



***The natural source of knowledge***  
*Advice, Research & Development  
in the field of organic and sustainable  
agriculture, nutrition and health care*

*The Agro Eco-Louis Bolk Institute is a private organization providing research, advice and development in the field of organic and sustainable agriculture, nutrition and health care.*

*We follow a participatory, practical and holistic approach by using experiential knowledge and by considering questions within a wider context. The institute collaborates with practitioners in the field, as well as with many institutes and universities.*

Netherlands:  
Hoofdstraat 24  
NL - 3972 LA Driebergen  
T +31 (0) 343 523 860  
F +31 (0) 343 515 611  
info@louisbolk.nl  
www.louisbolk.org

## ***The natural source of knowledge***

*The Agro Eco-Louis Bolk Institute contributes to a healthy future for soils, plants, animals and people, considering social, economic and environmental factors.*

Eastern Africa:  
P.O. Box 71982  
Kampala, Uganda  
T + 256 (0) 414 268 461  
F + 256 (0) 414 269 742  
easternafrica@louisbolk.org  
www.louisbolk.org

*The Institute operates globally but has particularly strong connections with Africa. The institute is based in the Netherlands, with regional offices in Ghana and Uganda.*

West Africa:  
Aviation House  
PMB KA 84 Airport  
Accra, Ghana  
T + 233 (0) 21 786 097  
F + 233 (0) 21 786 154  
westafrica@louisbolk.org  
www.louisbolk.org

## **Vincent Blok, CEO of the Agro Eco-Louis Bolk Institute: "We see things differently"**

"Over thirty years we have experience with research, advice and development which contributes to a healthy future for people, animals and plants. Unlike conventional science, our approach is not based on isolated facts. We see things differently: the forest is more than the sum of the trees. We offer individual and creative solutions, based on the natural environment of people, animals and plants. We always look at robust systems and take the natural qualities of people into account.

Due to the merger with Agro Eco, end of 2008, we do not only provide specialist knowledge on topics like sustainable soil management, pest and disease control, sustainable livestock farming systems and climate change, but also mainstream the knowledge gained into practical application. By developing organic and sustainable agriculture, together with our partners in Africa, we can contribute to the sustainable development of this challenging continent.

I have seen with my own eyes in what way our people contribute to the development of sustainable agriculture, nutrition and healthcare in Africa and to the quality of life of the African people."



Vincent Blok, Ph.D.  
CEO of the Agro Eco-Louis Bolk Institute

AGRO ECO  
LOUIS BOLK  
INSTITUTE

## **Mission and approach**

The Agro Eco-Louis Bolk Institute is an organization providing research, advice and development, mainly to supply chains in the field of organic and sustainable agriculture. It works with, and strengthens links between all actors in the value chain: farmers, processors, traders and consumers. Our researchers and advisors provide a package of services for primary production, processing and marketing, world wide. We help the private sector, NGOs, governments and international organizations in the development of markets for quality products, notably certified organic, Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance; supply chains that often involve large groups of smallholder farmers.

Our mission is to stimulate organic, sustainable and ethical market chains in order to contribute to the development of a healthy future for the people in Africa. We work on poverty alleviation through increasing productivity and quality of products and hence a better income for the rural population, so that they may not have to live from day to day, but can make secure plans for the future. To achieve this, we have three key methodologies: *Development through Trade, Participatory Approaches and Capacity Building*.

**Development through trade** Rural development is stimulated through the trade in organic, certified sustainable and ethically traded products. We assist buyers in setting up reliable supply chains of high quality ingredients and semi-processed products that increase incomes for the farmers - and the exporter. We assist exporters and farmer groups to implement quality assurance schemes so that they have access to, mainly, the European market. Being 20 years into this business we are strong in making market linkages. Every year, we co-organize the African Pavilion at the Biofach in Nuremberg so that over 70 African exporters experience the market and interface with their buyers. We assist both sides to develop long term relationships.

**Participatory approaches** What happens in practice is the starting point for our research, advice and development. That explains why our (local) people can be found in the field as well as in the laboratory. The farmer knows his/her field, the animals. We incorporate his/her experience into our work and identify best practices. Farmers are stimulated to experiment to find solutions for sometimes decade old problems. We work with different kinds of interaction like Farmer Fields Schools, farmer to farmer and demo farms. Our participatory approach relies on our own experience and knowledge, and on that of our clients (private sector, NGOs, governments and international organisations) and the people in the field. It is not theory but over 30 years of practice.

