

# Contesting 'Sustainable Intensification' in the UK: The Emerging Organic Discourse

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past 15 years organic food and farming has been a consistent topic of study across a range of disciplines; geography, sociology, social psychology and marketing as well as the agricultural and ecological sciences. Some of these interventions were based on the hope that the organic approach to agriculture could improve not only the farmed environment but also social relations between producers and consumers. From this point of optimism there came an almost instant backlash that moved from the critical to the condemnatory. For several years this was in contrast to the ever-rising commercial fortunes of certified organic products that were becoming increasingly favoured by consumers. The recent economic crisis appears to have stalled the commercial success of organics, leaving it out of fashion with consumers, as well as with many scholars. Global critiques such as those of Holt Giménez and Shattuck, leave organics in an ambiguous position, being labelled part of the neo-liberal project despoiling people and the planet alike, yet badged as 'agro-ecology' being part of what they define as the most radical attempts to redefine the global food system (Holt Giménez & Shattuck 2011). Global bodies such as the UN and World Bank can find that the 'food crisis' of our times might be resolved by forms of sustainable agriculture (De Schutter 2011, IAASTD 2009). Yet, many activists can find that organic has become so degraded as to be simply the choice between one form of corporate branding and another (Patel 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to argue that the organic movement is entering into a new phase of activity and that to understand these changes scholarly accounts need to be cognisant of it as a social movement and sensitive to socio-spatial differences within the movement (Reed 2010). By considering how the movement's organisations have discussed and contested attempts to intensify British agriculture this paper examines new permutations in the discourse of organic agriculture. This new permutation has developed in opposition to, and in tension with, the drive to 'sustainably intensify' British agriculture. Broadly the British state, with support from networks of scientists and corporations, has been attempting to frame the future of the food system as being reliant on a raft of new technologies, which are being resisted by a range of NGOs and social movements. As Holt Giménez and Shattuck have argued these northern, middle class movements - such as the organic movement - often straddle reformist and progressive positions regarding the food system, therefore present opportunities for change that might be of wider significance.

Therefore arguments formed and forged in one context may become relevant for the food system more widely. Before addressing that discussion this paper considers the academic critiques of organic food and farming, as well as the web of relationships within which the movement operates. The paper concludes by considering how the emerging configuration of the movement may start to reshape the socio-spatial relations of food production and consumption.

*“The crisis in 2005–8 was not a blip, but creeping normality (Lang 2010:95)”.*

As Tim Lang has persuasively argued, many of the features of the current crisis of food are not novel but extensions of the trajectory of the food system in the twentieth century (Lang 2010). Yet there are developments, some of which are the outcomes of that trajectory that mean the context within which these changes are taking place needs to be understood (Castells 1997,1998). Lang emphasises the increasing environmental pressures that are potentially going to limit the volumes of food produced. Yet, as will be discussed below, his style of critique shares elements that are common with those who would generally oppose his positions. By using the analytical tools derived from the social sciences we can perhaps mark those trends and interventions that are of lasting significance and those that the transitory. The challenge is to do so in a way that does not use meta-theory to produce narratives that mask differences and moments of resistance. Under the rubric of ‘neo-liberalism’ and those trends in ‘resistance’ to it, are flows and possibilities that suggest a more nuanced picture.

## **2. Social movements**

Social movements like the social networks that they constitute and are created by, are conceptually mid-level phenomena (Crossley 2002, Melucci 1996). For several influential theorists they are important agents of change, Castells argues that they are ‘symptoms of who we are’ in the Information Age. Whilst Charles Tilly argued that they mark a particular form of the contentious politics and the presence democratic opportunities (Castells 1997, Castells 1998, Tilly 2004). Most germane to this paper is the role that social movements play in theories of the contemporary food system, and hence global capitalism, as analysed in the food regime approach (McMichael 2009a, McMichael 2009b). Food regime theory accounts attempt to analyse the stabilities that constitute originally the political economy but increasingly the political ecology of a globalised food system that is based on inequalities both within and between nations and communities (Campbell 2009). Through periodising the operations of the trade in food products as well as the consequences of different forms of agricultural production, processing and distribution, food regime theory seeks to understand the tensions and paradoxes within a regime of accumulation (Burch & Lawrence 2009). In doing so it aims to locate sites and agents of resistance to, as well as mechanisms of, the exploitation of people, animals and eco-systems.

