



# Canterbury Commercial Organics Group

## Newsletter

Issue No 17: October 2001

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GE Free Rally	6 Oct
Field Day	14 Oct
Nature Farming	15-18
Conference	Jan

The Newsletter is published quarterly in January, April, July and October by the Canterbury Commercial Organics Group, a non profit charity run by volunteers. Deadline for submissions is the first day of the month of publication.

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## FIELD DAY – Biodynamic Stock and Crop Farm Sunday 14 October

We have a great field day coming up – on Sunday October 14 CCOG has arranged a field day at Gita and Ian Henderson's property at Scargill, North Canterbury. The Henderson's farm, Milmore Downs, is a 300 ha mixed stock and crop property which they farm organically using biodynamic techniques.

The Hendersons market their produce under their Milmore Downs label and the Demeter trademark. They have their own mill to process their organic wheat, barley, oats and rye which is sold to local bakeries and through a mail order business.

Old varieties of grains are grown which tend to be more disease resistant and also have a market niche. Dinkel is one of these grains – it is an old German variety which almost disappeared when modern varieties of wheat were introduced. It is now proving invaluable as it can be eaten by people who cannot tolerate gluten in regular wheat. Another old variety is hassan malting barley. It is pearled and sold as a whole grain for malt coffee.

During the field day, we will have an introductory talk from Gita and Ian, a demonstration of the set up and making of the biodynamic preparations, see the millhouse in operation and have a tour of the farm, seeing the cereal crops, sheep and lambs, and cows and calves.

**Date:** Sunday 14 October. The day will start at 11 am.

**Directions from Christchurch:** The Henderson's farm is easy to find. It is about 80 km from Chch. Go north out of Christchurch along the Main North Road. Go through Amberley and Waipara to Greta Valley. Turn Left on a road marked Scargill. At Scargill there is a T intersection - turn left here on the road marked to Waikari – go along here for about 2 km, turn down Pannetts Road which is the first road on your right. Down this road is the farm yard at the end.

**Bring:** Lunch and thermos, hat and sunscreen. Invite any friends who may be interested. Gold coin donation.

**October 6 - GE free rally, Seed exchange open day, details page 3**



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## Another article on the GE debate

I thought this was well worth reading - Editorial from the (British) New Scientist magazine, 26 May 2001. Vol 170, No 2292.

A few weeks ago, at the height of Britain's outbreak of foot and mouth disease, a pet calf called Phoenix was sentenced to death to help slow the march of the disease. How the nation's tabloids wept. Sometime after next month's general election there will be a big enquiry into this epidemic. Perhaps it will conclude it's time to overcome our squeamishness about genetic engineering and create genetically modified Phoenixes with inbuilt resistance to such diseases.

That is certainly the view of Britain's top scientific club, the Royal Society. Its new report on the pros and cons of genetically modifying animals picks out disease prevention as an especially worthwhile goal. Imagine the benefits, it says, of creating cows resistant to BSE and chickens impregnable to salmonella. Imagine what it would mean to African herdsman if their cattle were given GM resistance to the trypanosomiasis parasite spread by the dreaded tsetse fly.

The report makes lots of eminently sensible points. If GM fish are to be grown for food, it says, they should be farmed in landlocked waters and be made sterile to prevent them breeding with their unmodified wild cousins. Labs should be alert to the possibility of GM animals escaping. And any food produced from GM animals should be rigorously tested.

Yet the report's enthusiasm for some of the anticipated benefits of GE is misplaced. Despite its calls for more public funds for GM research, the real movers and shakers in this revolution will always be the big companies. Their interest will be in creating fast-growing, superlean pigs and cows for rich farmers, not animals that resist parasites in the developing world.

More fundamentally, why are animal diseases such a problem in countries like Britain anyway? The answer lies less in the DNA of our cows and pigs and more in our subsidised system of intensive farming and long-distance trading in animals which encourages infections. There is a danger that genetic modification will be used to shore up this system by making farm animals better equipped to survive cramped conditions. Indirectly, it could

even help to spread disease susceptibility by encouraging farmers to switch from genetically diverse breeds to high-yield GM animals drawn from a narrow gene pool. Nor will these creatures make farming less stressful. Judging from GM crops in North America, unleashing patented animals into the barnyard will not just strengthen the grip of big business on food production. It will be a recipe for legal disputes over gene ownership and breeding rights.

The Royal Society points out that, contrary to the popular myth, scientists aren't creating genetic monsters simply to satisfy their own curiosity. True. But the real threat from GM technology has never been one of giant chickens and pigs stalking the landscapes. It is bound up with a raft of more prosaic economic and social issues.

Are GM animals a good or a bad thing? First ask what kind of farming you really want. And who will control and own the animals.

