

Proceedings

**Greener Fields Forum
Eco-labels- Where Do We Go From Here?
St. Louis, Missouri
October 22-24, 2001**

Opening Session

Individual Outcome Priorities for This Forum

- A discussion of enforceable standards behind eco-labels.
- To learn what is current with eco-labels here and abroad.
- What is the strategy to move forward?
- To define common messaging and relationship with organic.
- Explore how to educate consumers about the farmworker link to eco-labels.
- The discussion should be inclusive and considerate of the limited resource, minority and women farmers.
- To discuss animal welfare standards.
- Find lessons learned from the Forest Stewardship labeling program.
- To discuss how to limit consumer confusion.
- Think of how eco-labels can help farmers make the transition to sustainable and/or organic.
- Address the green market share issue.
- How do we cooperate in educating consumers?
- Share the fair trade perspective.
- Assure that the farmer's voice is heard, find tools to help farmers.
- What will an organization look like? Who? How?
- Explore opportunities for complimentary labels.
- To ask, "Why not organic?" How do these claims relate to organic?
- Share stories of existing labels.
- Share consumer perspective of existing labels.
- To discuss how to create labels to benefit family farmers.
- To discuss labels that meet needs of all consumers.

GOALS: Set the tone and ground rules and learn individual attendees' outcome priorities.

**GOAL: Answer the questions,
"Do we share these common
principles?"
"How can these principles be
operationalized?"**

What are the common principles of eco-labels?

A discussion about social, environmental and economic principles. Where are we on operationalizing these principles?

Participant comments:

- Think about this as a process for now. We are looking at principles, criteria, then standards.
- We have to support the concept of eco-labels because government policy has failed farmers. This is where the market can reward farmers for good practices.
- Fair trade labels can scare farmers away if they are only about higher wages.
- Let's not let the government off the hook. This will only be a small niche market until we change policy. Still need to work on policy.
- A key principle is a democratic process. Farmers' voices need to be well represented.
- Protection of conflict of interest. Consumers Union wants to see certifying certifiers and a public comment process.
- Need to add mechanism for protecting claims from counterfeit claims.
- Integrity of production system is maintained through the marketing process. Traceability has to be a key principle.
- Assure worker participation in all label claims.
- No standards will be relaxed after inception, only improved.
- Labels protect ethnic and cultural diversity. Focus on principle of transparency vs. third-party certification. Third-party certification may not work in underserved communities. Look at Dominican Republic scenario.
- Principle could be the goal of achieving sustainability, rather than providing market niche.
- Protect genetic diversity and gene pool.
- Record keeping required to help verify compliance.
- Increase market share for farmers.
- A guaranteed minimum price.
- Grassroots support is the base of the label.
- Limit corporate and other grants.
- Systems approach which supports and maintains ecosystem integrity.
- Promotes, preserves, and enhances soil health.
- Protects, restores, and maintains water quality and conservation.
- Protects, maintains and enhances wildlife and biodiversity habitat.
- Promotes and utilizes an ecologically appropriate on-farm increase in the biodiversity of crops and animals maintained.
- Reduces and/or prohibits the use of toxic pesticides including the use of adoption of bio-intensive IPM (biologically integrated pest management)
- Has independent third-party verified practices and claims which are credible and measurable, that the criteria are transparent, uses the multi-stakeholder approach and is based-on continual improvement using whole systems management and monitoring plans.

- Third party accreditation or verification.
- Must maintain viable business and organizational structure.
- Provides timely and effective extension and outreach to farmers.
- Incentives for new participants/reward for incremental practices.
- Not produced with GMOs.
- Conserves and reduces non-renewable energy usage.
- Promote and develops renewable energy use.
- Preserve economic viability of family farms and ensure that the economic benefits are shared fairly along the value chain.
- Fair treatment of and bargaining for farmers and labor and better quality of life for farmers and farm workers.
- Recognizes and preserves the rights of indigenous people.
- Contributes to sustainable place-based communities and regional/local economies and communities.
- Well-defined humane treatment of animals.
- Produces high quality and safe food in sufficient quantity.
- The label clearly identifies where the product lies on the Sustainable Agriculture continuum.
- Financial incentives are clear and fair.

