

Organic Garden City Trust Commercial Group

Newsletter

Issue No 2: January 1998

Contents

Item	Page
Where to from Here?	1
Mark Levick Meeting and Standards Review.	2
Buyers & Producers Forum	2
Farm Walk at Ian & Gita Hendersons	3
An Evening on Harts Creek II	3
BHU 21st Birthday & Soil and Health AGM	5
Newsletter Subscription	6
Organic Weed Control	7
Classifieds	8

Where to from Here?

Having had two successful events and produced two Newsletters, the arrival of the New Year has prompted the group to consider what roles it could take on beyond the networking role we are fulfilling at present. What areas do you think we should consider? A generic advertising / educational campaign to raise awareness of organics among the public? Lack of information is often cited as a problem for producers especially new producers, how about collating and distributing technical information? Supply and demand for organic products are often out of step, with oversupply of some goods for local consumption and a dearth of other products, should the group be attempting to facilitate or co-ordinate the supply and demand situation? If we are to succeed the group needs to know what you want. We will have a short section at the standards review meeting with Mark Levick (page 3) to get some feedback on these issues, but we want to hear from you even if you are not coming to the meeting. Also if there is a place you would like to visit, e.g. a particular farm, shop, or research station please let us know and we will try our best to organise a visit.

Coming Events	Date
Mark Levick Certification Standards Review Meeting	30 Jan 6.30pm
Buyers and Producers Forum	20 Mar 7.00pm
BHU Lincoln University, 21 st Birthday open day	18 & 19 April
Farm Walk at Ian Henderson, Amberly	17 May Midday

The Newsletter is published quarterly in January, April, July and October. Deadline for submissions is the first day of the month of publication.

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On a similar theme The MAF Paper reviewing past and future prospects and research needs of organics, has highlighted a number of issues. Among many of the points it notes is the large change in the organic industry in the early nineties due to the involvement of large exporters such as Zespri and Heinz-Watties. The fallout on Bio-Gro and certification is only now being resolved with the small growers certification scheme designed to entice back the small producers lost in that period. The importance in export markets of highly motivated companies and boards, is vital for growth, areas, such as meat are being held back due to the intransigence of the industry leaders, especially those in monopoly positions. In the longer term, export markets are difficult to predict because of trade issues, i.e. barriers and subsidies. The public good benefits of organics and by implication the public costs of conventional production are discussed, this is a notable departure for MAF. A lack of whole farm / systems research is noted along with the difficulties of this type of work under the current science funding structure. An overall lack of government support particularly for the domestic market, and infrastructure barriers (e.g. supply, technical information and marketing) is seen to be hindering growth. Uncertainties of the financial implications of conversion and variations in the attitudes of banks also constrain uptake. To overcome these problems a series of steps to encourage conversion are outlined, including presenting information to all farmers explaining organics, challenging the wisdom of conventional production systems, technical information, demonstrating the long term economic and environmental sustainability of organics, and providing support to increase and broaden the organic market both domestic and export. For details on how to get a copy see 'An Evening on Harts Creek II' page 4.

Merf



Mark Levick Meeting and Standards Review.

The Bio-Gro Certification Standards review meeting with Mark Levick the Bio-Gro Certification Manager will be on January 30 at 6.30pm at the Oxford Terrace Baptist Church Hall, on the corner of Oxford Terrace and Madras Streets, Christchurch. This is the same venue as the Midwinter Convergence. There will be a five dollar charge to cover the cost of hiring the hall. Tea and Coffee will be provided, please bring your own cake and biscuits!

The Group is disappointed that we have not received any written submissions on the standards review, as requested in the last issue of the newsletter. Mark, however, is happy to come and discuss issues with you, but he may not be able to give authoritative answers. On the positive side we have had a number of people, some quite a distance from Christchurch, indicating they are attending the meeting, so we are expecting a good turnout.

Certification standards are a critical part of organic production, and with the rapid expansion of organic exports in the last few years, the quality and integrity of standards at the international level are increasingly important. Also since the last standards review which produced the 1994 standards, Bio-Gro has gone for IFOAM accreditation. It is therefore vital that Bio-Gro, know your feelings, ideas, problems and aspirations for the standards, and the certification process. This will ensure that there is widespread and grass-roots input into and thus support for the standards.

