

**Strengthening Our Organic Roots –
A Report from the 2008 IFOAM General Assembly in Vignola, Italy
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On June 22-24, 2008, delegates from around the world gathered at the historic Vignola Castle to determine the future of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements for the next three years.

The gathering was marked by lively debate, inspiring addresses, and sweltering heat. (Luckily, the Korean delegation had distributed promotional fans, which helped delegates cope.)

There were 27 candidates for 10 seats on the IFOAM World Board (WB). Yours truly came in 11th by one vote! Only 3 incumbents were re-elected. Katherine DiMatteo, former Executive Director of the Organic Trade Association, was re-elected, and then went on to be selected by the WB to serve as IFOAM's new president. Vice-presidents are Urs Niggli of Switzerland and Roberto Ugas of Peru.

Much of the debate during the General Assembly (GA) focused on an unfinished proposal from the previous World Board to revise IFOAM's Organic Guarantee System, moving away from the IFOAM Basic Standard to a vague "family of standards" concept. Delegates were generally cool to the idea (despite the heat), and approved numerous motions, which re-affirmed the membership's authority over the direction of IFOAM.

Here are some of the motions approved by the General Assembly:

Motion 15.1: The GA instructed the World Board to develop a position paper on the use of organic seed and propagation materials in Organic Agriculture.

Motion 15.4: The Assembly required that the World Board formulate a clear IFOAM policy position opposing the Patenting of Living Organisms, particularly in plants and seeds in Organic Agriculture, these being a threat to biodiversity.

Motion 20.5: The General Assembly expects the "IFOAM Basic Standards" to be maintained, developed and regularly revised, as they are IFOAM's identity and protection of its integrity.

Motion 26.1: The GA confirmed that cell fusion, including protoplast, and/or cytoplasm fusion breeding techniques, do not comply with the principles of organic agriculture. Therefore, the GA urged the World Board to develop clear guidelines on how to deal with varieties derived from cell fusion including protoplast and/or cytoplasm fusion breeding techniques.

Motion 29.2: IFOAM will develop a proposal to be submitted to funding agencies for the development of a study on how to include the gender perspective in all development projects or Organic Agriculture where donor and/or government money is used.

Motion 29.6: The GA requested the WB to propose ways of giving more weight to the representation of farmers' membership organizations, thus reflecting their real weight and value and decision-making rights in the IFOAM.

Motion 29.7: IFOAM, and the World Board, will support, educate and advocate regarding Grower Group Certification in order to obtain recognized and legal status worldwide for small holders, family scale farmers and other small-scale process/handlers. If, or when other groups are considered

for an ICS system, additional criteria will have to be proposed, discussed and agreed upon by the membership.

Motion 29.10: The GA instructed the World Board to develop a position paper on the primordial role of smallholders and family farmers in the context of food sovereignty. This position paper should serve as the basis for the development of internal policies, advocacy and program development.

Motion 29.11: IFOAM recognizes the potentials and dangers stemming from regenerative energy production and will thus establish a working group to specifically deal with the application of organic farming principles in renewable energy production and utilization.

The following definition of “organic agriculture” was presented:

“Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.”

The GA also discussed and adopted numerous recommendations to amend “Program 2011,” which, along with the adopted motions, will guide the work of IFOAM for the next three years.

South Korea was chosen as the location for the 17th IFOAM World Congress and General Assembly in 2011. Proposals from Taiwan and the Philippines were also considered.