



17.-19.2.2021

INTERVIEW

December 2020

Shaping transformation. Stronger. Together.: The organic movement and animal welfare

- **A joint interview with Louise Lutikholt, Director of IFOAM – Organics International, and Jeroom Remmers, Director and Founder of the True Animal Protein Price Coalition (TAPP Coalition)**

BIOFACH / VIVANESS 2021 eSPECIAL will be held from 17–19 February. In addition to exhibitor presentations and diverse opportunities for networking and virtual meet-ups, the eSPECIAL will offer all participants the comprehensive, deeply knowledgeable programme of the BIOFACH and VIVANESS Conference. The main theme for 2021: Shaping Transformation. Stronger. Together. The main focus: how diverse social movements – and the organic food industry – can achieve their goals better by acting together.

In the second of a series of interviews that will appear regularly in the BIOFACH Newsroom (www.biofach.de/en/news) until February, we talked with Louise Lutikholt, Director of IFOAM – Organics International, and Jeroom Remmers, Director and Founder of the True Animal Protein Price Coalition (TAPP Coalition).

The interviewer was Karin Heinze, BIO Reporter International

Ms Lutikholt, IFOAM has high standards for keeping livestock. Could you please briefly describe why it is important to include animal husbandry in the standards, and what those standards include?

Louise Lutikholt: As an international organic organisation, of course we have established a standard, since we're well aware that animals are an integral part of the vast majority of farms. It is a fact that domesticated animals have lived alongside humans for millennia, and have evolved

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together with us. IFOAM firmly believes that we must seek a healthy balance between keeping livestock and the environment, and of course in that effort we must also respect the animals' behaviour and needs, and acknowledge those by raising animals in natural ways that are appropriate for them.

That is why IFOAM has drafted specific rules for appropriate stock densities. Keeping livestock must be integrated with the environment, and also with regional conditions – including suitable local breeds. So in a nutshell, organic animal husbandry can take place only in an organic agricultural context. There are many additional rules covering all aspects of the relationship between farmers and their animals. Landless production and factory farming cause massive problems for people, animals and our planet, and the IFOAM Standards forbid them.

Mr Remmers, what kind of activities does the TAPP Coalition organise?

Jerom Remmers: The TAPP Coalition is a very new, international organisation with members from both organic and conventional farming, organic food producers, and various NGOs (animal welfare, environment, health, young people). One of our co-founders is Volkert Engelmann (CEO of Eosta, one of the largest dealers in certified organic and fair-trade products), who's concerned with correctly incorporating all the external costs of a product. We're very much in agreement on that point. As a first step, we have begun calculating the environmental cost per kilogram of meat from the conventional and organic production of beef, pork and poultry. With these "true prices," we have begun working with policy decision-makers, retailers and consumers on both the national and the European level, and are demanding a fitting tax policy. We have been pretty successful at that so far. We have presented our proposals for a "true price" for meat to the European Parliament, and the news item was reported in the media around the world. Our proposals would lead to an immense reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (120 million tonnes a year) and a reduction of health costs by 9 billion euros a year at the EU level, while at the same time setting aside funds to subsidise farmers and consumers so they can do the right thing.



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Our Dutch minister of agriculture supports the model. She has introduced a bill in the Dutch Parliament, and has also suggested putting it into practice as part of the European Union's Farm-to-Fork strategy. Our proposal is to lower the price of organic vegetables, fruits and plant products with subsidies from a meat tax or with a zero VAT rate. That will make sustainable, healthy food cost less, and food that adversely impacts both our health and our planet cost more. In a new petition (<https://goodfoodprice.eu>), we've called on EU consumers to support such a policy. We're urging supermarkets to inform consumers of the true prices of food, including the environmental costs. German food discounter Penny is the first to do that. Organic meat and milk products have lower true prices than conventional meat (<https://www.retaildetail.eu/en/news/food/why-discounter-penny-doubles-its-prices>).

Are there already points of contact with the organic movement?

Jerome Remmers: Our connection with the organic movement is very close, thanks to our members from the organic sector. One of our proposals is that at least 50% of the income from the meat tax should be returned to the farmer to improve animal welfare and sustainability standards – but also to support farmers in converting to organic farming, and to encourage marketing through the use of this advertising budget. We suggest 600 million euros a year in the Netherlands, and 15-20 billion euros at the EU level, which would then be made available to farmers by way of a meat tax. 25% of such budgets must go to the organic sector to ensure that the Farm-to-Fork strategy's objectives of 25% organically farmed area can be achieved by 2030. The meat tax can actually help finance the transition. And I think more and more people understand that it's necessary.

Does IFOAM already have more in-depth contacts with the animal welfare movement?

