Organic beekeeping worldwide

World conference, Threats, Requirements

Natrurland - Biofach 2012 
Out in force & innovations

Natrurland Representative 
in India

Green light for Organic 
between EU and USA
Contents:  
EDITORIAL ..........................................................................................................................03

NEWS ABOUT NATURLAND
• Naturland at BioFach 2012
  - Naturland out in force .............................................................................................04
  - 4. International Members’ Meeting ..........................................................................05
• Colombia favours sustainability ..................................................................................07
• Representative of Naturland in India  
  - Organic agriculture in India ....................................................................................07
  - Members of Naturland in South India .......................................................................08
• Equivalence agreement for organic products concluded between EU and USA ........10
• Naturland Standards revised ....................................................................................10

PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION
• 2. World Conference on Organic Beekeeping ..........................................................11
• GMOs pose a threat to Mexican beekeepers ...............................................................13
• Organic beekeeping – requirements made of certification procedures ..............14

MEMBERS’ FORUM
• Peermade Development Society (PDS) ..................................................................15
Dear members and partners of Naturland the world over,

Robert Dax, a pioneer in the field of organic agriculture and one of the founders of the health food wholesalers „Öko-ring”, died suddenly on 9th May, 2012. In 1983 he closely followed the establishment of the Naturland association, and in 1993 he created a health food wholesale organisation from an amalgamation of Naturland farmers and customers, a project which he pursued with great energy and enthusiasm, turning it into a successful and respected business, called „Öko-ring”, on which he has left a lasting imprint. His positive attitude and his kindness permeated the whole organic industry. With Robert Dax’s death, Naturland, and the organic movement as a whole, have lost an important fellow campaigner and pioneer of organic agriculture.

Like Robert Dax, Naturland farmers focused on sales right from the start, looking out for links to the trade, thus making a significant contribution to the development and growth of the organic market. Robert Dax devoted a great deal of his time to adult education and to making the public aware of where their food actually came from. It was clear that any changes in agriculture would go hand in hand with changes in the customers’ buying behaviour. Besides the ecological and social pillars of sustainability, economic sustainability plays an equally important role.

If one looks back at the early days of health food trading, with produce sold direct from the farm, and the few small health food specialty shops with their limited range of products, some of which were of substandard quality, one can see that the organic market has made remarkable progress in many countries since then.

And the size of the organic markets is on the increase. From a global perspective, the organic market grew to attain a figure of 59 billion US$ by 2010. It is in the main in the USA and a great number of European countries that healthy growth figures have been achieved. One third of the sales made on the European organic market were in Germany, with a growth rate of 9% in 2011.

Organic foodstuffs have ceased to be a niche product and have meanwhile established themselves on the mainstream market. In many countries today one can find a more or less comprehensive range of organic foodstuffs in any conventional supermarket. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the organic background and the absolute necessity for a global transformation process to be initiated are always understood. Futurologists foresee great opportunities for organic agriculture and organic foodstuffs in all respects; many of them even speak of a „megatrend”. However, this is far from being a trend, but is rather a question of sheer survival. In many countries where we have partners, organic agriculture has grown considerably, but in such cases almost exclusively with the aim of exporting the produce; the domestic market is poorly developed. However, it is important that not only exports but also the domestic demand for organic produce and the development of domestic markets be stimulated. There is potential for this in almost every country, if not in all of them. Recognising this potential and fostering the positive dynamics of market development – in other words, enhancing the public’s understanding of organic principles – these are the objectives of Naturland and its partners throughout the world.

Steffen Reese
At this year’s BioFach in Nuremberg, Germany, Naturland and its 50 partners demonstrated that sustainability is to be understood as a comprehensive all-round package. As Naturland understands it, sustainability encompasses ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects. At the same time Naturland focused on an area that often receives too little attention: such as the soil as a key resource of climate protection and water conservation, and as the basis of all food production. Besides this Naturland demonstrated approaches made by organic agriculture as a solution to problems of world food security, and the environmental services provided by organic aquaculture.