Social movements act in regime theory to either validate or challenge the food cultures of particular food regimes. They can act at moments in the transitions between food regimes either against, or in concert with, other powerful actors. Friedmann in her accounts identified durable food products transported over long distances as central to the food regime of the 1990s, so she saw movements taking ‘local’ and ‘seasonal’ as offering a possible locus of resistance. Although she argued that these could also be appropriated in a regime based around corporate dominance, as observed by Guthman (Guthman 2004a). McMichael more recently has identified the globalised peasant and small farmers’

movement Via Campesina as a movement contesting the neo-liberal conceptualisation of food as a commodity with their arguments for food to be re-localised through arguments for 'food sovereignty'. Whilst this argument prioritises those who are exploited and marginalised in the global South, considerable opportunity is identified for these movements to act in co-ordination with Northern social movements.

### 3. The organic food and farming movement

With its origins in the colonial encounter of Western agriculture with its Asian counterpart, and a separate hermeneutic tradition from German speaking Europe, organic agriculture started in the 1920s (Conford 2001, Reed 2010, Vogt 2007). By the 1930s it had networks of discussion and a few experimental farms across Germany and the British Empire. It was only in the post-war period that organic farming began to spread more widely, partly as a response to the green revolution and partly through the emerging organic movement. Configured, as I have argued elsewhere, as a cultural movement the organic movement lacked for many years the confrontational tactics of many other social movements but worked on exemplars of alternative agricultural practice and increasingly on providing organic products (Reed 2010). During the late 1960s and the early 1970s the Soil Association, the main organisation of the British organic movement, saw a range of radical environmental thinkers and activists clustered around it, ranging from the eco-socialist Barry Commoner, through the conservative Edward Goldsmith by way of its President E F Schumacher (Reed 2004, Reed 2010).

The adoption of EU organic production standards saw these goods move from health food stores and farm shops towards the major retailers, with subsequent rapid growth for those elements of the movement involved in farming (Buck *et al.* 1997). At this point the organic movement found itself at the forefront of a direct contest with its opponents for the first time, as it became a mover within, and tribune for, the protests against Genetically Modified/Engineered plants. These protests demonstrated the global spread of the organic movement until this point and locked it into what Campbell has described as a 'binarism' with GM agriculture (Campbell 2004).

Just as these protests saw these technologies largely removed from Europe and fiercely contested elsewhere, many scholars and activists were positing that organic farming no longer offered any resistance to the dominant forms of agriculture (Guthman 2004b, Lilliston & Cummins 1998, Rigby & Young 2001). Tovey had argued that in the Irish example the appearance of production standards had seen the institutionalisation of the movement and this was confirmed by Moore who demonstrated that many organic growers were moving to a 'post-organic' status to find new cultural space (Moore 2005, Tovey 1997). In part these differences can be explained by the local trajectories of different national organic movements. Although the protest actions in the UK that provided elements of a repertoire of protest that was widely emulated, suggesting divergent flows within and between national movements (della Porta & Tarrow 2005, Reed 2010). Guthman's prescription for subsidies for organic production, stronger regulations and more technical support appear very similar to initiatives common in Europe, yet the message of the 'conventionalisation thesis' has been broadly applied without these caveats (Formartz 2006, Patel 2007, Pollan 2006). There has also been much sport in what Johnston and Szabo have described as "scholarly cynicism about affluent food consumers and their selfish motivations" (Johnston & Szabo 2010:14)

#### 4. Sustainable Intensification

“We head into a perfect storm in 2030, because all of these things are operating on the same time frame, ...If we don't address this, we can expect major destabilisation, an increase in rioting and potentially significant problems with international migration, as people move out to avoid food and water shortages”, (Sample 2009)

The present food crisis, which started in early 2008, was triggered by rapidly rising international prices of grains, propelled by a series of short-term factors forming a “perfect storm”; more importantly, however, many underlying longer-term factors had been brewing in the market for some time, making the crisis inevitable. (United Nations 2009:26)

