

Annual Report 2005

including plans for 2006

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The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Denmark
April 2006

Head of School Henning Høgh Jensen

Introducing SOAR

The Research School for Organic Agriculture and Food Systems (SOAR) is a partnership among universities and research institutions in Denmark. SOAR was founded in June 2001 with funding from KVL, the Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming (DARCOF) and the Danish Research Training Council (FUR).

The objective of SOAR is to strengthen research training within organic agriculture and food systems, i.e. all aspects of organic food and farming, from primary production to consumption.

Since the start in 2001 SOAR has gathered almost all PhD students in Denmark within its scope. To ensure a high quality PhD education SOAR seeks a balance between breadth and depth in the study programme, so that PhD students become specialists within their fields, at the same time as placing their research in a wider context.

SOAR therefore aims at:

- attracting students and offering scholarships
- supplying students with the tools needed to work in an interdisciplinary and systemic way, and to place their research in a wider context
- strengthening the network between universities and research institutions
- encouraging personal development of students including a critical attitude to the principles and values on which organic agriculture is founded
- building competences and skills of supervisors
- encouraging international cooperation

SOAR ensures that a common platform is provided for all PhD students and supervisors for them to share aims, means and methodologies in organic food and farming research. Organic agriculture and food systems have evolved with its own values, principles and regulations, and these must be continuously debated by researchers and other stakeholders. SOAR as a research school has the obligation to encourage this debate among students and supervisors.

The PhD Projects

At the launch of SOAR in 2001 12 PhD students were enrolled. By the end of 2005 the number of PhD students enrolled in SOAR is 26. Research projects in SOAR are divided into three themes:

Theme 1: Organic crop production, nature quality and resource management with 13 projects

Theme 2: Organic livestock production and health with 7 projects

Theme 3: Organic agriculture, food production and society with 8 projects

Of the 26 students enrolled, 16 are women

3 students came from abroad

22 of the students are enrolled at KVL, 2 at DTU, and 2 at RUC. The distribution at work places is as follows:

KVL 11	DMU 3	DIAS Foulum 6
DTU 1	Risø 2	DIAS Flakkebjerg 1
RUC 1	DFVF 1	

5 PhD students graduated in 2005

- 3 women, 2 men
- 3 from KVL and 2 from Aalborg University
- 3 from theme 1, 1 from theme 2 and 1 from theme 3
- 4 from FØJO I funding and 1 ordinary KVL Scholarship

The average completion-time from start to defence was 48.8 months. This included 3 maternal leaves, extraordinary long processing time of thesis in one case, and other leave of absence. Average age was 38 years.

3 new PhD students started in 2005

- 2 women and 1 man
- All 3 at KVL
- All 3 in theme 1
- 1 co-funded Forsk., Risø, KVL, and 2 ordinary KVL scholarships
- 1 from abroad, 2 from Denmark

The flow of PhD students in SOAR is shown in figure 1.

Organizational structure of SOAR

Head of School is Associate Professor Henning Høgh Jensen. Management and decision making is conducted by the head of school in close collaboration with a Scientific Advisory Board (RVP). The Scientific Advisory Board is chaired by the Head of the School, and otherwise constituted of representatives from KVL, DARCOF, DMU, DJF and a PhD student. The Head of the School receives partial compensation for his work with the Research School.

A secretariat (head of school and a part time academic assistant) takes care of daily management. The secretariat is located at KVL, at the Department of Agricultural Sciences, where the Henning Høgh Jensen is employed. Henning Høgh Jensen has estimated that he spends 10 hrs per week on average on the research school, and the academic assistant is employed on a 30 hrs/week basis.

The Scientific Advisory Board (RVP):

Associate Professor
Henning Høgh Jensen
(Head of School)
The Royal Veterinary and
Agricultural University

Research Professor
Bent T. Christensen
Danish Institute of Agricultural
Sciences
Research Center Foulum

Associate professor
Björn Forkman
The Royal Veterinary and
Agricultural University

Senior Scientist
Pia Frederiksen
National Environmental
Research Institute (DMU)

Chief Scientist
Erik Steen Kristensen
Danish Research Center for
Organic Food and Farming
DARCOF (FØJO)

Associate Professor
Åse Hansen
The Royal Veterinary and
Agricultural University

PhD student
Paul Rye Kledal
Danish Research Institute of
Food Economics (FØI)

At RVP, KVL's representative and previous head of school, professor Stig Milan Thamsborg, has withdrawn and was replaced by associate professor Björn Forkman, Department of Large Animal Sciences, KVL. DARCOF's representative at DMU,

senior scientist Pernille Kaltoft, has been replaced by senior scientist Pia Frederiksen, also DMU. RVP conducted 3 meetings during 2005.