All eyes were on a chocolate fountain designed to draw attention to the topic of “organic plus fair trade”. Organic fair trade bananas from the fair trade organisation BanaFair, and organic fair trade bread from Hofpfisterei, a baker in Munich, were provided to dip into the chocolate fountain. It was there to demonstrate the true purpose of the “Naturland Fair” standards: the amalgamation of the fair trade concept between north and south. The first products to comply entirely with this global fair trade concept are 15 new whole milk chocolate varieties produced by GEPA the fair trade company. They contain organic fair trade cocoa and demerara sugar, produced by smallholders in Asia and Latin America, and also organic fair trade milk, produced by the co-operative dairy Milchwerke Berchtesgadener Land. As a whole, interest in such synergy products is great at every stage of the food chain. There are already new developments in the pipeline that are expected to appear later this year. At the BioFach congress, Petra Heine, representative of Naturland gave a talk describing the steps that the partners of Naturland need to take to qualify for voluntary certification to the “Naturland Fair” standards.

For many years now, Naturland has been involved in seeking sustainable solutions to problems associated with fish breeding and fishing. With its standards on organic aquaculture and sustainable fishing, this organic association has performed extensive pioneering work. For the first time this year, Naturland and BioFach organised a fish market to provide visitors with information whilst inviting them to sample their products. Here visitors were able to gain a representative general impression of the organic variety of fish and seafood available on the market.

As every year, visitors were able to sample to their heart’s content the delicacies offered at the Naturland booth party. And, as every year, donations were collected
At the start of a successful BioFach 2012, the fourth international Naturland members’ meeting was held, on 16th February. The board of directors, the world advisory board, management and staff provided information on developments in the association’s work, agricultural policy and the growing support evidenced by society as a whole for organic agriculture and fair trade.

GEPA champions Naturland
GEPA is Europe’s largest fair trade organisation, with an annual turnover of almost 60 million euros. In his guest lecture to the members of Naturland, Robin Roth, general manager of GEPA, delineated not only GEPA’s prime objective, namely socially acceptable trading, but also emphasised the environmental compatibility of this principle – with particular reference to the relationship between the north and south. In doing so, he focused on certification to “Naturland Fair” standards. End of the year 2011, GEPA presented the first fair trade organic chocolate, made with fair trade organic cocoa and fair trade ingredients.

This year the proceeds of the booth party went to the Panay Fair Trade Center (PFTC) in the Philippines to help them build a school and day-care centre. Here the children of the employees of Panay, and many others too, are given an education that will prove to be an invaluable start towards a self-determined life. Such institutions ensure investment in the education of future generations. In this way Naturland provides assistance to the social projects of its partners too, within the scope of its possibilities.
trade organic Alpine dairy milk, under the motto “fair trade all round – the south meets the north”, in conjunction with the dairy Milchwerke Berchtesgadener Land, a partner of Naturland; in the meantime this range has expanded to 15 varieties now available in the shops. These products show the work of Naturland on combining organic principles with those of fair trade produces synergies which enable members from the north and south to give each other mutual support. In his talk, Robin Roth described the challenges to be overcome by both companies and trading partners in Germany. The qualities required, namely sustainability and transparency, are the most important elements to establish credibility, a criterion to which GEPA and Naturland both relate. The expectations placed in organic and fair trade foodstuffs are very high. This has an effect on the producers, who notice increased stringency in the form of amendments to the standards, additional paperwork and/or stricter inspection. The step Naturland took to make the connection between fair trade products derived from ingredients produced in the north and the south and the topic of global fair trade and organic production methods, and to give encouragement to this development, is in Robin Roth’s opinion a unique opportunity to which he gave wholehearted support from the very beginning.