To ensure the meeting is as effective as possible and that a wide variety of topics are covered, we ask that if you have a question or issue you would like to discuss, please put it down on paper, and hand it to the chair before the start of the meeting. This will allow the chair to estimate the time available for each question and answer, to ensure fairness to all.

On an informal level the group knows of a range of certification issues being discussed at present. We would like to suggest these as potential discussion points.

- What should be the procedure for the standards review?
- Who should be on a review panel

- Should changes to the standards be put to the Bio-Gro AGM?
- The relationship between Bio-Gro and IFOAM and its relevance to world trade.
- The importance of regional rather than global IFOAM standards.
- Animal standards. Should standards be harmonised with IFOAM standards.
- Partial certification of farm units in place of the requirement that the whole farm should be converted to Full Bio-Gro.
- The importance of nominating an IFOAM world board member at the '98 AGM elections.
- That grazing of quarantine area with certified animals be allowed.
- Standardisation of Bio-Gro and Australian standards.
- Reciprocity for accreditation of inputs with other certifying agencies.
- Requirement for the incorporation rather than grazing of green manure crops.

Looking forward to seeing you there. For further information contact Merf.

Merf

Buyers & Producers Forum

Growing a high quality organic crop or producing an organic animal is no guarantee of making money. The marketing side of the equation is as, if not more, important. A criticism levelled at organic producers in the past, is they would insist on growing some wonderful exotic crop (often very tasty and or healthy) that no one has heard of, knows what to do with or even wants! However, even when producing organic staple foods, such as wheat or potatoes, there is no guarantee of a premium market.

A balanced rotation is a corner stone of organic systems, so a lack of demand for produce from one part of the rotation, puts pressure on the economics of the whole system. For example there is no readily available market for organic livestock at present, which is causing problems for many organic mixed cropping and livestock producers in Canterbury, particularly those growing a limited range of crops for processing and export.

On top of this, the small size of the organic market often means that it is difficult for buyers and sellers to find out about each other. A considerable effort has to be made to find out about organic markets, a

Organic Garden City Trust Commercial Group Newsletter



process that is often duplicated by each new entrant to organics.

The Commercial Group have therefore organised the 'Buyers & Producers Forum' to provide a forum for people wanting organic produce and those growing it to meet en-mass in a relaxed setting. The event will start with a series of short presentations from people wishing to buy or sell produce. This will be followed by an open session when you can discuss specifics. We have contacted a number of the major buyers in the Canterbury region and they have all expressed considerable interest in the event. It will therefore provide an unparalleled opportunity to meet representatives of a large number of buyers and producers.

The event will be at the Hornby Working Men's Club on the 20 March at 7.00pm. The club provides a bar from which you can purchase drinks including soft drinks. There is no BYO food or drink. There will be a \$5 cover charge per person for use of the club, and commercial group overheads.

If you would like to make a presentation please contact Merf, listing your details, what you would like to present and how long you would like to talk for. This is to ensure that every one who wants to make a presentation is able to do so and that the presentations do not take too long.

Merf

Farm Walk at Ian & Gita Hendersons

Ian and Gita Henderson have kindly agreed to a field day at their Farm "Milmore Downs" at Scargill on the 17 May.

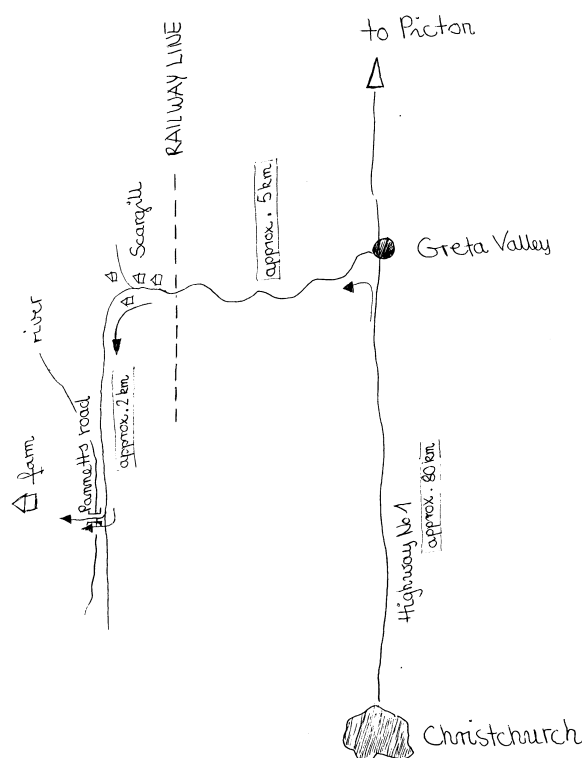
Ian and Gita have been leading figures in both Biodynamics and Organics for many years, with Ian having served on the Governing Board of the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association for many years. The farm is a leading example of biodynamic and organic production. This is a farm walk not to be missed. The farm was converted in 1980, and carries both Demeter and Bio-Gro certification. Ian has a zentrofan flour mill producing a range of high quality flours, and he also produces rolled oats, flakes and kibbled grains which are sold to local outlets. Livestock includes cattle, sheep and pigs, with the meat sold to several organic butchers and also processed into salami, biersticks, luncheon meat and frankfurters. Wool is