**Capacity building** As existing practices are the starting point, and development has to come from the stakeholders themselves, capacity building and empowerment play a crucial role. This means that we try to embed the process in traditional structures in the community. Social organisation is a focal point. Despite this 'traditional', we pay serious attention to gender issues and opportunities for youth. Important is that the farmers realise that a higher production and better quality are in their own hands. "Organic has brought pride back to the farmers", is one of the comments heard during the evaluation of the EPOPA programme.

## Services

The Department of Tropical Agriculture of the Agro Eco-Louis Bolk Institute has regional offices in Eastern Africa (Uganda) and in West Africa (Ghana). The employees of the team are bringing in expertise and experience in various fields:

- Making agriculture more sustainable through participatory work with farmers
- Producer and rural organization, smallholder management
- Supply chain development, business development services, market studies
- Certification, product quality, value addition, product development
- Monitoring and evaluation, communication, publications
- Training of trainers, of development leaders
- Policy advise, standard setting in new areas (e.g. sustainable fisheries).

The regional offices are supported by a team of specialist researchers and advisors in the Netherlands, which delivers specialist expertise on different kind of topics, for instance sustainable soil management, manure and compost management, organic fertilizers, pest and disease control, plant breeding of strong and robust varieties, sustainable livestock farming systems, certification requirements, biodiversity, nutrition and health care. The employees of the head office bring in expertise and experience in various fields:

- technical and management support during complex project implementation
- baseline study and impact assessment to measure the impact of our projects
- making and maintaining market linkages
- initiation and implementation of projects in areas not covered by the regional offices (this can also be in Latin America and Asia).

Bo van Elzaker, B.Sc.  
Managing Director Department of Tropical Agriculture



Netherlands:

Hoofdstraat 24  
NL - 3972 LA Driebergen  
T +31 (0) 343 523 860  
F +31 (0) 343 515 611  
info@louisbolk.nl  
www.louisbolk.org

## ***West Africa regional office***

Blue Skies is a major investment in a fresh cut fruit salad plant in the pineapple belt in Ghana. We assisted the agronomy department in the development of a smallholder project to produce organic sugar loaf pineapple for the UK and European market. Important issues were the regulations regarding slash and (not) burn, the Internal Control System and experiments with mulching to reduce erosion and maintain soil fertility. Later the farmer group was fair trade certified. The salads can be found in for example Albert Heijn supermarkets in the Netherlands. Once the agronomy team was able to operate (including revise) the system itself, we phased out.

We implement the organic school garden project together with the Ghana Organic Agriculture Network (GOAN). This project promotes organic agriculture to kids in primary schools. They grow organic vegetables for their own consumption and thus improved health condition. We try to involve the parents in growing the staple foods for the daily school lunch. The next phase is to expand the initiative to more schools. There is a manual. The actual work with the schools is done by agents of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, trained by GOAN and us. The project is financed by Oxfam Novib.

In 2006 we realized the first organic cocoa project in Ghana. Subsequently, Green&Blacks (Cadbury) asked us to develop a supply chain of organic cocoa beans for their quality chocolate. A suitable area was identified by the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana. As there is no farmer organization in that area we are initially responsible for total project management, including the employment of field staff, managing the certification and provision of inputs. Over time these responsibilities are transferred to an emerging farmer organization. In that project site we implement (again with GOAN) a biodiversity assessment and analyze what the costs are for a better biodiversity management. The first part is financed by Green&Blacks, the last part is financed by the IUCN. Nowadays we implement organic and rainforest alliance cocoa projects in the whole sub-region; in Ghana, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Sierra Leone.