At the end of the meeting, Naturland paid tribute to its long-standing members, namely Expalsa, BioCentinela and The Organic Salmon Company for 10 years’ membership and Putharjora Tea Garden Pvt. Ltd. for its 15 years of membership.
Colombia favours sustainability

Juan Manuel Santos, the president of Colombia, invited Steffen Reese, general manager of Naturland, to attend a meeting of business people on the occasion of his official state visit to Berlin in 2011. Following this, he had an appointment with the Colombian ambassador, Juan Mayr Maldonado, on 24th January, 2012.

The republic of Colombia, with its climatic and topographical variety, is a country with enormous natural resources. In terms of the number of species per unit area, Colombia ranks second world-wide. Ten per cent of all the world’s species are to be found on Colombian soil. In Colombia 38.4 million hectares are farmed agriculturally or developed. However, as enormous as Colombia’s biodiversity is, it is also very vulnerable, for such reasons as the implementation of inappropriate political measures on the use of the territory, the cultivation of illegal crops, the expansion of the infrastructure, mining, the consumption of timber, fires, ruthless exploitation, pollution and the changing climate. As a result, 377 animal species and 254 plant species are threatened with extinction, one third of Colombia’s forests have been destroyed, 50% of the soil is subject to erosion and 40% of the river areas are endangered to a greater or lesser extent. Since the establishment of Colombia’s political constitution in 1991, the protection of the environment has been a tenet of its politics. Juan Mayr Maldonado, the ambassador, has occupied such posts as Colombia’s minister of the environment, chairman of the United Nations committee for sustainable development, chief negotiator of the protocol on biological safety, and member of the board of the World Agroforestry Centre, ICRAF. His interests include those of organic agriculture in relationship to Colombia’s environmental problems and fair trade to improve the lot of Colombia’s indigenous tribes.

Organic agriculture in India

Singell Tea Estate was not only the first tea garden to convert to organic agriculture, under the pioneering guidance of Brij Mohan, and the management of Prem Tamang, but was even the first farm ever to be certified organic in India. This project became the cornerstone of organic agriculture in India, with Singell being certified Naturland in 1990 though the spur of innovation of Mr. Mohan together with the Association for Organic Agriculture. The tea was awarded a Naturland certificate. It can definitely be claimed that this also contributed to global development, because at that time neither the European eco-regulation nor the USA’s National Organic Programme (NOP) nor the Indian National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) existed. The situation in India has changed completely since then. In 2004/2005, the „National Project on Organic Farming” (NPOF) started, which made a major contribution to the development of organic agriculture in India. In this case the cultivation of organic cotton played an important role and India became the world’s greatest producer of organic cotton, with approx. 50% of global production. The Indian states of Uttarakhand, Nagaland, Sikkim and Mizoram have announced that their agricultural objective is entire conversion to organic agriculture. In
Sikkim, almost 40% of the total agricultural area has already been converted and the aim is to reach 100% by 2015. The government assists with the conversion process throughout the country by introducing such programmes as the NPOF, mentioned above, the National Horticulture Mission (NHM) and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). This takes the form of financial support in conversion and certification, and in the production of worm compost.

In advance of this year’s BioFach, the Indian consulate general in Munich issued an invitation to attend a seminar on the Indian organic industry, at which one Manfred Fürst, representative of Naturland, gave a talk on promotion of organic agriculture by Naturland in India. To quote a passage of the invitation leaflet to this event, which took place in Nuremberg, „The Indian government plans to expand the area devoted to organic agriculture. By 2012 it should cover an area of two million hectares. This corresponds to about 1.5% of the total area under agricultural use in India.‟


In South India, Naturland has members mainly in the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Indway International, with mangos produced by Bhandukia Farmer Group in the state of Gujarat, was not only certified organic by Naturland, but also was the first Indian enterprise to be awarded the Naturland Fair certification in 2011.

Members of Naturland in South India

The declared aim of Peermade Development Society (PDS), in the state of Kerala, which is one of India’s largest NGOs, is to support the indigenous and rural population. Two such PDS projects are PDS Organic Spices and the „Small Farmer Tea Project‟, which many years ago received help from Naturland with the construction of its own tea factory. Last year PDS was commended as the largest exporter of organically produced spices in India (see our article „Peermade Development Society‟ on page 15).