What do farmers need from eco-labels?

Presenters: Patchwork Farms, Land Stewardship, MOSES, Rural Coalition

- Farmers often have to be very creative in language in brochures and on labels. USDA and other regulatory agencies have problems with some claims.
- Limit government role in eco-labels. There is so much bureaucracy, one hand does not know what the other is doing and they muck it up.
- Support for young farmers.
- Eco-labels, place-based labels serve farmers as a realistic alternative to big agriculture contract systems.
- Third-party certification makes us nervous. Farmers and non-profits can follow Principles and have transparent system for credibility.
- The eco-label can serve as an incentive for young farmers to get involved in agriculture.
- Eco-labels or social labels demonstrate the viability of family farms.
- Eco-labels offer a name recognition marketing factor that is beneficial to farmers.
- The movement of eco-labels can increase projects to clearly enable consumers and producers to connect.
- Family farms as a principle of a label should come first.
- Farmers need signage and shelf space at the big chains. This goes a long way, accompanied by a local label, to inform consumers to buy locally.
- Farmers need labels to educate customers., but the labels should offer a clear representation so that consumers understand what they are getting.

A task force will look at the obstacles and challenges of operationalizing these principles and principles from the original draft.

GOAL: Assess how the rights and needs of farmers can be met through eco-labels.

GOAL: Discuss what is the minimum consideration you need to claim a label is farmworker friendly. Ask how fair trade translates to eco-labels.

- Labels need consistent standards. A label has to have standards behind the farmer label to support the claims on the label.
- Farmers need fair prices and access to markets.
- Farmers need more emphasis on locally grown.
- Farmers who are on the edge of getting out of farming need education, resources, and tools to transition. At the same time we need to educate consumers to support those farmers.
- Patchwork Farms label is governed by standards. Those standards are monitored by a farmer committee. There is a farm visit and signed affidavit saying farmers meet standards.
- The value of labels is that they can bring in money and keep farms profitable.
- Farmers need public recognition.
- Local is good, but some farmers have products to sell that are out of their region. We can rebuild regionality.

Farm worker & farmer rights, fair trade: label and guidelines discussion

Presenters: Canadian EQUI TERRE, CATA

- For a fair trade label to make a fair farmworker claim there must be just worker conditions.
- A living wage that allows a person to live in a dignified way with decent housing and food.
- If a farmer cannot pay a living wage, there needs to be documentation and transparency that shows his inability to pay a living wage.
- Farmworkers should have freedom of association and should be allowed to participate in collective bargaining.
- Farmworkers should have adequate health and safety protections including safe housing and pesticide protections.
- Farmworkers should participate in any label claims processes. Need to assure legitimate representatives for farm workers.
- For a farmworker-friendly label, there need to be confidential independent inspectors.
- There is a great opportunity to open doors for farmworkers with this concept.
- The Fair Trade Concept began in 1988 with a certification program out of Holland. The FLO (definition?) is a third-party certifier of producers, farmer groups, and NGOs that use the Fair Trade label.
- There are 300 registered Fair Trade farmer co-ops. These co-ops usually have access to credit, training support, and a long term commitment from buyers.
- Coffee farmers are offered a floor price of \$1.26/lb., \$1.41/lb. for organic. Production costs around .70/lb.; the current price on the US stock market is .40 /lb.
- The Fair Trade label also has environmentally friendly standards as well as price.

- There is a third-party certification, a clear money trail, and farmer membership in co-ops.
- EquiTerre serves to inform large scale buyers and consumers about Fair Trade coffee. Created marketing materials to educate consumers and buyers about benefits of Fair Trade. Organized a “buycott,” not a boycott. Very active on college campuses including a Just Coffee committee in each university.

What are Consumer’s Union criteria to evaluate an eco-label?

