

UNDERSTANDING ORGANIC FARMING – SEVEN POINTS - Eliot Coleman

The popular press defines organic farming by its rejection of chemicals.

A more accurate portrayal defines organic farming by its embrace of the soil's biological systems.

- 1.** Classical organic farming is based upon the creation and maintenance of a **biologically active fertile soil**.
- 2.** Organic farming succeeds because of the benefits derived from that soil. The production of pest-free plants and livestock with active immune systems is a direct outcome of this type of farming that, as scientific studies have consistently shown, induces pest and disease resistance in the crops.
- 3.** Research into the marvelously complex soil micro-biome is revealing the vital ecological processes that support natural non-chemical food production. That research underscores the intuitive brilliance of the founding organic farmers.
- 4.** As a bonus, truly fertile soil produces food of the highest nutritional quality. This was the foremost initial aim of the soil care techniques that became organic farming.
- 5.** Soil fertility does not require inputs from off the farm. It springs from farm-derived compost, crop rotations, green manures, cover crops, nitrogen-fixing legumes, grazing livestock, shallow cultivation, enhanced biodiversity and other time-honored practices that nurture the boundless energy and logic of the earth. Organic farming is a circle of endless renewal and it will succeed wherever there is soil.
- 6.** The inclusion of deep-rooting forbs in rotationally grazed grass/legume pastures within the rotation helps to maintain fertility and make available the almost inexhaustible mineral supply from the lower levels of the soil. Grazing livestock benefit the soil; diverse pasture benefits the livestock.
- 7.** Most significant of all, since soil fertility on the organic farm is not powered by fertilizer inputs but, rather, by easily understood soil management practices, this food production system is accessible at no cost by farmers everywhere and can thus nourish the planet with exceptional food in perpetuity. That clear path to a bounteous well-fed future for humankind will remain unrealized if we allow any misunderstandings about – and subversions of - the foundational concepts of real organic farming to go unchallenged.