

4th Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly
On Harmony with Nature
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**Advantages & Challenges of Organic Farming: A Farming System Based on
Harmony with Nature.**

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Good morning. I'm Jim Gerritsen and I'm an organic farmer. Our farm is called Wood Prairie Farm.

I'd like to offer my thanks to General Assembly for inviting me today to help commemorate with you International Mother Earth Day at the United Nations.

I'd also like to express my gratitude to our friends from the Plurinational State of Bolivia for your significant and generous contributions to the betterment of our world, including your role in organizing today's *Harmony with Nature* session.

It was four years ago that Bolivia hosted the landmark *World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*. It was at this conference where the visionary **Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth (1)** was articulated and approved by delegates. As an organic farmer, I believe this remarkable document clearly expresses the peoples' proper relationship with, and responsibilities to, Mother Earth.

There is one more reason I am grateful, and this reason is more of a personal nature. I have gratitude to the Bolivians, and along with you, your neighbors in Peru, in Chile, and in Ecuador, for your most generous gift, given to the Commons - given to the world's people - and that is the wonderful food we call potatoes. It is all of you - and your ancestors spanning the last 7000 years - who have developed and selected and protected the crop which the world now recognizes as Andean potatoes. My family makes our living from growing your Andean potatoes on our farm. Before me, my father and my grandfather grew potatoes on their farm. We thank you for your gift to the world. Andean potatoes are the world's fourth most important food crop after maize, rice and wheat.

Now, as I said I am an organic farmer. What exactly does organic mean?

Organic farming is a sustainable agricultural system which is natural - in that it seeks to fundamentally be in harmony with nature. It aspires to emulate the sophisticated natural

living systems of Mother Earth. By design, an organic farm is diverse in the range of crops grown. This creates dynamic resilience and facilitates crop rotation - which has the important benefit of interrupting insect and disease cycles and promoting nutrient cycling and soil health. Crop rotation is a practice common to every organic farm. Livestock and crop production are often integrated in complimentary fashion on the same farm. On organic farms there is a balance and some crops are harvested as food and other crops – known as cover crops or green manure crops – are grown to improve the soil.

An organic farm is full of life: of soil life, plant life, animal and human life. Traditional human knowledge, elevating skills of husbandry and stewardship are recognized, valued and honored. Organic systems are biased towards long-term benefit and stability.

Man-made, synthetic chemical or genetically engineered inputs have no place on an organic farm. They are neither needed nor desired. In fact, their toxicity and persistence in the environment have a destructive impact on the intricate organic farm ecosystem.

Organic farming is nature-based and soil-based. Healthy soil is the foundation of organic agriculture. The health, quality and fertility of soil on an organic farm improves over time. Significantly, healthy soil grows healthy plants. Healthy plants are strong and vigorous and have natural defenses against insect and disease. Healthy plants produce delicious, nutrient-dense, high quality food which is wholesome and sustains life.

On the other hand, soil which is minerally unbalanced, abused and made toxic by synthetic inputs and harmful farming practices grow plants which lack health and vitality and are subject to disease and insect problems.

Which would you choose to feed your family? Nutrient-dense organic food from healthy soil and healthy plants? Or food harvested from sickly plants and sprayed with toxic chemicals?

An increasing number of scientific studies make clear that organic farming is the superior production system when it comes to metrics of food quality, food sovereignty and resilience in the face of climate change. One of the most important studies supporting a shift to organic farming was issued by the United Nations just September. It is entitled ***Wake Up Before It Is Too Late – Make Agriculture Truly Sustainable Now for Security in a Changing Climate. (2)***

Perhaps we may agree organic farming predicated on harmony with nature is our best choice for going forward. Yet, organic farming does have challenges. These challenges are primarily political and economic in nature. They originate with powerful forces unwilling to give up wrested control and a risky focus on the short term gain.

To offer one example of challenges, we are seed growers carrying on a tradition of improving, selecting and multiplying seed, a practice which has been in control of farmers for millennia. That is, for 10,000 years – since humankind began to farm - seed has been a genetic resource jointly owned by the people and therefore a part of the

Commons. In recent decades, however, private corporations have increasingly taken control of world seed resources, aided by political decisions which sanction theft from the Commons via a new concept of patents on life forms.

Our recent *OSGATA et al v. Monsanto lawsuit (3)* attempted to challenge the validity of Monsanto's transgenic seed patents. It also sought protection for family farmers who through no fault of their own might become contaminated by Monsanto's patented seed and then perversely be accused of patent infringement for "possessing" Monsanto's patented material. After three years of legal battle we failed to gain legal standing to proceed. However, our position was vindicated and we won a partial victory when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington, DC, ordered Monsanto to not sue American farmers should they become contaminated with trace amounts of their patented seed material.

There are many layers surrounding the right of farmers to farm the way we choose and to have our crops protected from unwanted genetic and chemical trespass. To aid farmers in protecting themselves, this winter, OSGATA published the peer-reviewed *Protecting Organic Seed Integrity – The Organic Farmer's Handbook to GE Avoidance and Testing. (4)* The printed handbook is also available online as an open-source downloadable book.

So how do we implement harmony with nature? I believe a study of the Public Trust Doctrine will be helpful. The Public Trust Doctrine – which goes back to Roman times - establishes as primary, the protection of Mother Earth. It holds that government simply does not possess the authority to sell or "privatize" the Commons. For example, the Public Trust Doctrine asserts government does not have the right to sell to a factory, via a permit process, the power to pollute the Commons, the water or air. Nor does it have the right to sell a government sanctioned monopoly – which is what a patent essentially is – to a corporation which takes an asset, such as seed, from the Commons. Lacking authority, these actions are illegitimate.

I would like to close by reading an excerpt from an excellent new book by Dr. Mary Christina Wood which delves deeply into the Public Trust Doctrine. The book is entitled *Nature's Trust – Environmental Law for a New Ecological Age. (5)*

Writes Dr. Wood, "*The trust infuses existing environmental law and bureaucracy with a protective fiduciary purpose that can rise to modern ecological challenges. When taken to the global level, the trust becomes a diplomatic framework from which international obligations emerge to protect the Earth endowment for all generations.*

The sovereign trust obligation offers a catalyzing principle to citizens worldwide in their common struggle to hold government accountable for protecting life-systems. ... Resonating deeply and resolutely within the ancestral memory of humanity, trust principles must now revive to stir a global assertion of citizenship in defense of humanity and all future generations."

May we all have the courage and conviction to dedicate our lives to harmony with nature and the protection of Mother Earth.

Thank you for your attention.

Footnotes.

1. <http://therightsofnature.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/FINAL-UNIVERSAL-DECLARATION-OF-THE-RIGHTS-OF-MOTHER-EARTH-APRIL-22-2010.pdf>
2. http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ditcted2012d3_en.pdf
3. <http://www.osgata.org/osgata-et-al-v-monsanto/>
4. <http://www.osgata.org/organic-seed-integrity/>
5. <http://www.cambridge.org/us/academic/subjects/law/environmental-law/natures-trust-environmental-law-new-ecological-age?format=HB>