Introduction to Sustainable and Organic Farming

Farming and the way of producing more high quality food for the growing world population is a major concern worldwide. After years of industrial production of crops and livestock that uses massive amounts of synthetic pesticides, hormones and antibiotics, it has been shown that these practices pose major risks to the environment and if they are continued future generation will face major challenges to meet their demand of animal and plant products.

These fears have unchained the so called green movements, which are nowadays trending topic. Terms such as sustainable and organic farming appear constantly in the media. Governments try to promote organic farming (special incentives are given to farmers that practice organic farming, official bodies regulate that organic products accomplish the certification standards) while scientists and International Institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, UN) or the World Food Program (WFP) focus on promoting sustainable farming.

But do we know what they really mean and why they have become so important?

In Farm4Trade we are aware of the importance of these topics and the interest they awake in many farmers. Therefore, we have decided to prepare one section on organic and one on sustainable farming, to provide guidelines to farmers that want to adapt their production to one of these systems.
Before starting, we would like to dig in the differences and similarities between these two systems to enable farmers to fully understand them and make the right decision. Farmers are also encouraged to read the eBooks that will be published since they will provide further information.

**What is Sustainable Farming?**

Sustainable farming or, in a broader way, sustainable agriculture is the production of food, fibre or other plant or animal products using farming techniques that protect the environment, public health, human communities and animal welfare. In other words, it promotes methods and practices that are economically viable, environmentally friendly and that protect public health.

Sustainable farming means to make the most of what is available in the farm without damaging the environment, it aims to increase the production of the farm and it implies reutilisation of waste products hence increasing the profitability of farming. However it does not only concentrate on the economic aspect of farming, but also on the environment and quality of the products.

**What is Organic Farming?**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) study team on organic farming defines organic farming as follows “A system which avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetic inputs (such as fertilisers, pesticides, hormones, feed additives etc.) and to the maximum feasible extent rely upon crop rotations, crop residues, animal manures, off-farm organic waste, mineral grade rock additives and biological system of nutrient mobilisation and plant protection”.

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In addition to this, the FAO suggest the following definition: “Organic agriculture is a unique production management system which promotes and enhances agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity, and this is accomplished by using on-farm agronomic, biological and mechanical methods in exclusion of all synthetic off-farm inputs”.

**Which are then the differences according to these definitions?**

As it has been said, both systems entail reutilisation of in-farm wastes to maximise the benefits and also consider to reduce the environmental impact and increase the product quality among its goals. However organic emphasise the use of non-synthetic products while sustainable will allow the use of synthetic product that have been proven not to harm the environment.

It can be said that organic tries to go back to traditional agriculture while sustainable tries to conceal innovation and tradition. In both cases the aim is to minimise the impact on the environment, improve the quality, animal welfare and social justice.

It must be said that despite the pros and cons of both systems, which will be discussed in further articles, they have both been proven to be better than industrial agriculture.