Another project operating in Kerala is the Manarcadu Social Service
Society (MASS). The growers in this group cultivate not only spices but also coconuts, cocoa and coffee. The aim of the NGO, which was established in 2001, is to create lasting values in an autonomous community. They focus mainly on disadvantaged small farmers and are greatly committed to fair trade principles. They qualify workers in organic agriculture and make a direct contribution to the country’s economic development by enhancing the farmer’s competitive position. In the Nelliyampathy Hills in Chittur Taulk, Kerala, can be found the coffee, vanilla, pepper and tea gardens of Seethargundu Estates, which has been run organically since 1997 and certified organic by Naturland for ten years now. Besides these crops, organic vegetables are grown on the property, for the workers and staff mess. They also have fishponds, dairy cows and a flock of sheep that keep the grass between the tea bushes short. Use is made not only of processes developed from the bio-dynamic cultivation system, but also knowledge handed down through Ayurveda tradition. With painstaking patience, the topsoil on the stony ground is conserved, in the initial stage, by cultivating certain forage grasses to restore it. Later on, fruit trees are planted. Not until these trees have grown tall enough to stabilise the fertile layer of soil is coffee or tea cultivated.

In the state of Tamil Nadu, four tea estates belong to UNITEA, of which two, those in Chamraj and Korakundah, are managed along Naturland principles. Of great importance to the region are the social facilities which UNITEA, a fair trade organisation, has established and runs. They are not only there for the workers and their children. In the school, 1,200 children are taught, of whom only 30% are workers’ children. Besides this UNITEA runs a pupils’ halls of residence, an orphanage and a well-equipped hospital. The Korakundah tea garden, which is surrounded by a protected forest and the national parks of the Nilgiris biosphere reserve, is, at 2,700 m above sea level, the world’s highest tea garden, which is reflected in the high quality of the tea. Its management is very keen to place nature at the core of their business. Although the total area covers over 570 hectares, fewer than 270 hectares are planted with tea bushes, and the South Indian mountain jungles (sholas), arid grassland and wetlands remain untouched. Since there are no fences, wild animals are free to roam the area. Indian sambar deer and gaur (Bos gaurus) graze between the tea shrubs, the endangered Nilgiri langur monkey and rare bird species feel at home here, and occasionally a tiger has been spied.

The Members of Naturland in India hold the maintenance of biodiversity, and water and soil conservation, all elements key to organic sustainability, in very high esteem. Farming in a manner suitable to local conditions, in combination with fair trade and regard for social aspects, are of prime significance.

The Korakundah tea garden is surrounded by woodland.

Cocoa and ginger are just two of MASS’s many crops.
Equivalence agreement for organic products concluded between EU and USA

Naturland certification ensures the same degree of transparency and level of competition

As of 1st June, 2012, organic products accredited as such in the European Union (EU) may be sold in the USA without any further certification being required. The same applies to imports of organic produce from the USA to the EU. The EU, with its EU organic regulation, and the USA, with its National Organic Program (NOP), signed this agreement on 15th February, 2012. It should be noted that the NOP is a regulation in the same way as the EU organic regulation, and not an organic development programme, as the name erroneously implies. The aim of this mutual recognition is to simplify trade.

“This agreement introduces two forms of added value”, says Dacian Ciolos, EU commissioner with responsibility for agriculture and rural development. “On the one hand, organic farmers and food processors benefit by attaining easier access, with less bureaucracy and fewer expenses, thus increasing the competitiveness of this segment of the farming industry both in the USA and on the EU markets. Besides this, it improves the transparency of organic standards and strengthens the consumers’ confidence in and the recognition of organic foodstuffs and products.”