Continuation of SOAR 2006-2010

An international evaluation of SOAR has been conducted in January 2005 and their report is available at SOAR web-site www.soar.dk. The evaluation panel was chaired by associate professor Johannes Michelsen, University of South Denmark, and other members were Professor Carlo Leifert, Newcastle University, Associate Professor Egbert Lantinga, Wageningen University and Professor David Collinge, KVL.

Following the positive evaluation SOAR submitted an application to the Danish Research Training Committee under the Danish Research Agency, for 'quality development' as well as co-funding of 3 stipends.

A favourable reply allows SOAR to continue for a new five years' period from 2006-10. The funding contributes mainly during the first two year period after which support to the secretariat is reduced. This will create a need for support for daily operations in the not too distant future.

Summer Schools

Summer schools in SOAR should bring in breadth in the PhD education to supplement the more disciplinary research training that PhD students get in their disciplinary research environments. Because of the broad scope of SOAR, with organic agriculture and food systems being the common denominator, summer schools are aimed at broad themes, like research methodologies and philosophy of science, in relation to organic farming. The programs and course descriptions of previous and future summer schools are available at the web-site www.soar.dk.

Funding

SOAR has received funding from NOVA University Network for implementation of summer schools. The summer school 2005 entitled 'Globalisation: Threat or Opportunity for Organic Farming?' was also funded by NOVA. In 2005 SOAR applied for and was granted funding from NOVA for the summer school in 2006; 'Potential for Organic Farming to contribute to Rural Development in Europe'.

SOAR takes part in a NOVA application to EU for funding under the Marie Curie programme, as part of the NOVA Network in Agroecology, together with other NOVA networks. NOVA submitted an application to EU in 2005, but this did not qualify for funding. A revised application will be submitted in 2006, and the formulation of this started in 2005.

Participation

Participation in SOAR Summer Schools is rather stable between 16-20 participants each year. The number of foreign participants varies (see table 1 below), and in recent years the number of Baltic PhD students in the summer schools has increased substantially due to funding from Nordforsk and administrative help from BOVA office.

Year	Summer School title	participants in total	SOAR participants	participants from abroad
2001	Linking Ecology and Organic Farming	14	4	10
2002	Research Methodologies in relation to Principles and Practice of Organic Agr.	16	14	1
2003	Values, ideologies, science and organic farming	16	10	6
2004	Is Organic Farming the Key to Sustainability?	16	10	6
2005	Globalisation: Threat or Opportunity for Organic Farming?	21	7	13

Table 1. Participation in SOAR Summer Schools 2001-2005.

In 2005 participants came from nine different countries, and there were guest lecturers from USA, UK, Italy, Austria and Sweden. This broad participation gives a unique opportunity for participants to build networks across countries and disciplines. The course received a very positive evaluation (www.soar.dk > Summer Schools).

Biannual seminars

SOAR conducts seminars for networking, lectures, complementary training and group-discussions on subjects relevant to the PhD study. The seminars are planned by SOAR secretariat in collaboration with the PhD students. The venue is different every time, visiting the different research institutions and working places of the PhD students. Through the seminars the PhDs gain exposure and new insights to the breadth of research in organic food and farming, and they debate objectives, methodologies, and values of organic farming research.

In 2005 one seminar was conducted in spring, 28-29 April, at DMU Roskilde. 17 PhD students participated in the seminar. There was a small course in networking, conducted by Finn Kollerup and his colleague from Alt4Kreativ (www.alt4kreativ.dk). The PhD students, their supervisors and other researchers from DMU made presentations of their research, and as part of this the group went for an excursion to an organic farm to discuss landscape and organic farming.

Partnerships and alliances

Collaboration with DARCOF has been strengthened in 2005. The head of SOAR participated in a board meeting in DARCOF to inform board members about the research school. The SOAR secretariat has close collaboration with DARCOF secretariat, and SOAR activities are announced through DARCOF news channels as appropriate.

