The 2017 General Assembly of IFOAM - Organics International passed a recommendation to ask all candidates running for the World Board the same questions regarding our strategy, policies and positions, for the voting members to know more about the people they vote for.

Sarah Compson, United Kingdom

1. The strategic plan of IFOAM - Organics International 2025 refers to 3 key levers to promote the principles of organic agriculture: supply, demand and policy. On which lever would you like to put the emphasis in your work for IFOAM – Organics International, and why?

Whilst my professional focus is primarily on policy, particularly related to standards and regulation, my background at the Soil Association – an organization with a similar approach to IFOAM OI – means that I have knowledge and experience with all three levers. This has been enhanced through my role at Textile Exchange. As a result, I could contribute usefully to all of them. However, I believe that holistic solutions need a holistic approach – and I would bring my knowledge and experience of the power and impact these levers can have both individually and dynamically in order to facilitate collective and meaningful action.

2. Please share your thoughts on which actors in our movement could contribute to which parts to make our common vision come true.

IFOAM – Organic International is in the unique position to uplift the voices of those throughout farming, food and fiber value chains, whilst also engaging and influencing policy makers - showcasing our principles in practice – demonstrated by our committed members. All actors in our movement have a role in making our common vision come true. I see a key part of IFOAM OI’s role as providing the framework and strategic plan, which will allow us to become more than the sum of our parts by successfully engaging the relevant actors in the most powerful and impactful ways. Our strength comes from our diversity.

3. What do you propose in order to get a real transformation in agriculture, in general, and more specifically, in your role as a WB member?

A real transformation requires a paradigm shift in the way we think about and approach agricultural systems. We must reach out beyond our movement but remain guided by the experiences and knowledge of organic practitioners at every stage of the value chain, who are already showing that a different way is possible. Whilst I’m based in Europe, my work gives me a global perspective. I will use my facilitation skills, ability to take a balanced view and my connections and influence within the movement and beyond to help drive the changes needed – in relation to shifting both mindsets and practices.
4. Reflecting on the development of new GM breeding techniques such as Crispr CAS: where do you see challenges and issues for the organic sector?

New genomic techniques are not compatible with the principles of organic agriculture and risk being a distraction from truly meaningful, farmer-led innovation. Aside from the challenges and issues related to the technology itself and the lack of meaningful consultation with citizens and civil society, we already know that silver-bullet solutions will not result in the widespread changes that are needed if we’re to meaningfully transform agricultural systems for the benefit of people and the planet. Therefore, the challenges are twofold - firstly related to the technology itself, and secondly related to the approach to transforming agricultural systems that it represents.

5. The SDGs of the United Nations are aiming at sustainability in all areas of life and development. How do you make the SDGs a reality in your own life?

My career in the organic sector is my vocation. I am passionate about living my values and feel a close affinity with the SDGs. Outside of work, my hobbies, interests and lifestyle are closely aligned with the SDGs. I grow my own food, volunteer in my local community, am a governor at a school for children with special educational needs and I have a range of nature-based hobbies, including outdoor swimming, cycling and climbing. I believe that a deep connection to the natural world and a committed passion for organic principles are essential qualities for all WB members.

6. The work of IFOAM-Organics International is partly financed by membership fee, and for a greater deal by donors and foundations. What experience and skills can you bring to support acquiring financial resources?

I have been involved in a number of funding bids during my career and have successfully secured funding from donors to fulfil organic projects with beneficial goals and objectives. My structured and logical approach combined with my passion for clear and engaging communication are practical qualities that I could bring to the task. This, combined with my unerring commitment to the IFOAM vision, makes me a strong and reliable fundraiser.