



# Organics in Canterbury

Issue No 31: March, 2006

## Contents

Holistic management field day	1
Cover crop field day	2
Calendar of events	3
BHU Open Day	3
Canty Organic report	4
Sheep profitability	6
New organic book	7

This newsletter is published by the Canterbury Commercial Organics Group, in association with Heinz Watties, MAF Sustainable Farming Fund, Canterbury Organics and the Biological Husbandry Unit, Lincoln University.

[www.organics.org.nz/ccog/ccog.html](http://www.organics.org.nz/ccog/ccog.html)

### Newsletter contact:

Mary Ralston,  
Back Track,  
RD 12 Rakaia.  
Email: [kem@xtra.co.nz](mailto:kem@xtra.co.nz)  
Phone: 03 3029202.

Articles, letters to the editor and advertisements are welcome.

## Holistic Management & Canterbury Organic Growers' Field Day

Herstall & Ali Ulrich's property, Rock Farm, Cave,  
Friday 24 March, 10.00 am to 2.00 pm

**Bus leaving Christchurch 7.30 am, returning by 5.00 pm**

Join us for a rare opportunity to see sheep managed on dry sunny hill pastures under Holistic Management, bull and lamb finishing on irrigated flats under Harry Weir's Technosystems and tree planting for amenity value and forestry to control gorse, all on the same farm.

Herstall will discuss the day-to-day management of these systems and the benefits he gets from them. He will also discuss the detailed soil monitoring tests carried out on all the pastures. In support of Holistic Management Herstall has said, "By leaving humus on the soil surface, the soils are protected from the wind and sun and retain moisture." His neighbours were quick to notice the changes under Holistic Management too when Rock Farms big hill, their drought barometer, didn't dry out as quickly as usual.

Herstall and Ali's achievements were recognised in 2003 as winners of the Ballance Farm Environment Livestock Award. See background article on page 5.

*"I highly recommend this opportunity to visit Rock Farm and discuss with Herstall the challenges he has faced and the choices he has made over the last 25 years. When I worked with Herstall in the 1980's he was a forward looker*





*and thinker, constantly reviewing options to farm as sustainably as he could." Sue Cumberworth*

**Register to attend by contacting Sue Cumberworth,  
Ph/Fax 03 329 6456, email  
[sue@agribusinessgroup.com](mailto:sue@agribusinessgroup.com)**

---

Organic Growers' Risk Management Project & Kowhai Farm (Heinz Watties Organic Farm at Lincoln University) present a....

## **Cover Crop Management Field Day**

**Date:** Wednesday 12 April

**Time:** 10.00am – 2.00pm (BYO lunch)

**Venue:** Kowhai Farm, Lincoln University

- Results of the 2005 Cover Crops Trial – Late sowing/crops species/harvest dates
- Cover crops literature search summary
- Kowhai Farm Update
- All welcome!

For more information contact Sue Cumberworth, Ph/Fax 03 329 6456, email [sue@agribusinessgroup.com](mailto:sue@agribusinessgroup.com). The preliminary results of the cover crop trial were reported on in the last issue of the newsletter.

---

## **EM courses at CPIT Seven Oaks**

FREE Workshops Effective Microorganisms (EM) for Home and Garden  
Sat 13 May; 5 August; 9 September and 18 November

The workshops are held from 9am to 1pm at CPIT 7 Oaks Campus and are FREE to participants. Effective Microorganisms (EM) improve soil health and the quality and yield of crops. The EM Bokashi composting system for recycling food scraps will also be covered.

For more information contact CPIT. Ph: 0800 242476 or 03-940 8074, Email: [info@cpit.ac.nz](mailto:info@cpit.ac.nz)

---

## **NZ Organic Festival Workshop Weekend**

March 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> Harbour Street Historic Precinct Oamaru

**Theme: The oil crisis – disaster or opportunity?** There will be discussions, workshops and tours of local properties. Workshop topics: seed saving, how to convert a vehicle to run on vegetable oil, implications of the oil shortage, designing for maximum warmth with minimum input. An organic lunch will be held on Saturday at Brydone Growers.

Contact: Nathalie (03) 434 2594, or Marie 021 076 6168 or the Oamaru i-site.