The Nordic collaboration through the NOVA Network of Agroecology, and the Nordic School of Ecological Agriculture, AGROASIS, continues (www.agroasis.org). SOAR academic assistant participated in 2 meetings in this forum in 2005, and it is discussed to establish a Nordic school on PhD level. As a first step a common list of Nordic PhD students has been established at SOAR's website in 2005.

Contacts to Industry through the Danish Agricultural Council and 'Økologisk Landsforening' have been strengthened, though no concrete outcomes were obtained in 2005.

A number of visitors are received at the secretariat, which in 2005 included a delegation from Canada and from the Louis Bolk Institute in The Netherlands. As the Head of School will become KVL representative in the NATURA network, the potential for new activities in this forum will be investigated.

Concluding remarks

The flow of PhDs is satisfactory, and expected to continue.

The organizational structure of SOAR works well, but it should be emphasized that the work load of running a research school of this size and level of activities is demanding (secretariat: 10+30 hrs/week). The structure of an advisory panel is a good support for the head of school.

It is very encouraging that SOAR got a positive evaluation and a grant for continuation for a new 5 years' period. The application was assessed as very worthy of support.

The summer schools are finding a format that works well for a varied group of participants with different scientific and cultural background. The support from NOVA and BOVA is very helpful, and hopefully this will continue.

Seminars are very intensive, fruitful and important activities in the research school. More systematic evaluation and development of form and content may be valuable in future.

Building alliances and partnerships is time consuming and easily given low priority in the daily routines, and time is the limiting factor in developing networks further. The consolidation of the Nordic network in 2005 is very positive and is expected to pay off in 2006 with more common activities. There is still a need to put more effort into the European networks, while partnerships with private sector in Denmark steadily build up.

All in all it has been a satisfactory year with new challenges emerging for the future.

Activities planned for 2006

Continuation beyond 2006

SOAR has received a grant of 2.1 mio DKK for the research school (kvalitetsfremme) over a 5 years' period 2006-2010. Work plan and budget is based on the budget accepted by the Danish Research Agency. The new budget period will start from July 2006, thus the budget for 2006 consists of 6 months budget from the first funding period, and 6 months' budget from the new funding period.

PhD Stipends and MSc projects

Three PhD students will enrol in SOAR at start of 2006, funded through the joint grants from the Danish Research Agency (1/3 stipendier). Contacts with Industry will be sustained and new sources of funding explored. In 2006 a plan for collaboration with FØL should be formulated in order to optimize the use of research funds for applied purposes within organic food and farming.

It is expected that a number of stipends (10-15) will be announced through DARCOF (FØJO III), and many of these may apply for co-funding through SOAR, so we foresee another application to the Danish Research Agency in April 2006. This application may also include internationalisation stipends.

As a new initiative, start money will be made available for MSc projects that relate to SOAR with the aim of enhancing the recruitment of young scientists. This initiative is rooted in the fact that there is no direct linkage to MSc study programmes. It is the aim that 10 young scientists will work on organic projects in this way.

Biannual seminars

The spring seminar will focus on communication of research, e.g. how to write press announcements.

New supervisors are becoming attached to SOAR. Therefore, we plan for a seminar for supervisors in autumn 2006. The course will focus on the issue of quality in supervision and will be a follow-up on an earlier course.

Summer school

The title of the summer school 2006 is "Potential for organic farming to contribute to rural development in Europe". The summer school is planned to coincide with the Joint Organic Congress in Odense 30-31 May, and will run from Sunday 28 May till Friday 2 June. A planning group with experts in rural development and representatives from the EU projects involved in the Joint Organic Congress was formed in December 2005. One PhD student participates in the planning group.

Key-note speakers will be invited from the Joint Organic Congress if needed in addition to the students' participation in the Congress. The summer school will be announced through DARCOF e-News, through the EU projects, and through our international networks, in order to reach 50% international participation.

It is also the plan to submit a new application to NOVA for funding of a new summer school in 2007 by April 15th 2006.

Financial overview

Initial sources of funding

The total initial budget for SOAR scholarships and operational costs was DKK 10,705,000 over a 5 years' period. From the outset in June 2001 a budget was made to cover operational costs and SOAR's contribution to the stipends. In addition to these grants DARCOF has directly (fully or partly) funded 10 PhD students enrolled in SOAR, amounting to a contribution of 7,209,000 DKK, under 'FØJO I'.