sold to a local broker. Crops include wheat, rye, barley, oats, brown and red lentils.

The day will start at midday with a shared lunch - please bring a plate of food. At 1pm Ian will introduce the farm and his marketing strategy, followed by discussion and questions. This will be followed by a tour of the farm starting around 2.00pm, looking at the livestock operation, green crops, rye, shelter trees and their management, irrigation system and reservoir, the flower mill and biodynamic practices and their preparation.

Please see the map for direction on how to get to Ian & Gita's farm.

Merf and Janice





An Evening on Harts Creek II

The Evening on Harts Creek II proved very successful, with about forty people attending from a wide range of backgrounds. The Group is keen to make this an annual event, to provide a chance for all in the local organic industry to catch up with each other, listen to some of the latest research and news on organics and have a great time.

The day did not get off to an auspicious start with the strongest norwesters, often up to gale force, seen for some time. In spite of this over thirty brave souls boarded tractor and trailer for a tour round the farm. Tim Chamberlain, gave a running commentary on the many aspects of his farm, starting in the mixed wood-lots which include macrocarpas, pines and eucalyptus which are being grown for quality timber. Next were several ponds that Tim and Rose have created for both aesthetic and wildlife reasons, including 'Lake Wratten' a very large 'pond' named after a Professor at Lincoln University who gave valuable ecological advice during construction.

On the agricultural front the trip looked at Tim's sheep and dairy heifers, which were all in top condition, grazing on pastures that David Musgrave helped Tim devise. David spoke of his dislike of ryegrass, the reasons for which include its lower nutritional value, and the endophytes that make it resistant to Argentine stem weevil which also make it less palatable to stock. David recommends a range of other grasses, herbs and legumes including chicory, clovers and lucerne, the type and proportions of which are tailored to climate and the individual farm situation.

Next came the horticultural section with a look at various crops including peas for Watties, carrots, onions, dandelions and potatoes. Tim outlined the trials and tribulations of growing vegetables and also the rewards when things go to plan. Weed control is **the** major issue for organic cropping, several surveys showing that over eighty percent of growers rate it as their top problem. Merf outlined the various methods used, emphasising the vital importance of rotations, cultivation type & timing, and minimising the amount of viable seed produced to achieve good weed control.

A more unusual item on Harts Creek Farm is a trial looking at the biological control of Californian thistle by sclerotinia fungus, run by Landcare and ICI. Many organic farmers would shudder at the thought of teaming up with a chemical giant like ICI, but Tim

thinks that it is essential. "If we just keep knocking them, they are not going to change, but if we team up on suitable projects we can start to convince them of the value of organic techniques" says Tim.

Having previously outlined the importance of pre planting weed control techniques Merf gave a demonstration of the farm's hoeing technology while Tim gave a running commentary. Tim has a small Fiat tool carrier with mid mounted sweep hoes and a rear mounted Budding basket weeder which he bought from Richard Hudson. Tim has tried a range of weeding tools including, the Bezzeries spyders and torsion weeders, but found they were difficult to set up. The basket weeder is very simple to adjust in comparison, and once set up needs little or no further tinkering. It works by having two sets of cage wheels about thirty centimetres in diameter linked by a chain drive with a 3:1 ratio, which makes the back basket turn three times as fast as the front so it flicks the weed from the soil. Tim has been really impressed with the basket weeder, for ease of use and efficiency at killing weeds.