---

## **Calendar of Events**

**12 March** BHU Lincoln University Open Day. See below for details.

**18 & 19 March** Oamaru Organic Festival. See page 2 for details.

**24 March** Holistic Grazing Management Field Day, Cave. See article front page.

**12 April** Cover Crop Field Day, Kowhai Farm, Lincoln University. See page 2.

**13 May; 5 August; 9 September; 18 November** EM Workshops. See page 2.

---

## **BHU and Lincoln University OPEN WORKSHOP DAY**

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2006, 11.00 – 3.30 Theme – “From Plot to Plate”

The Biological Husbandry Unit (BHU) displays organic demonstration and extension orchards and gardens. It is located at and supported by Lincoln University. Founded in 1976, the BHU features a diverse range of established model organic agricultural and horticultural systems that are used for research, demonstration and education.

To celebrate 30 years of the BHU an Open Workshop Day will be held at the BHU and Lincoln University on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2006 (the locations will be signposted at Lincoln University). The new self guided tour/walk around the BHU supported by poster-boards will be opened.

A range of workshops will be hosted on the day exploring the theme “From Plot to Plate”. There will be presentations and workshops on:

- Beneficial and interesting insects
- Healthy vegetables
- Healthy cooking
- The happy insect garden
- Organic weed control
- Looking after your organic soil
- Composting
- Using Effective Microorganisms and Bokashi

**Cost:** The fee for the workshop day is \$10.00 per person (under 16 years of age free).

**Lunch:** From 1.00 - 2.00 pm an organic lunch (organic sausages, bread, salads, juice, tea/coffee) is available at a cost of \$10.00 per person.

**Registration:** for the workshop day and bookings for the lunch are essential. The registration and booking form is available from: The BHU, phone: 325.2811 extension 8370, or e-mail: [wardj4@lincoln.ac.nz](mailto:wardj4@lincoln.ac.nz)



---

## **News from Canterbury Organic** (OFNZ Canterbury and Nelson Bays)

**Membership** - Organic Farm NZ is continuing to grow and attract new interest in Canterbury. We are currently processing our 35<sup>th</sup> application and we now have 14 members fully certified. This is a big step forward since the start of the programme, particularly in respect of the profile of the Organic Farm NZ scheme with retailers. On the down-side, membership is still fluid as peoples' plans and circumstances change. I think it is in the nature of the scheme that we are providing a service to smaller scale producers, many of whom are setting up and/or gaining only part of their income from the land. I hope that producers gain from the experience of being certified even if only for a couple of years – in terms of organic expertise, local contacts and an understanding of the production rules and record keeping. However, perhaps there are some solutions out there to improve business success, such as co-operative marketing of produce, improved access to advice and practical training....

**Certification Workshops** - Robyn and I plan to run a couple of workshops on certification with OFNZ in North Canterbury during the year in order to help growers keen to establish one or more pods in that area. These will include an opportunity for attendees to receive help completing Property Management Plans and advice on inputs, record keeping, etc. We will be contacting members and potential members in that area shortly. If you are not on our mailing list, or live elsewhere and would like to hold a similar meeting in your locality, please contact the Canterbury Organic office ([corganic@organics.org.nz](mailto:corganic@organics.org.nz)).

**New Administrator required** - I have filled this position since 2003 and am now looking to free up some voluntary time to assist managing the BHU (Biological Husbandry Unit) Organics Trust at Lincoln. The administration for Canterbury Organic is shared with Page Lawson, who looks after the membership database and renewals. It is a part-time job that can be done from home by phone and email. A computer is essential, but only for emailing and word processing. It needs relatively few hours, variable depending on the number of renewals, enquiries, etc coming in - around 8 hours/month is typical. Canterbury Organic reimburses time (at \$15/hr) and costs (postage, printing, phone-calls, etc).

The job does not require technical expertise but carries the responsibility to pass on information quickly and efficiently between members and the certification manager, auditors and OFNZ national office. I am happy to assist in handing over the job and will be continuing voluntary involvement on the committee. If you think you could help out, or know someone who can, please contact Robyn, Page or myself for more information.

Best wishes for an abundant autumn,

Hugh Mingard [corganic@organics.org.nz](mailto:corganic@organics.org.nz) or phone 329.6569

---

**Advertising** Call Mary 03 3029202 or email [kem@xtra.co.nz](mailto:kem@xtra.co.nz) to place an ad in the next issue.

**FOR SALE Organic Fertiliser** 1 tonne of certified organic borage seed cake (a byproduct of our oil pressing operation). High nitrogen (4.5%) & potassium (1.5%) \$0.35 per kg. For more information contact David Musgrave [waihib@ihug.co.nz](mailto:waihib@ihug.co.nz) or phone 03 6922842.



