



CLARENCE HOUSE

I was delighted to learn that this conference was being arranged and particularly wanted to send you every possible encouragement.

My own interest in organic agriculture began more than twenty five years ago when I started to learn of what was being done in Germany as a result of the efforts of a remarkable man, called Dr. Hardy Vogtmann, who convincingly demonstrated the results that could be achieved from this approach to food production that relies on natural systems working in harmony with Nature. Soon afterwards, I began to convert my own farm at Highgrove to an organic system. Since then I have experienced the ups and downs of trying to farm almost 500 hectares of organic production, so I do know something about the challenges!

Organic farming is not straightforward. The short-cuts and quick fixes of so-called 'conventional' agriculture are simply not available. Nor is it a route to instant financial success. Yet the benefits, as far as I am concerned, are enormous. Organic farming delivers all the things that people really want from agriculture – namely, high quality, healthy food; protection of the environment; high standards of animal welfare and more jobs. I also happen to believe that organic systems bring the “culture” back into agriculture; something which I think society is in danger of overlooking. Without a cultural heart, why on Earth would young people want to stay on farms, or those who live in an urban environment be attracted back into agriculture? And how else are we to reverse the damaging trends of the last half century?

The whole question of food production and food security is very much in the news at the moment and is an issue that is close to my heart, as it is no doubt to yours. There are plenty of people arguing that the only way to feed a growing world population will be through ever greater intensification of agriculture, with larger farms and more 'efficient' production. In this scenario, traditional practices are swept away in favour of 'modern' systems that rely on external inputs of fossil fuels, chemicals and heavy machinery.

I do understand why the lure of industrially-produced food is so attractive to some people, all of whom I am convinced have the best of intentions. But I think it is very important that society recognizes the true costs, not just in environmental terms, but also in terms of its impact on our own health. If we lose the essential balance and disrupt the virtuous circle, then we risk incurring long-term and unmanageable costs.

The truth is that by treating food as an easy commodity, rather than a precious gift from Nature, we have started playing games with our health and with the environment, from which humanity can only stand to lose. That is why maintaining the integrity of organic farming, through robust standards and vigilant enforcement, is essential. People buy organic food because it is different, because they believe it is better for them and better for the environment, and because they trust our principles and standards. If that trust is lost – and there are plenty of people who would be delighted if it was – it can never be regained.

I believe fundamentally that the solution to global food security and shortages, climate crisis and our grandchildren's future rests largely with the truly sustainable farmer who works in harmony with Nature, harnessing positive forces through healthy soil, healthy crops and healthy animals and, in so doing, providing healthy food. Organic systems deliver all these benefits and it is very encouraging that there is such interest in Norway at the moment. I know that in many parts of your wild and beautiful country the climate does not encourage mixed farming, but the small average farm size and the tradition of family farming, in a vibrant rural culture, will hopefully encourage more pioneers to emerge.

Every organic conference and meeting I have ever attended has had a very special spirit, and I am sure this will also be the case for your gathering at Kongsgården. I hope your discussions will be both enjoyable and fruitful, and that organic farming in Norway will go from strength to strength.

Charlie