Mark Levick, (Bio-Gro certification manager) was also present, which gave the chance for a valuable discussion on various aspects of certification. Tim also outlined his philosophy on organics and particularly the current certification situation. Tim said "When I started, thirteen years ago, there were eleven other large farms with Bio-Gro certification within a 100km radius. None of these farms are now certified". Tim can not say the reason for this situation, but feels there are six main reasons why he is still farming organically.

- Having his father maintain a profitable conventional side to the farm while he learnt about and converted a small area to organics.
- A policy of only growing organic crops after four years of pasture, thus ensuring high levels of soil fertility, structure and low disease risk.
- Using a fertiliser consultant, and having a proactive approach to maintaining fertility in the organic area. This has resulted in a philosophy that nutrient budgets have to be maintained i.e. all nutrients leaving the farm gate have to be replaced, even if this means using restricted materials.
- Three levels of production, i.e. conventional, transitional and full Bio-Gro, enabling maximum returns from the organic crops grown.
- Because he started in organics early, he only faced a small amount of bureaucracy, compared to the current situation, where for example a ten metre strip is required between certified and conventional parts of the farm, and the difficulties of quarantine.



- Being close to incredibly supportive networks, i.e. Lincoln University and Bob Crowder, the pioneering work of Alec McErlich and Watties, the innovation, imagination and dynamics of Jon Manhire, David Musgrave, Nigel Van Dorrser, and many others, were essential for where they are now. Tim considers that his farm is more about the people involved rather than himself and the cropping.

The farm tour finished with a walk alongside Harts Creek through Tim's riparian strips. Tim is very proud of these and is planting them with a diverse range of natives, with the aim of making it a valuable native wildlife habitat and corridor.

Before the speakers started Bruce Snowdon from Heinz-Watties very generously provided a range of organic beers, wines and snacks, a much appreciated and welcome gesture - thank you Bruce, and Heinz-Watties.

Right on cue, the norwester died down in time for the presentations. We heard Hugh Campbell of Otago University talk about the global trade situation with particular reference to GATT and the importance of 'green' trade barriers where countries are excluding produce due to pesticide residues. Many exporters, including Watties and Zespri see organics as a very effective way round these barriers. Ruth Liepins, also at Otago, spoke about the problems producers face with regard to knowledge and information of organics in Canterbury and also why they are involved in organics. She also discussed issues surrounding gender in farming and the similarities and differences between organic and conventional farms in respect to gender. Caroline Saunders was an extra speaker who spoke about the latest report from MAF on organics and detailed the three sections on;

- The potential for expansion of organic farming
- Research investment in organic farming
- Prospects for conventional farmers adopting organic production techniques.

For more information see <http://www.maf.govt.nz/MAFnet/publications/org1/htoc.htm>, or to get a copy contact MAF, PO Box 2526, Wellington, Ph 04 474 4100 and ask for Technical Paper 97/13 (short) or 97/14 (full version) Organic Farming in New Zealand: An Evaluation of the Current and Future Prospects including an assessment of Research Needs.

Kristen Lyons from the University, Rockhampton in Australia spoke of the general organic situation on the other side of the ditch, while Andy Monk from the University of Wollongong spoke about

certification in Australia. If you would like any more information on any of the speakers please contact Merf.

The BBQ was an ideal end to a stimulating and informative day. The evening was beautifully still by then with the stars and moon visible and the delicious smell of BBQ cooking wafting over the participants. The conversations lasted well into the night covering many topics including the events of the day, aspects of growing, marketing and organics or just catching up with old friends.

The Commercial Group would like to thank Tim Chamberlain and Rose Donaghy for hosting the event and Heinz-Watties for supplying the very welcome organic refreshments.

Merf

BHU 21st Birthday & Soil and Health AGM

The Biological Husbandry Unit (BHU) at Lincoln University will be 21 years old in April. To mark this achievement an open day is being held on Sunday 19 April. There will be tours of the unit, a range of workshops, stalls and Morris Dancing!. The commercial group is planning a workshop / advice - consultation session on the day. If you would like to help with this please contact Merf. The day will start at 9.00am and end at 8.00pm. There is a \$5.00 admission charge. There will be an organic food stall or you can bring a picnic.