Naturland welcomes the EU commission’s moves towards simplification, whilst recognising grounds for criticism of the commissioner’s comments on competitiveness and transparency. In some cases there are considerable differences between the relative standards of each regulation. The animal rights organisation Compassion in World Farming expressed disappointment at the equivalence agreement; AoEL, Association of Organic Food Producers, points out that organic produce will be appearing on the European market which would not be allowed to be produced in such a manner in the EU but is still permitted to bear the EU organic logo. Naturland criticises that organic aquaculture was left out of the agreement because the USDA, the US Department of Agriculture, has for years been unsuccessful in incorporating regulations in the NOP governing organic fish.

Generally speaking, trade between the world’s two major organic producers has become simpler. Certification by Naturland, the basis for the right to use the Naturland logo, is subject to the high Naturland standards which are the same throughout the world. This enhanced claim likewise ensures equality of competition and transparency between the USA and the EU.

Revision of Naturland standards

At this year’s delegates assembly of Naturland, further developments of Naturland standards were decided. The standards on production, aquaculture, sustainable capture fishery and social responsibility were amended. Naturland Fair Trade standards were adapted in the corporate certification “Naturland Fair Partnership”, fair trade minimum price and in fair trade premium.

The new Standards can be downloaded at: http://www.naturland.de/standards.html
Between 19th and 25th March, 2012, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, provided a wonderful backdrop for the World Conference on Organic Beekeeping, an event which takes place every two years. It was organised by Naturland, FiBL and Ecosur, as well as various Mexican ecological institutions and associations. The event far exceeded everyone’s expectations. Seventy beekeeping organisations took part. In total there were 500 participants, from America, Europe, Africa and Asia too.

During the first three days, various training courses were held. Besides Manfred Fürst and Peter Gänz, who are organic beekeepers and representatives of Naturland, further experts gave talks on such subjects as the standards to be upheld by organic beekeepers, hygiene requirements when producing and processing honey, and other topics such as biodynamic beekeeping or the establishment of social projects within the context of beekeeping co-operatives.

In order to relate theory to practice, participants were given opportunities to visit the co-operatives Maya Vinic and Mieles del Sur, which are committed to the principles of organic beekeeping. These indigenous organic small-holder beekeeping groups demonstrated their beekeeping methods and provided an insight into their customs and traditions. These courses attracted about 200 participants and were characterised by a very lively exchange of opinions.

The conference itself was held on the three ensuing days in a colonial-style group of buildings in the historic old town. It started with a traditional indigenous Maya prayer, of the Tsotsiles tribe. This was followed by words of welcome to the organisers, Naturland, FiBL and Ecosur, spoken by Pedro Álvarez-Icaza (CONABIO – National Commission for Knowledge and Use of Diversity) and Gilles Ratia (Apimondia). Then 60 talks on various topics related to organic beekeeping were held, e. g. farm management, the bees’ health and the quality of honey. The series of talks was mixed up by interesting videos, showing, for example, beekeeping in mangrove and coffee-growing regions, or beekeeping using stingless wild honey bees (meliponines).

A key topic of the conference was the threat posed to beekeeping by the use of genetic engineering in agricul-
A further topic of the conference, which provoked keen discussions with the Mexican agricultural authority, SAGARPA-SENASICA, was the demand for quality and hygiene requirements made by the EU with respect to harvesting and processing honey. Countries such as Mexico, which export their honey, are required to comply with these regulations. However, it is the opinion of many beekeeping organisations that the conditions imposed by the Mexican agricultural authority itself are more stringent than those of the EU, making it more difficult for them, and especially smallholder beekeepers’ co-operatives, to avail themselves of export opportunities. The Mexican organic beekeepers therefore demanded that the state authority be more flexible in the implementation of EU requirements. As examples other countries, such as Argentina and Nicaragua, which also export honey, were cited, countries which are not hobbled by restrictive national requirements.