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## Organic vineyard takes environment prize

Seresin Estate was announced overall winner of the 2001 Marlborough Rural Environment Award. The 44 ha vineyard has held transitional BIO-GRO status since 1997/98, and working towards organic certification has been a massive challenge for the company, said judges in declaring Seresin the winner of the viticulture and supreme awards. Many of the lessons learned along the way were now available to other winegrowers and the wider horticultural industry.

Seresin's approach goes beyond meeting rigorous BIO-GRO organic standards, to exploring environmentally friendly techniques for growing grapes and 10 ha of olives, and making the vineyard a pleasant place to work and visit.

Among management practices highlighted by the judges was the trial of inter-row species to increase organic matter of the soil, mobilise nutrients and encourage insect species which parasitise pests. Vines are mulched to control weeds, conserve water and the olive and native plantings on steep banks minimise erosion, while adding interest and diversity.

Winemaking is a natural process of letting crushed grapes ferment to wine, so Seresin's organic convictions make little difference to winery practices, says manager Brian Bicknell. Wild yeasts, which



naturally arrive on the grapes and develop in the wine, are used in preference to commercially synthesised products, as much to achieve the interesting and complex flavours that result as to promote a natural process.

(From Grapegrower, Autumn 2001)

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## Progress with Canterbury Organics

The regional working committee set up to progress the Producers Organic Domestic Scheme (otherwise known as the small scale scheme) is making significant steps. We had our first workshop a fortnight ago - to improve growers knowledge of the Bio-gro standards. Joy McLeod, Bio-gro auditor, gave an in depth session on the most important sections of the standards. Dr Trish Fraser gave a short talk on the importance of maintaining high levels of organic matter in the soil. The age old problem of minimising tillage to reduce loss of organic matter is a challenge for all organic growers. There was a lot of discussion during the meeting and I am sure most growers left with a much clearer view of how to work with the standards. It was pleasing to have a good turn out --about fifteen growers including those already started in the PODS scheme and new growers wanting to learn with a view to joining later. Thankyou to those who travelled from Geraldine for the workshop. We will follow up with a similar standards workshop in six months and slot in more on site workshops based on tree crops or veges.

Last night we had a meeting to consider the constitution for Canterbury Organic which Tremain has put considerable time into - thankyou Tremain. There were minor adjustments and he will now draw up the final version for acceptance at a meeting in a fortnight's time. The working committee is progressing with setting up a regional body for the certification of organic growers for the domestic market based on the PODS peer review template in a way that allows for later aligning with a national organic certification organisation. To this end we will progress through the steps of forming an incorporated society with the cost of \$100. As Canterbury Organics Incorporated we will be able to employ an auditor etc. and handle monies in the approved methods. So thankyou to all those giving their time and patience to the scheme - we are getting there!

Robyn Patchett

**STOP PRESS!!**

### **SATURDAY OCTOBER 6 GE FREE RALLY NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION**

A rally in support of a GE free environment will be held on Sat Oct 6, starting from Liffey Domain, Lincoln (near bridge on Gerald St) beginning 11 am. To be followed by a picnic. Organised by Ground Swell.

### **SATURDAY Oct 6 SEED EXCHANGE OPEN DAY Polytech Seven Oaks Campus**

Hassals Lane, Opawa. 1.30 – 4.30 pm. Speakers include Bob Crowder and Fraser and Karen Palmer-Hesketh. Seed and plant swap, stalls.

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## Mid-winter feast report

CCOG members and friends gathered in the Woodbury Hall on July 14<sup>th</sup> for CCOG's annual mid-winter feast. We kicked off the evening with a delicious dinner, and then had the privilege of hearing two speakers who were inspiring, challenging, thought-provoking and entertaining.

Ian Blakemore spoke about his organic farm, his philosophy and life in general. Ian farms 300 acres in Totara Valley, near Pleasant Point. Originally his farm was called "Wantwood" because of its lack of trees, and people had said they wouldn't take on the farm even if it was given to them. Now the farm is well-treed with forestry blocks and shelter belts, and is a very successful organic unit, growing deer, cattle, sheep and organic vegetables, particularly potatoes, carrots and squash for the organic baby food market.

Ian learnt farming originally from his father and farmed conventionally for about 15 years. In those days he grew grains, grass and clover seed; sprayed quite a bit, had a big mortgage and got lots of headaches. He had been interested in meditation and the spiritual side of life for a long time but the pieces didn't fall into place until February 1987 when he had a visit from a Biodynamic inspector. After hearing about organic farming he decided to go that way with his farm. He farmed biodynamically.



cally for some years but needed Bio-gro certification for marketing so went with Biogro.