The Soil & Health Association will be holding their AGM on the Saturday at the Hornby Community Centre starting at 10.00am. There will be a trip to the Seven Oaks organic unit at the Christchurch polytechnic in the afternoon and a social gathering and meal in the evening.

Transport, can be supplied by local branch members and where requested planes, buses or trains will be met. A bus service (#8 to Lincoln University) runs from Cathedral Square on Sunday at 9.20am, 11.20am, 1.20pm, 5.20pm, and 9.20pm to the University from where the BHU is a ten minute walk. Buses return to the city at 10.35am, 12.35pm, 2.35pm, 4.35pm, 7.00pm, 10.05pm. The trip takes forty minutes. Accommodation; some limited billets are available - otherwise accommodation is the attendees' responsibility

For more information contact Anne Seyger, C/- NZ Post Agency, Rolleston, Canterbury, Ph 03 347 8817.

Anne Seyger



Organic Weed Control. Part 1

Weed control has been identified in many surveys of growers and farmers as being their number one problem, often by over 80 % of respondents. I also know of at least two organic vegetable farms that have gone bankrupt due to poor weed control, and many others that are struggling or given up due to weeds.

Good weed control is therefore essential for a successful organic enterprise. The level of detailed information on weed control is often sparse and more often covers the 'what' needs to be done rather than the 'how' to do it. Weed control in organics is a big topic and requires a good background understanding of weed and farm ecology. It is therefore too big a topic to cover thoroughly in one article so a series of articles progressively describing the ideas and techniques for weed control in organic systems will be produced.

Back to Basics

Weeds are often seen as the enemy that have to be controlled - preferably eliminated. Good farmers are often viewed as those that have nothing on their farms except crops. Weeds are seen as an indication of failure. Things in agricultural / ecological systems are rarely that simple, however. A well researched example of the complexity of farm systems comes from cereal crops in the south of England. The increasing effectiveness of herbicides in the crop and the greater use of herbicides in non crop areas, such as hedgerows, has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number and type of weeds. Nothing unexpected there. However, what this has caused is an even greater reduction in the number and types of beneficial insects (those that kill crop pests). This has resulted in an increase in the levels of pests, requiring more pesticides, with the result of increased costs and resistance problems. The effect of using herbicides therefore resulted in crop pest outbreaks!. This kind of effect is neither intuitive or easy to predict, but is common in agro-ecosystems. By not spraying field margins, and growing one meter wide strips of tussocky grasses such as Yorkshire fog

and coltsfoot, at about 100m intervals across the field, beneficial insects were re-introduced into the crop and consistently kept the numbers of crop pests below economic damage levels without pesticides. Weeds are therefore both an enemy, and an ally. An organic system that aims for the total eradication of weeds is likely to run into difficulties, and vice versa, an abandonment of weed control will lead to severe crop losses. A balance is therefore needed. Organic systems need to have a diverse range of plants in field margins, and while controlling crop weeds, total elimination would be counter productive.

Integration of the Farm System

Weed control on organic farms cannot be considered in isolation to other aspects of the farm system. This is also true in conventional systems but to a much lesser extent. A conventional producer can often consider the requirements (e.g. fertiliser, pest, disease and weed control) of each crop with little concern over the effects of previous or following crops. Organics strongly relies on an integrated systems approach, with careful thought required on how any one action will effected by and will effect the whole farm over a period of many years. Many of the techniques for controlling weeds will have major impacts on other parts of the farm system, such as soil structure, nutrients, machinery, other crops that can be grown, etc. Therefore the techniques described in this series needs to be considered in light of the whole farm system. The farm system also has to be integrated with the economic and market environments adding further levels of complexity. This means that 'recipes' or 'prescriptions' for organic production are not possible. Each farm system is unique, even the same crop grown in different areas of the farm may require different treatments. Therefore a through understanding of the principals and techniques are required, and then used to make decisions on a case by case basis.

Information Gaps

While the principals of weed control in organics are well established, detailed technical information on the principals is often thin or non existent. For example only recently has the effects of different cultivations have on weed seedling emergence been researched, or the effects of various non crop



species on beneficial insects . These gaps have to be filled by experience, common sense or even guess work.

