oriented development with discussions and decisions of policies and standards and election of officers.

Recalling those early days, what stands out is that although IFOAM was founded as a federation of movements - which indeed remains in strength - it is to the vision and dedicated work of a few outstanding individuals that its early development and its actual survival is due. It is more than appropriate that in this anniversary year we should recall their names and express our gratitude.

In addition to those already mentioned many others could also be cited. But a special acknowledgement must be made of those who following Hardy Vogtmann in turn undertook the "honorary" responsibility for conduct of the secretariat.

The first was Elliot Coleman, then running a demonstration organic farm for a charitable foundation in the USA. Earlier he had led parties of fellow Americans on tours of organic farms and market gardens in Europe, bringing these groups to the two first IFOAM conferences and with, their participation, helped to develop the North American membership.

Subsequently, the secretariat moved from Massachusetts, USA back to Paris, where it was undertaken jointly by Denis Bourgeois from Nature et Progrès and Karin Mundt, who by then had been associated in founding the organic gardening magazine "Terre Vivante" and a publishing house. Karin Mundt had been responsible for recruiting many early IFOAM members at the time when she was travelling for a leading French journal.

The next to take over was Gunnar Videgard from Sweden who proved to be the last in the line of Honorary General Secretaries. Their achievement - working voluntary and with limited resources, often with the time "stolen" from the organizations for which they bore their main responsibility - had been to build up a worldwide organization to the stage of development, where it became inescapably clear that a full-time salaried secretariat with a permanent base had to be appointed.

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