Presenters: Consumers Union, Caroline Nunly Cairns

- Consumers Union has published the first online guide to eco-labels. The goal is to educate, inform, and empower consumers. The site offers information on 150 labels with claims on food and forest products.

What makes a good eco-label?

Meaningful and verifiable standards

- Most important.
- Labeled products must have some clear advantage over non-labeled products.
- Environmental attributes should coincide with consumer expectations.
- Criteria must be objectively verifiable.

Consistency and clarity

- Meaning should not vary.
- Label should not mislead (e.g. imply certification or product characteristics that don’t exist).

Transparency

Labeling organization should make available to the public: criteria and standards, organization structure, funding sources, board of directors and affiliations, process for certification and accreditation, and be transparent about potential conflicts

Independence (free of conflicts of interest)

Types of conflicts of interest: financial interests in sale of certified product; activity to promote and market certified products; manufacture of certified products. Many labels evolve (e.g. organic)

Opportunities for public comment

- Accessible to multiple stakeholders.
- Mechanism for input without conflict of interest.
- Extends understanding of criteria and label.
- Promotes accountability and forum for debate.

GOAL: To learn CU's criteria for evaluating eco labels. How can the needs of consumers be met through eco-labels?

GOAL: Agree on draft commonalities between organic and other valid eco-labels

Common messaging development, including relationship with organic

Presenters: Whole Foods, Mid West Food Alliance & OTA

- A greater part of green market share, not divide the current share.
- Organic and eco-labels should be complimentary in messaging..
- Neutral/external enemies. Compare to conventional not between organic and eco-labels.
- Consumer's Union guidelines should be considered.
- Explore joint opportunities:
 - Inspection/inspectors
 - Accreditation
 - Certification
 - Materials
 - Research and education
 - Training
 - Policy
- Humane meat standards considered for both.
- No GMOs in either label.
- Work together to define strategy for local claims.
- Joint marketing opportunities.
- Common terms, need to develop glossary of terms.
- Support independent family farms.
- Strive for inclusivity.
- Claim protection/ establish an audit trail.
- Consider brand competition, not either/or.
- Look at eco-social label. WTO is trying to put a stop to it, so we have to work together now.
- Prevent greenwashing and false or misleading claims

Some key requirements for organic and other eco-labels:

- Independent third-party certification, accreditation and verification based on established criteria and measurable standards.
- Real enforcement with equitably and appropriately defined roles for the farmers, farm workers, NGO, industry and government sectors
- Truthful / transparent claims that ensure consumer confidence
- Farmer / worker rewards that are cooperatively determined, institutionalized and transparent.
- Synergy and reinforcement between policy and marketplace rewards must be coupled with timely farmer-led, proactive and supportive research, and continuous education and cooperation.
- Participatory stakeholder process with a special recognition of the key role that farmers, farmworkers, and consumers have played and need to continue to play in the development and progressive evolution of standards.

What have you learned from current labeling efforts and where are you going from here?

Presenters: Whole Foods, Food Alliance & World Wildlife Fund

Whole Foods decided not to roll out a new Sustainably Produced label. Too much resistance from organic community. Whole Foods is 100% committed to organic program and did not want to jeopardize the organic market in any way. Feedback was that Sustainable label was very arrogant and divisive, whereas farmer feedback was more positive. Whole Foods had a very difficult task when they tried to develop messaging to differentiate between organic and sustainable. Their program would have followed the Consumers Union criteria, had an application, inspection, required no GE or irradiated products, could not use dirty dozen pesticides. Now feel that they should have brought organic into the discussion earlier. Goal was not to replace organic in the market but to replace conventional.

World Wildlife Fund is working with Forest Stewardship Council, Protected Harvest, and Marine Stewardship to offer products that protect environment and habitat. WWF is working with Unilever to figure out sustainable management practices. WWF helped to launch Protected Harvest, a potato project in (state?) The goal is to move heavy pesticide use to high IPM usage. Marketing a brand of potato. A separate entity is doing the marketing of the product, not the certifier. The Protected Harvest marketing materials compare the price as lower than organic. Lessons learned from WWF:

- Label claims need to be measurable and performance based, with annual site visits, principles behind standards, and transparent standards.