---

## **Holistic Approach a Winner** *(by Sandra Taylor, Country-Wide 2003)*

(Good background reading if you're interested in coming to the field day on March 24)

Improved stock health as a result of a holistic approach to pasture management won Cave farmers Herstatt and Alyson Ulrich the livestock award in the Ballance Farm Environment Awards in 2003. The couple farm a total of 589 ha of which 485 ha is dry land hill country, while a second 104 ha property is an irrigated finishing and forestry block. Together the two properties winter 2700 ewes, 700 hoggets, 100 rising one year bulls and 280 two rising two year old bulls.

After completing a holistic management course three years ago, the Ulrich's have adopted the principles of holistic grazing management and have noticed a marked improvement in soil health and pasture quality and quantity and stock performance.

With the goals of sustainability, nurturing the bio-diversity of the property and maximising income and profit, the Ulrichs have gone back to the fundamentals of how to grow grass. Herstatt believes by improving soil health you will improve plant health and consequently stock health. Understanding how plants grow, allowing them to reach their maximum growing potential and allowing the plant time to recover is an important part of the holistic system. He says it is important not to graze pasture too short so that the leaf index ratio is not reduced too far and photosynthesis is not retarded. The time allowed for plants to recover between grazings will vary between seasons and years.

In their grazing system the Ulrichs have "grazing cells" with each cell consisting of a variable number of paddocks depending on the season and climatic conditions. In spring, for example, the number of paddocks within the cell may be between 10-15, while in winter all the paddocks on the property will be incorporated in the one cell. With the use of a grazing plan drawn up by the Ulrich's stock manager in spring, the sheep are rotated within these cells spending an average of two days in each paddock. When the sheep leave the paddock the amount of residual matter as assessed by eye, is recorded and the time the stock spends in the paddock may be adjusted for future grazings.

The goal is to graze each paddock for two days, while any paddocks that require a maximum four days grazing will either be break or permanently fenced. Under this holistic system more plant residue and some trash is left on the paddock. The trash is trampled back into the soil by the stock providing a valuable food source for microbes and earthworms. The Ulrichs have noticed an increase in the number of earthworms in their soils since using the holistic system and say it is the earthworms and soil microbes that stimulate water and nutrient cycles. Another plus is improved moisture retention with the soils being protected from wind and sun by the trash and residue cover.

Herstatt said in this system the paddocks are grazed very evenly as opposed to set stocking where the sheep will always eat the most palatable plants such as clover and ryegrass first, which causes these plant varieties to get hammered. In the past under a set stocking grazing regime, the Ulrich's tended to have cocksfoot and browntop dominated paddocks, these being the plants the sheep did not like to eat.



The only time the Ulrichs set stock now is at lambing, as after tailing all the ewes and their lambs are mobbed up into flocks of between 700-800 ewes (with their lambs making around 2000 grazing mouths) to start rotating within the cells again. The Ulrich's start drafting lambs at the end of November, and last season sold 1200 lambs before and including the draft at weaning, averaging 36 kg LWT. Under the holistic grazing system the Ulrichs have pushed their weaning date out from the beginning of December to January 20, so they have been able to sell more lambs prime straight off the ewes. The ewes are weighing an average 5 kg heavier at weaning than under the traditional system, a reflection of the better quality summer pasture. Lambing percentages have been maintained at 146% in the past three years despite two droughts and one very wet year.

With improved pasture management Herstatt says he has reduced the quantity of winter feed he grows by 50% and has had to do very little thistle spraying due to denser, better quality pasture. For some years now the Ulrichs have tested their soils for micronutrients as well as macronutrients and topdress with trace elements along with the fertiliser according to the soil tests. Herstatt believes this attention to trace elements is reflected in improved stock health.

Although the shift to holistic pasture management systems has required a change in mindset for the family, Herstatt says they were convinced of the benefits of the holistic grazing three-quarters of the way through their first spring using the system.

---

## A Clean Bill of Health

Review of a field day on Sheep Profitability and Multi-disease Resistance, February 24, 2006

The aim of the afternoon was to provide farmers with some practical skills and knowledge to address drench resistance, improve flystrike resistance, and lower animal health bills to create greater profitability.