What for the United Nations was an inevitable crisis, is for Sir John Beddington, Chief Scientist to the UK government, a harbinger of an even more perfect storm of globalised disorder and hardship as food begins to run short. A new consensus has been rapidly appearing within elite groups, that food supplies are going to be compressed and this is likely to become a prominent feature of the next decades. The analysis of the flows and forces that led to the vortex of this storm forming quickly became divided between those who view it as the product of the pressures stemming from the success of development and resulting environmental pressures and those who view it as a product of the globalised market in food. The former group tend to emphasise the importance of technological innovation, underpinned by applied scientific research to increase the productivity of agriculture. For them the pressures of inexorable global population growth to the peak of 9 billion in 2050, in tandem with the environmental pressures of global warming means that the challenge is beyond distribution but of the absolute physical lack of agricultural products. Often self-consciously they are echoing the arguments that launched the green revolution, arguing for a renewal of that project but with a greater attentiveness to the environmental consequences of such intensification of production.

The arguments that are most closely associated with the discourse of food security poses three questions, that of the *access* to food, its overall *availability* and its relative *affordability*. Within this discourse, questions of the demand for food and the conformation of those foodstuffs, the power of the major market players and global management of those resources are reified. It also tends towards the Malthusian, in that population dynamics are almost always negative in their consequence, in that high numbers are an unmitigatedly bad outcome and an aging population is just as problematic. In this we can see the arguments around food security as a form of environmentalism, conforming closely to what Dryzek has previously classified as ‘administrative rationalism’. In this discourse liberal capitalism and the administrative state are reified, with nature subsumed to human problem solving and the key agents of change are experts and/or managers motivated by the public interest, the ‘public’ being a unitary group rather than a range of constituencies (Dryzek 1997).

Those who see the crisis as the result of the operations of the global market target a range of actors and processes. Walden Bello, looking at the crisis from the perspective of the global south points to the extension of liberal capitalism through the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s that brought local food producers into the global market and broke down the infrastructures looking to develop national capacity (Bello 2009). Others point directly to the role of speculators in causing the volatility, as investors have poured into complex speculative tools (Kaufman 2011). Yet, these critiques are often unable to adopt positions of diametric opposition as they share some of the premises of the arguments of their opponents. Most share the opinion that the planet is approaching its natural limits and

many hold even more pessimistic arguments about global warming and the vicissitudes of global warming (Holden 2007, Pfeiffer 2006).

For many hailing the need for a new or doubly green revolution, the appeal of this sort of administrative rationalism is apparent, and to a degree those groups that opposed, which opposed the aspects of the green revolution, are opposed to this renaissance. Yet, it is apparent that both groups share many of the same epistemic assumptions; the finite limits of the planet, the demographic pressures and the impending peril of climate change. Equally aspects of their lexicon are shared, dominated by conservation of resources, shades of green and the importance of biological processes. It is over questions of participation, the forms of technology to be deployed, the role of liberal markets and national autonomy that they diverge.

## 5. Collapsed in the aisles

In fact, much of the 'organic' produce shipped in from around the world and across the UK today carries no sense of connection with its geography or its farmers. It is as anonymous as the majority of conventional chemically produced foods, as dull in flavour and as lacking in nutritional vitality (Rose 2010)

Sir Julian Rose used his position as a pioneer, having farmed organically since 1975, and an article in *The Ecologist* magazine to point out the failings of the contemporary organic industry. His answer was for the movement to return to its roots and to stop chasing a "big branded chimera". In this Sir Julian echoed academic and activists critiques of organic food. The sociologist Raj Patel has condemned the difference between organic and non-organic food as the choice between 'Pepsi and coke' (Patel 2007). Whilst Heath and Potter condemn organic products because organics they argue is based on unfounded health claims and the difference in price purchases only social distinction, in contrast to their quixotic example of a hybrid car. Although Patel, Heath and Potter are drawing on the North American experience for their critique Rose's follows the same pattern although confining itself the UK. Organic food has become a commodity like any other by being sold in supermarkets, and for Heath and Potter they are worse because they claim a spurious moral status and so create a socially destructive cachet or 'cool'. Their arguments are not based on evidence but rather an argument that the system of retailing is, as Rose argues, "Orwellian".