Ian believes the longer he farms organically the easier it becomes. For instance he never has to help the cows calve and his sheep are quite parasite resistant. He puts this down to breeding all his own replacements which gives you the opportunity to select the best stock. He now has only 120 ewes and gets a 30% premium for his lambs. He has 75 trouble-free Angus cows that are all descendents from an original 20 he bought.

Deer and cattle work well together Ian believes. He also believes in being as hands-off as possible. Deer especially don't like to be disturbed. The fawns like to hide in long grass in the spring, and then he can clean up the paddocks with the cows, who will eat all the seed heads. He has 500 deer which are not certified as yet but Ian hopes that a method of removing the velvet that will be accepted by Bio-gro will not be too far away. Deer and sheep are not a particularly good combination, sheep can carry disease that deer can catch.

What makes an organic farm work? Ian believes to get the pieces of the jigsaw fitting together a large mix of the stock need to be cattle, there needs to be lots of trees, and irrigation is a great thing so that high value crops can be targetted. Organic farming needs to be low pressure rather than farming to the limit, animals farmed this way will be naturally healthy and strong. This also takes the pressure off the farmer.

Future challenges for Ian lie in developing a line of frozen organic potato chips. He has started from scratch on this project which will be the first of its sort in the South Island. He has sourced organic sunflower oil from Australia and sorted out a manufacturer in Christchurch.

On a personal level Ian has found travelling a great way to get a different perspective and find out what's really important – and that he believes is being who you are and enjoying what you do. Be honest, passionate, responsible to ourselves and to others, and cooperate not compete. Organic farming for Ian fits into this holistic vision, he obviously is passionate about his job and way of life.

## Haikai Tane

It was difficult to put down in words what Haikai spoke to us about – his talked ranged over many fields and many continents. Philosophy was in

there with organic farming and the benefits of wilding trees and the dangers of ungulate hooves.

Haikai began by telling us about the origins of the Biological Husbandry Unit (BHU) at Lincoln University, which has been a landmark of organics in Canterbury. It all started with Haikai encouraging horticultural students to demand an area at the then Lincoln College to experiment with experimental ecological techniques in their horticultural studies. They were given a plot ruined by chemical agriculture. At this time Lincoln College wouldn't have a bar of organics so it was called the Biological Husbandry Unit. Bob Crowder was initially a conventional horticulture lecturer; work at the BHU showed him as well that organics was possible. The students learnt by experimentation.

Haikai is sceptical of the way we farm in New Zealand – knowledge and technology is not lacking but there is a cultural problem – we don't acknowledge the place we live in. We don't give validity to our place in the South Pacific, our climate, soils etc are so different to Europe but we try to farm in a European way. Our plants haven't evolved with mammals so are not prepared for the trampling of grazing animals.

It also seems that we have not learnt from the origins of agriculture – organic agriculture began in Egypt or China around 2000 BC. The Egyptians managed the Nile to get the advantage of silt deposited from the floods. Nutrients and organic matter were trapped on the fields – a complete contrast to what we do now – draining fields and blocking rivers to prevent natural floods. In China as well water systems were managed to trap nutrients.

Haikai raised a laugh when he said that unless we change the cultural paradigm the organic farmers will still be gathered in Woodbury Hall and mainstream farmers will have their meeting in big hotels in downtown Auckland. To change we need a BHU on every campus and we need to challenge everyone's thinking.

Haikai finished by reminding us that we all have a responsibility to draw others attention to issues such as water use, pollution, etc.

**Letters to the Editor, news items and notices of events are welcome. Please send any newsletter material to the editor, Mary Ralston, RD 12, Rakaia, email [kemj@voyager.co.nz](mailto:kemj@voyager.co.nz)**



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## Nature Farming takes on kitchen wastes

Most New Zealanders are familiar with the concept of organic farming and it has become a significant part of agricultural and horticultural production. Less familiar is "Nature Farming" – a variant of organic farming which uses EM or effective microorganisms – a combination of cultures of naturally occurring microorganisms that can be applied to the soil to increase the microbial diversity of soils and plants. A typical EM brew contains lactic acid bacteria, yeast, photosynthetic bacteria and actinomycetes.

The use of EM has many significant beneficial effects, including:

- Promotion of germination, growth, flowering, fruiting and ripening in crop plants and thus increases crop yield
- Enhancing photosynthetic capacity of plants
- Increasing the efficacy of organic matter as fertilizers
- Improvement of the physical, chemical and biological environment of the soil
- Suppression of soil borne pathogens and pests.

Bokashi is another product developed by Kyusei Nature Farming. It is equivalent to compost in traditional organic farming but is prepared by fermenting organic matter with EM.