Additional sources of funding

The grants from DARCOF, KVL and FUR have enabled the research school to enrol 13 PhD students through co-funding from research institutes. Four PhD students with KVL scholarships enrolled in SOAR. Furthermore SOAR was granted 2 stipends from FUR for international PhD students, and in 2004 SOAR was granted one additional 1/3 scholarship from the Research Council, co-funded by KVL and a research institution.

SOAR also received funding from the NOVA University Network to conduct summer schools in 2003 to 2006. Furthermore support was received from NorFA (now Nordforsk) for the participation of Baltic students in the Summer Schools 2003, 2004 and 2005. In 2005 SOAR was granted 2.119.000 DKK for research school activities and 1.500.000 DKK for co-funding of PhD scholarships from the Danish Research Agency.

With the estimated value of the additional funding (co-funding of scholarships) and KVL scholarships, the total port folio of SOAR PhD students and Research School activities adds up to 48.242.000 DKK (Figure 2)

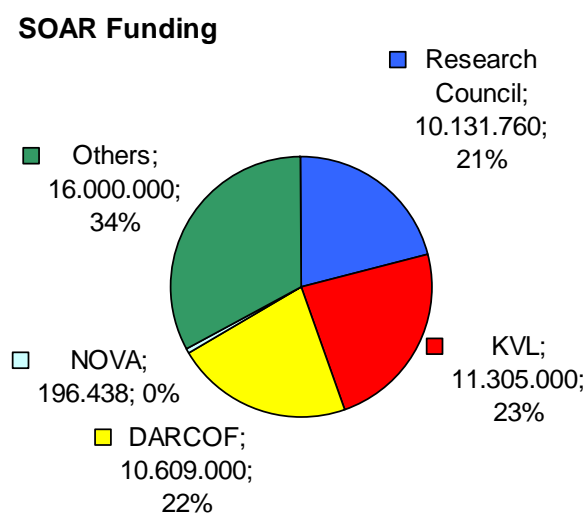


Figure 2. Distribution of funding by sources. Part of the funding 'Others' stems from DARCOF projects.

Accounting 2005

The accounting below shows the amounts that are debited to the SOAR account at KVL. Grants for stipends from KVL, DARCOF and other co-funders are paid directly to user, and are not included in this accounting.

2005	Income	Budget	Expenditure	Transfer
Transfer from 2005	1.666.000			
600.000 from Forsk	600.000			
NOVA Summer school 04	91.818			
225.000 from Forsk	225.000			
325.000 from FØJO	325.000			
Head of SOAR		75.000	0	75.000
Academic assistant		270.000	299.534	-29.534
Operational costs		50.000	37.188	12.812
Seminars		40.000	26.066	13.934
Courses		100.000	0	100.000
Summer school		140.000	230.571	-90.571
Supervision course		50.000	0	50.000
Overhead		191.178	191.178	0
Scholarships		495.910	411.367	84.543 ¹
Total	2.907.818	1.412.088	1.195.904	216.184

¹ The reason for this transfer is that one PhD student under this funding had reduced weekly working hours for a period of time, and her PhD study is thus extended accordingly.

Budget for 2006

Including PhD stipends

Budget item	SOAR I	SOAR II	TOTAL
	DKK	DKK.	DKK
	untill 30.06	from 01.07	All of 2006
Head of SOAR	50.000	30.000	80.000
Academic assistant	166.000	166.000	332.000
Operational costs	45.000	10.000	55.000
2 seminars	30.000	30.000	60.000
Summer school	140.000	0	140.000
Supervision course	50.000	0	50.000
M.Sc. Projects	50.000	0	50.000
Scholarships	531.250	416.666	947.916
Total excl OH	1.062.250	652.666	1.714.916

Exclusive PhD stipends

Budget item	SOAR I	SOAR II	TOTAL
	DKK	DKK	DKK
	untill 30.06	from 01.07	All of 2006
Head of SOAR	50.000	30.000	80.000
Academic assistant	166.000	166.000	332.000
Operational costs	45.000	10.000	55.000
2 seminars	30.000	30.000	60.000
Summer school	140.000	0	140.000
Supervision course	50.000	0	50.000
M.Sc. Projects	50.000	0	50.000
Total excl OH	531.000	236.000	767.000