Attacks such as Rose's are hardly new in *The Ecologist* but the difference was the context of this criticism, as sales of organic food in the supermarkets and beyond were falling. Organic sales began to fall as soon as the recession began with sales falling by 13.9% at the of 2009, after rising by 1.7% overall in 2008 and showing a signs of a return in 2010 as month by month comparisons moved from -12% to -8%. This was not a uniform decline, with babyfood and milk continuing to increase sales throughout the period, whilst organic prepared foods, meat and brands such as Duchy Originals, owned by Prince Charles, being particularly hit (The Soil Association 2010). Although the opponents of organics in the media and farming industry sniped, analysts in the retail sector remained confident in the resilience of the organic sector.

Shoppers have not performed a u-turn on ethics, so the challenge for organic is to make sure that communication of its benefits is clear and consistent. If they get that right, it would be sensible to assume that volume sales could pick up as the economy recovers. (Grocer 2009)

The decline in sales certainly caused difficulties to businesses that were planning for continued expansion and particularly for meat producers, with the most high profile victim

being Price Charles who found his brand being rescued by the supermarket 'Waitrose'. The amount of land organically managed rose in 2009, to 4.3% of the UK's farmland. The geographic distribution of organic farmland remains complex with a strong increase in Wales reflecting that nations agricultural policies and a continuing strong presence in the South West of England.

The plunge in sales had a galvanising affect on the organic industry in the UK, as it had previously tended to allow the campaigning groups to promote organic whilst individual businesses focused on marketing their own brands (Reed 2009). This changed with the formation of the organic trade board (OTB)<sup>1</sup>, which as well as seeking to represent the industry, looks to share market research, promote effective communication with consumers and to improve the evidence base for organic products. As part of this the OTB along with the environmental charity Sustain promoted the OrganicUK campaign to raise funds that would be matched by the EU to promote organic products generically in the UK, with the announcement of a 3 year promotional campaign costing £2million in July 2010. In the autumn of 2010 this collective effort was initially eclipsed by one of the donors to OrganicUK solo effort. The Yeo Valley dairy used short advertising slots during the popular TV talent show the 'X-factor' to trail an on-line video of some of its farmers rapping. In the first two days it had secured over 350,000 on-line views which had risen to 1.4 million by mid-December on the dairy's own YouTube channel, inevitably - Yeotube. Its products during this period offered the chance to win tickets to the X Factor, as Yeo Valley spent £5million attracting a youthful audience for organic milk<sup>2</sup>.

The recession in organic sales saw the UK organic industry organise itself and move into promotional activities in many ways clarifying the role of the charities such as the Soil Association that had previously conducted much of this work. That it was the dairy businesses, the least effected by the recession and the largest enterprises, that were at the forefront of these developments suggests something of the future direction of the organic industry. Until the recession much of the advertising of organic products had been marked by elitism, with branding aimed at more affluent consumers (Cook, Reed et al. 2008). For many in marketing and retailing this dovetailed with the higher costs of production in some organic systems, resulting in organics to be positioned within stores and brandscapes at the more expensive end of product ranges. Some, such as Riverford's Guy Watson consistently argued against this approach and the damaging impacts it had on the organic market, but until the recession their warnings went unheeded. The first advertising campaign resulting from this initiative 'Why I love Organic', changed the tenor of previous organic marketing by deliberately featuring working men, alongside celebrity endorsements and social media links. Without the upward pressure of rising incomes, the previous marketing strategy was exposed. Re-orientated by actors such as the OTB the emerging strategy is less elitist as it aims at penetrating the mass-markets often disparaged by activists.