The Big Picture

As noted in the previous paragraphs weed control is part of the whole farm system. Weed control has to start at the highest level of that system. There is therefore a hierarchy of weed control techniques:

- Rotations
- Soil nutrients
- Crop / pasture choice
- Cultivations
- Sowing / planting and related techniques
- Hoeing
- Hand weeding

A key point about this list is that the cost of each of these levels increases, often exponentially as you progress down the list. A well designed rotation 'costs' very little for a large level of weed control, hand weeding is often prohibitively expensive.

Also many texts on weed control in organics focus on hoeing. Sole reliance on hoeing is likely to cause problems - and in intensive systems, considerable problems and failure.

The next article will look at the details of the seven 'levels' described above.

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Newsletter Subscription

The Commercial Group hope that you have enjoyed and valued the newsletter so far. From now on a subscription will be charged for the newsletter to meet the production costs and help towards the running of the group. For a **printed** copy the annual cost for four issues will be ten dollars, half of which is for production of the newsletter, the other half for group running costs. For **email** subscription the annual cost will be five dollars, all of which goes to running costs. A number of free copies are sent to other organisations such as Bio-Gro and regional organic groups. If your mailing label has "Complimentary copy" on it, no subscription will be charged, and you will continue to receive your copy free of charge.

To help in its role as a contact organisation we would like to know what your involvement in organics is, for example grower or researcher, and what types of production e.g. meat or vegetables. If you would tick all the relevant boxes on the reply slip we would be most grateful.

To meet the requirements of the Privacy Act, the only information the trust will hold on you is your name, address, phone and fax numbers, email address, subscription data, and involvement information as mentioned above. The trust will be the only body to use this information and will use it for distribution of information e.g. newsletters, to you. The mailing list will not be made available or sold to third parties. However as a central contact point for the local organic industry the trust needs to be able to supply individual contact details to third



Please ensure that your correct name and mailing address are shown on the reverse of this return section. If not please correct them.

Please tick the following, as appropriate

- I wish to subscribe to the Commercial Group Newsletter by **POST** at \$10 per year (four issues).
- I wish to subscribe to the Commercial Group Newsletter by **EMAIL** at \$5 per year (four issues).
- My details are not to be released to third parties.

Please make all cheques payable to the Organic Garden City Trust., and return with this form to: The OGCT, "Gilead", Hamptons Road, RD4 Christchurch.

Signature _____

Please tick **all** boxes that apply to you

- Producer
- Processor
- Retailer
- Researcher
- Vegetables
- Meat
- Grains & Pulses
- Other - Please give details



parties, for example if someone is looking for produce or information the trust could give them the contact details of the relevant person. If for any reason you do not want the trust to divulge your contact details please tick the relevant box on the subscription form.

Classifieds

Advertising Rates

Advertising rates are one dollar a line (approx. eight words a line) up to a quarter page, and then twenty five New Zealand dollars per quarter page. All enquires to Merf.

Enterprise Consultancy for Organic (E.C.O) 1998

Consultants Ray Wright and Holger Kahl. Ph 021 214 3174. After hours (6.00pm to 7.00am) 03 325 1137. C/- Piko Wholefoods, 229 Kilmore St Christchurch.

We aim to make the link between the wisdom of organic growing and the people who choose to produce organic food. We provide the innovation and up to date information your enterprise needs to succeed.

Holger is Tutor in charge of the organic growing certificate course at Christchurch Polytechnic, and Ray has returned from a working holiday experiencing organic growing in Europe, having

qualified in organic growing at Christchurch Polytech in 1996.

Enterprise Initiatives include;

- Box Schemes ,direct selling, scheduling and brokering
- Green shopping, Grower and produce supply stores
- Display and demonstration gardens, permaculture design, edible landscapes and fruit forest gardens
- Green tourist networks - wwoofing
- Green employment agency - labour pool for organics
- Appropriate technology supply and hire
- Compost toilet co-operatives - grey water restoration
- Rotational growing co-operatives - Urban farms
- Ethical investment banking - green dollar exchange.

If any of the above enterprise ideas appeal, or should you have enterprise ideas of your own which require a kick start please phone us at E.C.O.

Bio-Gro Apples and Pears

From March onwards. Firsts and seconds available from stall or via courier. Phone "Robbies Patch" 3295 725.

Disclaimer. While every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this publication is accurate, the Organic Garden City Trust, its committees including the Commercial Group, and the members thereof, do not accept any responsibility or liability for error of fact, omission, interpretation or opinion which may be present, nor for the consequences of any decision based on this information.

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