Gill Pontin, of the Christchurch City Council's Garden City Composting, is the co-ordinator of trials using bokashi to break down kitchen waste, with the ultimate aim of reducing the volume of food scraps going to the city's landfills. The first trial of 20 households was very successful so a further trial of 120 is underway. Initial feedback shows the idea has been well received and popular.

Each household is given a bucket and a bag of bokashi. Kitchen waste is put into the bucket with a handful of bokashi. The scraps should be squashed down to minimise the amount of air as the process works by anaerobic fermentation rather than decomposition. When the bucket is full, the contents can be buried in the garden, or in a large bucket that has the bottom removed and is buried in the garden. The contents will break down to give compost. There is no smell of rotting vegetables as there can be in decomposition. Extra bags of bokashi can be purchased for \$2.

Gill and others from the New Zealand Nature Farming Society have just returned from a trip to Pusan, Korea, to investigate the large scale use of bokashi to minimise the volume of organic waste going to landfills. Gill said it was encouraging to see it working in a big city. As Korea runs out of space, it has had to come up with new solutions to waste disposal problems – the government has regulated that councils put in place the infrastructure such as buckets and collection points.

Although Christchurch and New Zealand are not as pressured by space limitations, we should still be encouraging the use of this technology and working on solving our environmental problems says Gill. Other applications for bokashi and EM are in odour control at landfills and for composting bio-solids – a trial of this has already begun, as has a trial using EM in the compost making process.

Gill thinks using bokashi to minimise the amount of waste going to landfills has great potential for the whole of the South Island and hopes that other councils will become interested. Any Christchurch residents keen to become involved can contact the Metro Refuse Station, Metro Place, Bromley, to collect a bucket and bokashi.

In January 2002, the New Zealand Nature Farming Society is hosting the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on EM Technology and Nature Farming. The conference will bring together over 100 overseas scientists, academics and farmers, as well as many New Zealanders, in Christchurch for four days. Keynote speakers include Professor Teruo Higa, who first developed EM, Ms S. Vaupel, Vice President of IFOAM, Dr Morgan Williams, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, the Hon Jim Anderton, Deputy Prime Minister and Seagar Mason, CEO of Bio-Gro New Zealand.

Papers will be presented on many different aspects of the nature farming and EM technology, such as the use of EM on low organic matter soils, animal production with EM technology, options for effluent reuse with EM, control of salinization with EM, weed management, fruit fly management with EM, and aquaculture.

The conference and field trips will be a great opportunity to see how EM can be integrated into farming and waste management systems. For more information or to register for the conference, contact Mike Daly, at [nznfs@paradise.net.nz](mailto:nznfs@paradise.net.nz).



## Tree Crops Field Days

Sunday 7th October 1pm - 3pm

In conjunction with the Southern Nut Growers' Association, Mark and Caroline Eastmond would like to invite you to a field day at their property near Waiau, Nth Cantby. They have an orchard of 1500 8-9 yr old hazelnut trees and operate a specialist tree nursery supplying hazelnuts throughout the South Island. With a current stock of 40,000 trees this is a growing industry and a very interesting property to view! They are involved at all levels of the hazelnut industry - from nursery tree production, nut growing, supporting and informing new growers and processing/marketing. The property is at 157 Lower Flat Road, Waiau, will be signposted from Waiau township. Mark and Caroline can be contacted on (03) 315-6173 or [eastmond@xtra.co.nz](mailto:eastmond@xtra.co.nz)

**Sunday 28th October:** Jeff & Caroline Elliott's Nursery. Contact person: Bob Craig, 03-3126181. Time: 1:30pm Jeff & Caroline Elliott's Nursery is located on the corner of Grays Road and Main North Road, Amberley. This will be a fascinating afternoon, as Jeff is into all sorts of plant propagation, even tissue culture!

## A & P Show

It's on again!! Christchurch Show will be held on November 14, 15 and 16. Volunteers are again needed to help with the stall that Soil and Health, CCOG and the Polytech runs. This stall promotes organics and is very good exposure. Samples of organic produce are also needed. Please ring Robyn Patchett on 329-5725 if you can help.

## Advertising

**For sale:** Bio-Gro transition certified seed; echinacea augustifolia, echinacea purpurea and valerian officinalis. Phone/fax Pukunui Herbs NZ, 03 3198 722.

**Grazing wanted** on Bio-Gro certified land for certified sheep and /or cattle. Numbers to suit. Phone Ernst 332.7841.

Advertising rates are \$1 a line (8 words a line) up to a quarter page, \$25 per quarter page, \$50 half pg, \$90 page. Enquires to Mary kemj@voyager.co.nz

## Canterbury Commercial Organics Group - Newsletter

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If any of your details are incorrect please contact Robyn at the return address.

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