AGRO ECO  
**Louis Bolk**  
INSTITUTE

Aviation House  
PMB KA 84 Airport  
Accra, Ghana  
T + 233 (0) 21 786 097  
F + 233 (0) 21 786 154  
westafrica@louisbolk.org  
www.louisbolk.org



## Eastern Africa Regional Office

Since 1995, Agro Eco has been involved in the Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa (EPOPA) programme, financed by Sida\*. The first phase was implemented by Agro Eco, the second phase together with Grolink\*\*. In a period of ten years, more than 110.000 smallholder farmers were approached in Uganda and Tanzania, of which currently 80.000 are actively involved in about 30 organic supply chains. Independent evaluation showed high impact and significant improvements in the livelihood of the 27.000 farmers studied in Uganda and Tanzania. Products include various coffees, cocoa, cotton and sesame, dried fruits, canned pineapple, herbs and spices, and sustainably managed fish. EPOPA succeeded in giving African smallholder farmers a better livelihood through developing local, regional and especially international organic markets. The programme assisted in the establishment of national certification bodies in Uganda and Tanzania. Within the national movement an Organic Trade Point was set up, where producers and buyers can get information about the market. The increase in agricultural production benefits rural communities, thus the farmers. Ten thousands of smallholder farmers earn 3 Million U\$ per year more in premiums alone (excluding increase of production). The exports are worth 30 Million U\$ per year (2008). This was realized at an average cost of around 1 Million U\$ per year to the Swedish taxpayer, during ten years. For more information, see [www.epopa.info](http://www.epopa.info).

The North Uganda Shea Project (NUSP) is built around a partnership of 3 key players in the value chain: the exporter based in Kampala, the processor based in Lira and a women's association based in Otuke County of Lira District. The project worked on development around the collection, certification, processing and marketing of Wild Harvested Organic Shea products, mainly shea nuts and shea butter/oil. This is an ingredient for cosmetics. The project started at a time when Otuke County was a conflict area suffering under the rebel activities of the Lord's Resistance Army. The association's members were all living in refugee camps and collection of the nuts had to be done under military protection. The nuts provided important income for the women and made life somewhat bearable in the camps. An internal control system was developed for over 1500 women collectors and organic protocols put in place for the processing and export. In 2006 wild harvest certification was achieved. In 2007, a first 1.2t of butter and 17,6t of nuts was marketed.

Since peace came to the area, the women and their families started to return to their village homes. Keen on extending the range of products, the women insisted that their farms became certified organic. Today, the families grow their own food and organic cotton and sesame,. While the initiative was with the women, the men also became involved . The families thus have a sustainable farming system and an economic incentive while rebuilding their lives and homes in their villages.

\* Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

AGRO ECO  
LOUIS BOLK  
INSTITUTE

P.O. Box 71982  
Kampala, Uganda  
T + 256 (0) 414 268 461  
F + 256 (0) 414 269 742  
[easternafrica@louisbolk.org](mailto:easternafrica@louisbolk.org)  
[www.louisbolk.org](http://www.louisbolk.org)



## ***Biodiversity: profit from ecosystem services***

Since the merger, ecosystem services has become more of a focus area. Biodiversity is declining at alarming rates throughout the tropics, primarily as a result of agricultural expansion and intensification. A loss of biodiversity results in disappearing ecosystem services, the services that the environment delivers for the good of human well-being. The income of farmers depend at least in part on ecosystem services such as crop pollination, predation of crop-pests, soil fertility and capturing CO<sub>2</sub>. Yet, farmers can only profit from these services when healthy ecosystems are at hand, which in turn depends on the availability of natural habitats for reproduction and foraging. Important natural habitats in the tropics are disappearing at ever increasing rates, causing unprecedented losses of biodiversity. For example, deforestation in the tropics still takes place at almost 5 million hectares per year!

Some forms of agriculture can play an important role in the conservation of tropical habitats and biodiversity, thereby safe-guarding important ecosystem services. First, environmental health can be enhanced by not using pesticides. Second, some forms of agriculture can physically contribute to the conservation of biodiversity. Cacao plantations, for example, can resemble natural forests in terms of tree cover and diversity. Such shaded plantations play an important role in biodiversity conservation in landscapes that are dominated by deforestation, and also support ecosystem services.

The Agro Eco-Louis Bolk Institute uses the relationship between biodiversity and ecosystem services to build sustainable agricultural practices in the tropics. By stimulating natural habitats in agricultural landscapes (such as planting shade trees in cacao plantations), farmers are involved in the sustainability of product supply chains. Organic, fair-trade and rainforest-alliance certification schemes are used to create extra revenues for thousands of farmers that are part of such supply chains. By developing new mechanisms for selling ecosystem services such as carbon capture and storage to western stakeholders, the Agro Eco-Louis Bolk Institute wants to create new sources of income for farmers in the tropics and a sustainable agriculture.