## 6. Super dairies

In 2009 most of England's dairy cattle lived on farms that ran herds of between 100-200 animals, with the second largest group were those in herds of over 200 animals. Against

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<sup>1</sup> [www.organictradeboard.co.uk](http://www.organictradeboard.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.yeovalleyorganic.co.uk/>

the backdrop of an overall decline in the number of dairy animals through the decade, the role of larger herds in dairy production had been growing<sup>3</sup>. Many of the herds recorded as being over 200 animals, are kept on separate farms but owned and managed by one enterprise. The proposal for a single dairy unit of over 8100 cows, managed as one unit, a step of 5800 more cows than the next largest unit, signalled a major leap in the scale of farms producing milk in the UK. Those behind the proposal argued that they would be able to realise economies of scale, in that the unit would generate energy from anaerobic digestion facilities on site and transportation costs would be lowered, with the welfare of the animals maximised by being kept mainly indoors, with only limited summer grazing<sup>4</sup>. The farmers behind this proposal were open that their inspiration was the similar dairy units that they had seen in Wisconsin, in the United States. In December 2009 an application for the requisite planning permission was lodged with North Kesteven District Council.

The Nocton proposal tripped across the wires of numerous groups and cultural boundaries that were not always found in common cause. Much of the debate was defined within the cultural terms of 'Britishness' - that the UK had a distinct tradition of dairy farming and that this represents a good example to other countries; post-imperial agricultural leadership. The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), a London based umbrella body for a coalition of animal protection societies, launched a campaign against the use of milk from battery farm cows. The "Not in my Cuppa" used of the role milk in the national beverage - the cup of tea - as the fulcrum for arguments about the impacts of animal welfare for cows in such a system as proposed at Nocton. In this campaign they were joined by the Compassion in World Farming, Friends of the Earth, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, The Soil Association, 38 Degrees and a group from the area near the proposed unit - Campaign Against Factory Farming Operations. These latter groups widened the arguments to the future of farming, the impact on the environment - locally and globally - as well as the conservation of the traditional English landscape, with some proposing the positive solution being the adoption of organic milk and dairying.

It was the statutory body charged with protecting the environment, the Environment Agency, which withheld its permission over concerns about the amount of manure being generated on the farm and its likely impact on the local watercourses. In April 2010, the application was withdrawn in the light of this advice and in November a revised application for a unit of 3,770 cows was submitted, only to be withdrawn in February 2011. In a statement from Nocton's developers, they cited the lack of research that they could draw on to persuade the Environment Agency that the farm did not represent a threat to the local aquifer. They were at pains to point to their relationship with the Agency:

*We believe the Environment Agency has not acted under any pressure in reaching this decision and that no undue influence from other individuals or organisations has been brought to bear; any claims to this effect would be both disingenuous and self-serving (Nocton Dairies 2011).*

The district council, as the ultimate planning authority, made it clear that it had concerns about the housing of workers, the loss of amenity to local people and the wastes from the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dairyco.org.uk/datum/on-farm-data/cow-numbers/uk-cow-numbers.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.noctondairies.co.uk/>

unit. Those behind the proposal knew that the opinions of the Environment Agency were central, as they were unlikely to be overturned at appeal, whilst those of the district council could be.

This application was about far more than the enterprise alone, as the statement withdrawing the application made clear:

*The challenge has been laid down to the farming industry to produce more with less. We need leadership to help us do this and proactive advice from regulatory experts – only a practical, informed and ‘can-do’ approach will move this whole agenda forward* (Nocton Dairies 2011).

Their opponents were also clear that victory for Nocton would have been a ‘tipping point’ and the end of “Our smaller-scale, predominantly pasture-based dairy farmers, under whose stewardship Britain’s dairy cows have grazed countryside pastures for generations” (Morris 2011). Of equal significance was that the British public had rejected intensive animal husbandry and “Britain is a world beacon for farm animal welfare”, so a failure would encourage others to adopt intensive technologies.