Louise Lutikholt: IFOAM is very concerned with the true cost of food – that's our connection with the TAPP Coalition. Up to now, IFOAM has used the concept of including all the involved costs as an approach in its lobbying work. The great thing about the TAPP Coalition is that it is putting



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that idea very vigorously into practice right now. On top of that, IFOAM has had a very long-standing connection with the animal welfare movement – it goes back to the 1970s, when IFOAM was founded. You can see that from our principles and standards. So there's a clear connection. At the moment the metastudy by the Thünen Institute is looking at the advantages of organic farming with regard to aspects of animal welfare as well. It's becoming clear that it's not enough just to rely on standards; the skill and attitude of each individual farmer also count.

Let's go deeper into the subject. We've had growing movements in both organic products and animal welfare for years now. The vegetarian and vegan community is also getting stronger and stronger. These movements are very much a presence in the media. Why haven't IFOAM and the TAPP Coalition, with their joint objectives, joined forces before now?

Jeroom Remmers: I really hope IFOAM will join forces with the TAPP Coalition and others on the EU and global plane to promote and require the concept of a "true pricing of food" – meaning a sustainable, fair pricing for groceries. Coalitions from the green, vegan, animal-rights and organic movements must work together. Together, they can form political majorities in parliaments, and politicians will see that this is an idea that is supported by many different groups. That's the way to get ahead, and it's urgently necessary for us to work together towards our shared goal. We hope more organic food organisations from outside of the Netherlands will join the TAPP Coalition as partners.

Louise Luttkholt: All organisations have different roles, and it's a very good thing when many are pursuing the same goals and heading in the same direction. Each of us must do our share. What I like so much about the TAPP Coalition is that it is a clear signal that social change is taking place. That's excellent, and it's exactly what we want to bring about with IFOAM Organic 3.0. We would like to see the organic movement and other groups moving towards each other. After all, we all agree that food is not just some indifferent commodity, but has a very great influence on our life, our health, the environment, other species, and not least of all, on wealth and poverty in the world. And that's why it's so important to work together towards the



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same horizon – even more than we're already doing. I often imagine a march where other people steadily keep joining in, and we all move in the direction of transformation together. However, I think each of us also needs to maintain our own identity, so as to preserve diversity, because that makes us strong.

There seems to be a consensus that animals need to be treated better, and that we need appropriate prices. Even politicians are giving thought to that. Would a European animal welfare label and the Farm-to-Fork strategy be solutions?

Jerome Remmers: I think we still have a long way to go – I estimate we've now travelled the first 20%. Of course there's also resistance, for instance from the pesticides and fertiliser industry. That is yet another reason to join forces and convince our politicians. Parts of our proposals are already being taken up by the EU Commission – they agree that meat is too cheap now and that steps must be taken to end that. But that has to be implemented in the laws of all EU Member States. We will provide support on that.

Louise Lutikholt: There are already many rifts in the prevailing system. COVID has made that even clearer – for instance with conditions in slaughterhouses. And it also shows how this system depends on factory farming, dumping prices, and exploitation of workers. People are more and more coming to understand that – which will help us get ahead faster. It is very important for us to be ready for this transformation, because the current conditions are no longer bearable. Many people have already had their eyes opened. However, I'd really like to frame the picture more broadly. We talk about this fair pricing system and meat taxes from the perspective of our Northern Hemisphere and a Western lifestyle. At the same time there are so many people in the world who have no access to nutritious food. We shouldn't give the impression that organic products are only for the rich.

Jerome Remmers: No, of course not. In February of last year, the World Bank issued a report finding that to have fair, healthy food worldwide, all unhealthy products need to be taxed, including meat and sugary



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beverages. Taxes have proved to be a strong lever. Otherwise, obesity and other diseases of civilisation caused by unhealthy eating will increase faster, even in low-income countries.

(<https://tappcoalition.eu/nieuws/13251/world-bank-asks-governments-to-introduce-taxes-on-unhealthy-food-like-processed-meat>)

Where do you see specific points of attack for advancing the organic movement and animal welfare together, along with a sustainable transformation – meaning a transformation in farming and food?

Jeroom Remmers: We can survive in this world only if we change our way of eating. And that's exactly the goal of the TAPP Coalition. I have learned that the organic sector has done a great deal of good work in sustainable farming and animal welfare. I think it would be a good next step to pull together in a great coalition, to compel politicians to put effective laws, like meat taxes, into action. And we need to make it really clear that we'll wind up in a biodiversity and climate disaster if we don't act very soon.

Louise Luttkholt: It's fantastic to see that the TAPP Coalition is putting the "true" calculation of costs into practice. In any case I think our two organisations are going in the same direction, looking towards the future. It's so important to hear many voices from different angles, so we can arrive together at our shared goal – a truly sustainable Transformation. Stronger. Together.

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