At the same time as the conference, a trade fair on organic beekeeping was held. Thirty Mexican and foreign booths exhibited honeys and beekeeping equipment and accessories, and offered their services in such fields as quality control, inspection, certification and financing. The trade fair was open to the public and the participants in the conference and individuals wanting to learn more about beekeeping and bee produce demonstrated great interest. Among the exhibitors were several organic beekeepers who harvest their honey according to the stringent standards of Naturland.

Great enthusiasm was shown for the honey contest between 29 samples from various countries. The jury, chaired by Lucia Piana, a honey expert from Italy, awarded first prize to the Maya Vinic co-operative. Second and third place were taken by the organic honeys produced by Mieles del Sur and FiBL Switzerland. Those interested may sample these two latter honeys to see whether the jury made the right decision, because they are part of the GEPA product range.

During the three days of the conference, a local women’s group, „Mujeres y Maíz“, served the participants tasty meals. The dishes, prepared in the traditional manner, were based on maize products made from indigenous and organically grown strains. At mealtimes and in the intervals, Café Museo Café and Maya Vinic served the participants organic and fair trade coffee.

The next World Conferences on Organic Beekeeping are to be held in Italy in 2014, organised by the Conapi co-operative, and in Argentina in 2016, organised by the Coopsol co-operative. Naturland, FiBL, Ecosur, IFOAM and Apimondia will continue to support and co-ordinate the conferences.

The conference in 2012 was a great success and the organisers of the next conferences will certainly meet all challenges they encounter with great enthusiasm and energy.

For further information:
www.naturland.de
www.ecosur.mx/abejas
www.fibl.org
Genetic engineering in agriculture: GMOs pose a threat to Mexican beekeepers

The debate about genetically modified crops is becoming a topic of increasing importance to the Mexican public. On the one hand there are the economic interests of the transnational companies that produce and distribute genetically modified seed, and on the other the interests of society as a whole, the consumers and the beekeepers. Curiously enough, it is the Mexican beekeepers who have been identified as a high-risk group, even though they are the victims and not the originators of the problem.

Mexico is the sixth largest producer and third largest exporter of honey in the world. The main recipient of Mexican honey exports is the EU. Now the livelihood of over 40,000 beekeepers and their families is threatened by the growing prevalence of genetically modified maize and soy crops.

Strange to relate, the source of this problem is to be found in a beehive in Bavaria, Germany. This is situated 500 m from a trial plot where genetically modified maize is grown. An analysis of this honey showed that the pollen it contained was contaminated with pollen from genetically modified maize. This case was even taken as far as the European Court. Consequently a decree was passed in September 2011 prohibiting honey containing pollen from genetically modified food crops that have not been approved from being placed on the market (the principle of zero tolerance). However, if the pollen comes from genetically modified food crops which have been approved, it is possible to place the honey on the market. In this case, however, and if the amount of genetically modified pollen exceeds 0.9% of the total pollen contained, then the label would have to state „Contains GMO ingredients“.

Should this ruling be implemented, then it would be almost impossible to sell the honey, wherever country it came from, because the majority of European consumers refuses to buy genetically modified foodstuffs. Buyers of Mexican honey require that it be free of genetically modified pollen. Every time genetic contamination is detected, growers and exporters will lose further market share and the damage done to the reputation of Mexican honey will ultimately make its production economically unviable.

In practice it is impossible to avoid contamination if products are grown in the vicinity of genetically modified crops. Bees make no difference between genetically modified and natural crops. The bees’ normal flight radius is one kilometre from the hive, but can extend to as much as three kilometres. This goes to show that it is impossible for agriculture where genetic engineering is not practised to co-exist side by side with agriculture where it is practised. Recently there has been news of approval granted for 30,000 hectares of genetically modified soy to be sown on the Yucatan peninsula, news that must be
Organic beekeeping – requirements made of certification procedures

The EU imports large quantities of honey. German beekeepers, for example, can fulfil only 20 per cent of Germany’s requirements, meaning 80 per cent has to be imported. Latin America and, to a considerable extent, Mexico too, supply Europe with this sweet liquid gold.

