

Compiling an Organic Research Agenda through Farmer-Scientist Collaboration

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The Scientific Congress on Organic Agricultural Research (SCOAR) was established explicitly as a collaborative, peer-level dialogue between producers and scientists, and including others (e.g. government personnel). A primary objective of the project has been using this collaborative process to provide input to an “agenda” for guiding organic agricultural research programs. This presentation will describe the structure and content of the SCOAR Agenda product, and provide observations about the producer-scientist collaborative process. The document is provisionally titled, *“Investigating the ‘O-Word’: Research Outcomes and Agendas for Organic Agriculture.”*

The SCOAR Agenda is organized around a series of “system-management” topics or themes, rather than typical disciplinary categories. For example, the Agenda includes chapter headings entitled, “Soil Microbial Management” and “Systemic Biocontrol of Weeds, Insects, Diseases and Human Pathogens.” This thematic structure reflects the project’s stated goal of, “creating a shared understanding of organic agriculture as an ecological approach to managing farming systems.”

Within each system-management category, the Agenda provides a typology of research needs: “General Research Outcomes” (broad goals suitable for adoption by national programs); “Basic/Systems Research” (longer-term questions and hypotheses about underlying agroecological processes); “Applied/Component Research” (short to medium term questions and hypotheses about practical aspects of system-management); and “Technology Development” (diagnostic tools and research methods). This format is intended to facilitate use of the document by researchers, research program managers, and policy-makers. In addition, each chapter includes a discussion of how the topic area was framed, and a synopsis of known work to date.

We feel that this Agenda succeeds in integrating input from producers and scientists, but the process of developing a national collaboration was highly problematic. In addition to the typical problems associated with such efforts (i.e., differences in “culture” and communication skills; regression to expert-consumer roles), the project faced additional limitations inherent to the organic agricultural endeavor (e.g., huge diversity of crops and management systems; relative lack of experience for both producers and scientists). Future efforts should benefit from this experiment.

Publications Resulting From This Work

Organic Farming Research Foundation. 2002. Administrative Recommendations for Sec 7218: *The Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative* of The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. Organic Farming Research Foundation: Santa Cruz, CA.