

## Images becoming symbols for individual pathways in sustainable agriculture—Practical testing of a methodology

Otto Schmid<sup>a</sup> and Nikola Patzel<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>FIBL, Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, Switzerland, otto.schmid@fibl.ch

<sup>b</sup>Überlingen, Germany, nikola@patzel.info

**Abstract:** *The aim of the workshop is to confront ourselves to a variety of images relatable to personal aims and attitudes. Our picture collection is made as a help to find individually suitable and meaningful pathways to sustainable agriculture; but also to see value conflicts or discrepancies. In this, we continue a method development started by Bioland Association (Germany) for advisory purposes. Symbolic images are commonly used in marketing but are not really explored as a source for ethical orientation and strategic planning for farmers, advisors and researchers. A further developed methodology and systematic, how to use pictures as tool for long-term planning, is proposed.*

**Keywords:** *Pictures, images, symbols, orientation, long-term planning, advice service, visual communication*

### Introduction

There exist so many ideas how a more sustainable agriculture should be developed — or, how just to 'survive' once more, without regard to the long-term future. For many actors it is difficult to find an orientation in this debate. Often organisations formulate a 'vision' or a 'mission statement' to help themselves in a strategic planning process. In German language in such a process often the term 'Leitbild' is used, which literally means *leading image*. However, very seldom real images are taken as guides to fundamental objectives. That may indicate a renouncement to use symbols and therefore the help of the unconscious, as well as to the integration of imagination and visual thinking in planning processes. There are few approaches, where an image-based methodology was developed to help actors in such a finding process, e.g. as it was developed by the advisory service of Bioland association in Germany or in consumer research.

### Goal of the workshop

The goal of the workshop is to test an image-based methodology to approach individually suitable and meaningful pathways for sustainable future farming, but also to see value conflicts or discrepancies. The picture set, which will be used, was originally developed for farmers for strategic purposes but was further developed also for the use by researchers and advisors. The basic idea is to facilitate an individual orientation and ethical reflection about future agriculture, stimulated through the use of outer and inner images of agriculture in a group process. Through a backcasting method from positive future images, which correspond with individual archetypical images, appropriate transition pathways for the further development of sustainable farming are encouraged.

The workshop follows the insight that when working with 'leading images' – be it in an advisory service or in visual communication – it can be inspiring and encouraging to have also subjective experiences with symbolic images. We do this in an easy manner. The workshop aims to discuss the potentials, risks and limits of an image-based methodology. Issues to be reflected are: emotional and pattern-giving functions of images, 'getting the picture', ambiguity of symbols, symbolic images as expressions of conflicting values and aims, risk of misuse of inner images and visual communication, individual vs. collective guiding images and symbols.