The Soil Association and the WPSA published a report in April 2011 pointing out how large-scale developments such as Nocton and similar pig unit at Foston in Derbyshire would put many smaller farmers out of business. Foston, a proposal for a pig unit of would breed around 25,000 young pigs a year and was the subject of the ‘Not in my Banger’ campaign, a clone of the ‘Not in my Cuppa’ one targeting Nocton. The Soil Association reported argued that as the domestic supply of milk was already fulfilled by, Nocton would have to displace existing producers by undercutting them on price. Using industry figures, they argued 60-100 average sized farm businesses would be displaced by Nocton’s entry into the milk industry. The Soil Association had been campaigning against intensive animal production in the UK since the 1960s, but the arguments against Nocton, and Foston, represent a new permutation in their discourse. Previous arguments have been concerned with the technologies of confined production; the new permutation brings into play the scale of this deployment. The Soil Association is beginning to defend explicitly family farming:

*These smaller dairies and pig producers will be ideally suited to serving local markets, and will often represent a family’s main or at least an important source of their income. The families running many of these farms will have been producing milk and pork for generations* (The Soil Association 2011:4).

## **7. Cloned**

As the UK got used to the idea of a coalition government it was revealed in August 2010 that a number of cloned cattle had entered the food chain. A cattle breeder in the Scottish Highlands had privately imported cloned embryos to augment his herd’s line and at least one of these animals had found their way into the food chain. Given the UK’s history of cattle related food and health crises this was met with newspaper headlines and an investigation by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). As a novel food product, the safety of which had yet to be assessed it should not have entered the food chain, although the consequences for non-compliance were opaque. Coincidentally the EU parliament had voted in July for a moratorium on cloned animals or their progeny or products entering the food chain, although the Commission did not share that position. The topic gained pace as



in late November, after a review initiated by the FSA, the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP), reported that the produce from and cloned animals themselves were 'unlikely to present a food safety risk'. It also appealed for more evidence to be able to present findings with greater certainty and that consumers might want a labeling scheme in place. This opened the way for the FSA board to discuss the matter, and in turn make a recommendation to the Minister, which it did in May 2011, that the progeny of cloned animals be allowed in the food chain. Even if the Minister approved clones and their produce as 'safe', many anticipated considerable problems with public acceptance of these products, although press reports suggest that the ministers were not minded to press for labeling.

Despite the change in government this move represents continuity with the previous administration's determination to have the administrative and legal framework in place for genetically engineered or modified plants despite no domestic market or demand to grow such crops. The FSA initiated the safety review as no farmer or business had done so, and set the procedure in motion to have clones found to be safe. Even though research commissioned by the FSA had found widespread opposition from the public to cloning, and a belief that the system of approval was not adequate:

- There is a major mismatch between the methods used by regulatory
- authorities to assess food safety and the public's perception of what
- is needed. Participants wanted to see methods for assessing food
- safety that were analogous to the approach used in clinical drugs trials (Creative Research 2008 :2)

In this the research echoed that of the more formal and larger consultation about plants 'GM Nation' that there was little interest in such crops being planted. As with GM plants none of the supermarkets were prepared to endorse the use of clones and had previously made unambiguous statements about avoiding clones or their products. The stance of the government appeared to be to leave the opportunity in place to take up GM plants, and more recently clones, in anticipation of domestic demand for such products. This is fully in accordance with the discourse of food security discussed above, where technologies managed by experts in the public interest will address the upcoming crisis.

## 8. Discussion

In their categorisation of the responses to the global food system Holt Gimenez and Shuttack note that attention needs to be paid to the specific circumstances of movements and the opportunities for alliance. This paper has aimed to do just that and then suggest how these might have a wider influence, as they are diffused through the global organic movement. On occasions proponents have argued because the organic movement in their locality or jurisdiction has displayed particular tendencies then all organic movements across the planet will follow suit. It may be that organics in North America, at a federal level, or within a particular certification system has become dominated by corporate interests. Similarly individual organic farmers are part of the most radical of groups and champions of the broadest change to the agricultural system - such as Jose Bove. The British organic movement has displayed tendencies that suggest an accommodation with the food system; over 70% of organic products in the UK are sold through supermarkets. Yet, it has

also displayed the more strident opposition to GM technologies, continues to contest other technologies that seek to intensify British agriculture and battle the corporate domination of agriculture more broadly.