Food Alliance is an eco-label based in Portland, Oregon. Started in 1997 as a non-profit. Working with 78 farmers in the Northwest, expanded to Midwest and other locations. Conducted surveys with consumers and farmers. Farmers looked for a program that could provide credibility of products, positive messages and consumer loyalty and support. Lessons learned:

- Support of store management is very important, big challenge in getting product to market.
- Need constant vigilance for standards.
- Develop and nurture connections with stakeholder groups.
- Looking at fine line between marketing product vs. marketing the label. We can only market the label. The grower has some role in marketing as well.

Eco-label network or council: functioning and formation

What are the priority issues, the right format and the right frequency — next steps?

- Useful conversation.
- Meet again in the Spring, location and date to be decided.
- Develop agenda collaboratively.
- List of contact information for people who could not attend.
- Meet in the Spring, April, May, or June, location TBA.

GOAL: Identify lessons learned, common trends and challenges among labeling efforts.

GOAL: Assess where we go from here. Networking? Hold biannual meetings? Leave St Louis with clear idea of next steps.

Goal: Assess policy opportunities to expand and support eco labels. Create action steps to move policies forward.

Policy opportunities—what do eco-labels want from the Farm Bill 2002?

Also discussion of Conservation Security Act and European Proposal for Support of Multifunctional Agriculture, and FAO/UN

Presenters: George Boody, Michael Sligh, Linda Elswick

Food and Agriculture Organization–United Nations

- There is an opportunity to participate in the FAO's language and standards for A Code of Good Agricultural Practices.
- Seeking multi stakeholder input (from the major groups in Agenda 21).
- Opportunity to participate immediately 10/26/01, and in an electronic conference, Winter 2001-2002.
- Purpose is to provide a statement of clear principles and standards that could provide the basis for a concerted international and national action on sustainable agriculture production systems.

US Farm Bill

- Funding for organic farming research, certification cost-share and reinvigorating public plant breeding.
- There are targeted alerts regarding sustainable agriculture that would be helpful to this group.
- Got to National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture website and Family Farms website.
- Fast Track is a big issue. President seems willing to shift the conservation funds if they can have Fast Track. Fast Track is too dangerous, non-negotiable.
- Harkin Conservation Security Act, a lot of opportunity there for eco-labeling.

Multifunctionality Report *(See Appendix)*

- Scientific study showing that current conservation programs and policy changes are not decreasing runoff in Minnesota.
- Sediment runoff only decreased with a diversified farming system.
- Performed a contingent valuation survey. Found that consumers are willing to pay \$201 per household to conserve soils.
- Current per household cost is \$400, for Federally funded programs that are not conserving soils.
- 150 people surveyed.
- Those that are looking at marketplace change need to look at the policy agenda. There is taxpayer support for conservation practices.

GOAL: Answer the questions: What worked in St. Louis? What do we need to spend more time on? What are the next steps for the principles, relationship w/ organic, farm bill, network building?

Evaluation and next steps

Who is missing from this Forum? Relationship with Organic, Principles, Farm Bill. Is it our best bet to work on principles for eco-labels OR increase consumer awareness to connect farmers and growers?

- Suggestions for more time; two full days would allow fuller discussion
- Choose one topic to focus on next time—for instance common messaging or animal welfare.
- Need a clear mission.
- No need for more presentations.
- Good to frame principles of what eco labels stand for.
- Need to move towards the formation of a network or council.
- Perhaps work on parallel conversations until the next meeting. Focusing on a series of issues we touched on here.
- Need to work really hard on getting more diverse representation.
- More time to make connections with individuals.
- Break out into working groups with working sessions—develop some nuts and bolts.
- Need to focus on animal welfare and limited resource.
- Appreciated the presentations that offered very specific steps and suggestions.