Honey is a rich and sensitive foodstuff. The credibility and reliability of imported honey, too, must be guaranteed. Importers and consumers of organic honey expect not only top quality in the product itself but also in the organic standards it adheres to. Conformity to these high demands is verified by means of organic certification procedures to provide the consumer with credible proof.

The EU regulations CE 834/2007 and CE 889/2008 on organic beekeeping contain requirements on conversion periods, the origin and location of the bees, how they are fed, their health (antibiotics are prohibited) and management, and expect detailed documentation on adherence to these measures to be provided.

Naturland has also published strict standards for organic beekeeping, the requirements of which exceed those of the EU regulation. That the farm be converted to organic management in its entirety is an unequivocal principle.

Since 2005, social responsibility has been laid down in the standards of Naturland too, to address the needs of those who work and live on the farms. A growing number of consumers recognise the added value the quality of the product thus acquires, and place their trust in certification to Naturland’s standards and in the Naturland brand for honey and beekeeping products too.

The sites of the bee colonies must be chosen with great care.

The standards of Naturland stipulate that the honey and the wax be analysed; the results of the analysis are expected to confirm that they are free of residue. In cases where the bees are given artificial feed in an emergency, up to 90 per cent organic sugar may be used; the combs should be left with at least 10 per cent organic honey, or this should be added. The standards require that the harvest to be made in a particularly gentle manner, and contain instructions on the careful storage of the honey. For example, pressure filtering, ceramic filters and micro-filtering are prohibited, and the honey may not be heated to temperatures higher than 38°C.

In order to guarantee that the high beekeeping standards are implemented, Naturland does not rely on EU organic inspection alone, even with additional inspection to standards of Naturland, but also sends its own representatives to the farms, to offer the beekeepers further training and courses on organic beekeeping.
Peermade Development Society (PDS)

Peermade Development Society in Kerala is one of South India’s major NGOs and was established in 1980. Since 1999 PDS and Naturland have had a close relationship. The visionary founder was Mar Mathew Arackal, a Catholic priest then, now the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Kanjirappally. In 2001 he had to resign as a delegate for Naturland International because he was made a bishop. Today „PDS Organic Spices” and „Small Farmer Tea Project” are members of Naturland. This year PDS Organic Spices was certified to the Naturland Fair Trade Standards. The smallholders’ families are the focal point of PDS’ numerous activities. This organisation sees its main task as that of „empowerment”, the strengthening of village communities, above all of indigenous groups, women and disadvantaged farmers. By ensuring sustainable development, local resources are to be protected and used to facilitate the vision of the Society “…that they may have life and have it abundantly.”. This guiding principle has led to many projects being started, with the aim of creating better living conditions for the rural population.

Development of the Community

„Community empowerment”, the strengthening and encouragement of communities, takes place on three levels. The basis consists of Self Help Groups (SHG) with a membership of between ten and twenty members. A number of SHGs then combine to form a „Village Development Council” (VDC). Currently there are 54 VDCs. In each VDC a trained person from the village community co-ordinates the activities and attends to the members in the self-help groups. In the four regions in which PDS operates the VDCs themselves join forces and a co-ordinator runs the programmes. Mainly training sessions on the expansion of capacities are offered, and favourable loans granted. Training in the field of organic agriculture plays an important role here too (e. g. production and application of vermicompost, pruning coffee plants, cultivating forage plants) but others are held on such subjects as accounting, health and hygiene or the production of traditional household remedies too.

Rural Health and Wellness

PDS provides the rural population with a comprehensive range of services in the fields of basic health care for their physical and mental health, and with a health-insurance scheme. The encouragement, research into and further development of Ayurveda teachings are held in high esteem. To this end medicinal herbs are cultivated, harvesting and gathering of local raw goods organised, traditional methods rekindled and research done into new medicines or combinations. Ayurveda medication is prepared by hand and sold in Ayurveda pharmacies. In the hospitals, experienced Ayurveda doctors and Ayurveda physiotherapists are employed. Guests from all corners of the globe also consult these doctors and avail themselves of the Panchakarma (purification) and spa services offered. The „Sahyadri Medicinal Plants Conservation Programme” helps to raise the awareness of the rural and indigenous population. The purpose of this programme is to cultivate and propagate those plants that are used in Ayurveda treatments and to protect and preserve those plants that grow wild.