Joining with other movements, across ideological and spatial divides remains a challenge for the British movement. Although much of the English language critique of the food system stems from North America, on the ground the differences between European food system and that of the US robs these criticisms of practical application. The broad ideology might be shared, the rhetoric and imagery appeal, but the gap in practice and policy is too wide to have much practical bearing. As the debate about air freighting organic produce demonstrates, the trade-offs between environmental benefits and social goods are difficult; with the Soil Association ultimately preferring to demonstrate solidarity rather than environmental purity. Although influential individual enterprises such as the Riverford family of box schemes have taken a different route, choosing not to airfreight (Watson and Baxter 2008). At the same time global trends, such as the embedded water in meat and dairy products are less germane when considering the wet, temperate uplands of the west of England and Wales. Here often the most sustainable form of agriculture is extensive grass fed animal husbandry. Weaving a sustainable food system will be in part attentiveness of the specifics of place and culture, but solidarity across distance will also be important.

The focus of the organic movement also remains locked onto the food system of the twentieth century, with questions of agriculture production trumping those of processing, distribution and consumption although these latter concerns are moving up the agenda. Although occasionally the role of poorly paid, migrant and abused labour has been raised in relation to the food industry; this has not been taken up the domestic organic movement. The IFOAM review of organic standards may be put social justice into the core of organic aspirations, it has yet to find its way into certification standards. Repenting from its up-market image during the boom years at the turn of the century, the newly organised organic sector is determined to be more egalitarian and popular, social claims about organics have yet to find its way into the promotion of organic products. It also needs to construct new roles for activists, producing and consuming organic products are quietist roles - the farmers literally tying people to the farm and the latter at most a supporting role. Experiments in mass share holding of a farm, or more direct forms of protest have proved to be popular within the movement suggesting that new roles could be quickly filled if more widely articulated.

## 9. Conclusion

By insisting on class positions tied to food movements, Holt Gimenez and Shuttack remind us that whilst northern consumers are relatively powerful actors in the food system, this power is circumscribed by political opportunity and the greater powers of corporate actors. Hence protests and mobilisation tend to be reactive, contestations of the actions of others rather than initiatives from the movement. The protests and lobbying against the introduction of clones and mega-dairies continues a long history of fighting the development of mainstream agriculture - innovation by innovation. One area where the movement has been able to make considerable strides in the development of knowledge and interventions supportive of sustainable agriculture. Although the global

movement has been littered with research farms, test plots and applied research, it is only in the past twenty years that a sustained effort has been put in place to develop peer-reviewed scientific knowledge about organics. This represents in part a retreat by the movement away from an insistence on 'wholistic' enquiry into organic farming, that made investigations both complex and often outside the parameters of the existing journal system. It also represents the determination of scholars allied with the movement to provide the movement with not only the practical knowledge to farm organically but also to argue for organic in policy circles. After nearly 80 years of work the organic movement is increasingly able to prove its case, without presuming that decisions are always made with regard to evidence.

The British organic movement is likely to remain straddling the reformist and progressive tendencies within the food system, until the political opportunity structure within the food system opens. If the history of the movement is a guide then this is not solely about the dominant food system but also crises within the movement itself, the disintegration of the late 1960s saw the emergence of organic standards; the decline in the early 1990s saw the introduction of box schemes and the greatest headway was made in opposing the introduction of GM crops. The British organic movement continues to display the potential to be influential actor in reforming the food system (Reed 2010). The form and timing of its next significant intervention is not apparent but its continued activity suggests that it respond will to the next significant opportunity.

In the past decades the British organic movement has provided the global organic movement and those movements allied to it with a number of examples that have created opportunities. The most significant has been to pioneer the construction of a market based on a certification scheme controlled by a social movement. This development created the space and resources both physical and ideological for the wider movement to grow rapidly. The forms of protest developed by British protestors against GM crops, which had in turn been adapted from Australian tactics, were widely emulated as the dispute was diffused globally. This suggests that whilst northern movements may play a particular role in the global social movements that not all national movements are equally influential or positioned to be so. Whether it is the legacy of the empire or that British English is a variety of the *lingua franca* of the dominant global language, the UK's organic movement appears to have historically enjoyed a particular place of influence. This suggests that innovations within and by the British movement may have a wider importance for the global movement, making it worthy of continued study and the investment of energy by activists looking to make a change to the global food system.

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