Agricultural Research and Advisory Services

Since research and development play a major role in organic agriculture, particularly with regard to pest management and the fertility of the soil, PDS is also involved in this field, in order to be able to offer organic farmers practical solutions to their cultivation problems. For instance, beneficial fungus are grown and propagated to act as antagonists to phytopathogenic fungus, such as Trichoderma or Beauveria. In 2010, 3.8 tonnes of Trichoderma were sold to farmers who were able to buy it at cost. Other projects pursued by the research institute are the propagation of bananas and pepper from tissue cultures,
and growing species of pepper which are resistant to diseases and drought.
For almost twenty years now, vermicompost starter packs, and vermicompost itself, has been sold to the farmers. In this case the earthworms Eisenia fetida (red wiggler) and Eudrilus eugeniae (African nightcrawler) are used. Ready-made vermicompost is also sold in packs of one kilo each at the market. Further information on this topic can be found under: http://www.naturland.de/fileadmin/MDB/documents/International/English/2011_5_Vermicompost_Home-page_EN.pdf and http://www.pdslandtolab.org/

Processing and Export
There are two enterprises within the Peermade Development Society that take care of the processing and export of tea and spices, thus guaranteeing the certified organic farmers a higher income. For years now, PDS has been commended as the largest exporter of organically grown spices in India. PDS Organic Spices participated in the Bio-Fach in Nuremberg again this year, with its own booth.

Sahyadri Organic Tea Factory and „The Small Tea Growers”
PDS built its own small tea factory in 2002. This was necessary because the tea farmers were only able to sell their harvests at low prices to the local tea factories. However, these tea factories would not always accept the tea. By building their own small tea factory, it became easier to market the tea. Naturland made a significant contribution to the success of this building project, both by injecting finances itself and by acquiring loans by making a project application to the EU. The factory produced CTC tea, for which, however, there was little demand in Germany. After a few difficult years, Tea Promoters (India) took over management of the tea factory, and GEPA too helped with the fresh start. Equipment was brought from Darjeeling to Kerala so that the rolled orthodox tea could be produced. Soon green tea too will be available.
The members of the tea smallholders’ co-operative, of whom there are about one hundred, are farming a mixed crop system suitable for local conditions, of which a total of about 57 hectares is devoted to organic tea. Besides this, most of the farmers’ families own one or two cows and a small biogas plant. The gas thus produced is used for cooking.

PDS Organic Spices
This branch of PDS is responsible for the processing, export and sale of organic spices, as well as the organisation, advisory services and internal control system for over two thousand spice growing families. In the modern factory the main spices processed are black and white pepper, ginger and turmeric.
A wide variety of spices such as pepper, vanilla, cloves, nutmeg, cardamom, cinnamon, ginger and turmeric, as well as medicinal plants and coffee grow under mixed cultivation. Since the land is traditionally divided up between all the heirs, the farms in mountainous regions are small lots, in many cases with families having less than a hectare to work. The soil is fertile and tending spice crops is arduous. The main work needs to be done during the coffee and pepper harvests. Kerala has a very good educational system and many of the children find work outside the farming sphere. Some farmers’ groups have in the meantime acquired weed-cutters, but otherwise machinery is in little evidence. Further information can be obtained from: www.pdsorganicspices.com

Peermade Development Society shows that organic agriculture works very well in small structured farming areas. It is important in such cases to be aware of the local conditions and specific needs. Naturland and PDS are acting thereby in concert.

For further information:
http://www.pdspeermade.com/index.htm