A range of speakers addressed the topic of drench resistance and genetic multi-disease resistance. Peter Lester linked soil and animal health, and in particular, the role of vitamins and minerals in promoting healthy animal immune systems and multi-disease resistance. David Scobie talked about his work breeding sheep that need less dagging, tailing, and crutching. The lack of wool on the belly and legs help reduce dag formation and flystrike.

Allan Richardson of Avalon Farming presented his experiences on breeding high performance sheep with multi-disease resistance; including internal and external parasites, facial eczema, grass staggers, and footrot. He compared the profitability of his conventional and organic multi-disease resistant flocks. He puts his success down to a combination of organic farming and holistic management, using the Probitas soil conditioner, multi-disease resistant genetics, marketing under the Avalon brand, and long term marketing contracts at premium prices.

His breeding programme selects for worm resistance so that his animals become vacuum cleaners across the pastures, ingesting worms and killing them. He compared his approach to breeders who focus on resilience to worms instead: resilience allows animals to handle very high parasite loads but they also deposit high parasite counts on pastures. The impact on a



farming system is that resilient animals can handle high parasite exposure, but other livestock classes or species following them would suffer from the high counts.

Allan put his case for using homeopathy and tonics like cider vinegar in his operation. Through his monitoring regime he believes these compounds are effective. When challenged that they are only 70-80% effective, he said 100% effectiveness encourages resistant organisms and spreads resistance faster.

Allan compared his organic farm with his conventional operation. Both operations have the same stocking rate and very similar lambing percentages and ewe wool weights. However the organic lambs kill at a kilo less than conventional, but despite that the income for his organic operation is 40% higher than conventional. The organic operation has much lower animal health and feed costs and a fertiliser bill around 75% of the conventional operation. The resulting cost structure is 90% of the conventional farm and Allan predicts an economic farm surplus of nearly three times of the conventional property for the 05/06 season.

David Scobie of AgResearch presented his work identifying animals with short tails and bare bellies and breeches to reduce flystrike. The impact of his research could reduce shearing costs by 8% through less crutching, dagging, and fleece sorting at shearing. He explained the genetic heritability of the traits his work focuses on short tail (0.8), dagginess (0.2), breech bareness (0.4), and bare belly (0.3). The higher the figure, the greater ability of the parents to pass that trait compared to environmental influence. For example, introducing short tail to a flock is very easy whereas removing dagginess is much more difficult because of the influences of vegetation, stress, and parasite loads in the animal gut.

David suggested that bare breech was probably the most important trait that farmers could take from his work to reduce flystrike. However, bare bellies are thought to improve lamb survival because the lambs can feel warmth and find the teat more easily. The animals used in his research have produced lower fleece weights and lower microns across all the breeds they monitor.

Peter Lester of Quantum Laboratories spoke of the need to balance the mineral composition of soils. He reminded the group that pH doesn't indicate the soil's fertility. Instead of focusing on pH, farmers should be learning more about base saturation and cation exchange capacity as these determine the ability of soil to grow healthy pasture and animals.

For more information contact John King: 025 6737 885, 338 5506 (a/h), [john@succession.co.nz](mailto:john@succession.co.nz)

---

A new book for organic growers:

***Plant Protection in Organic Arable and Vegetable Crops – a grower's resource*** By D. Teulon, P. Cameron, G. Bourdot and D. Curtin. Published by the New Zealand Institute for Crop & Food Research Limited. \$59.95.

**Synopsis:**

Developed to address a perceived lack of information on pest, disease and weed management in organic farming in New Zealand, this new book is an invaluable resource for organic arable



and vegetable growers and their consultants, as well as for those considering a move to reduced chemical usage or organics.

Beginning with the central principles of soil health and the management of pests, diseases and weeds in organic growing, the book also contains standalone chapters on those pest, disease and weed problems specific to eight arable crops (barley, borage, clover seed, lentils, grass seed, linseed, maize and wheat) and nine vegetable crops (asparagus, brassicas, capsicums, carrots, onions, process peas, potatoes, squash and tomatoes), together with information on recommended organic control methods.

Throughout, anecdotal material has been deliberately avoided – instead draft chapters of the book were circulated among scientists, growers and consultants for practical, objective feedback and sound evidence to incorporate into the final text. Wherever possible, information has been related to New Zealand conditions and to current organic certification standards.

Copies available from Crop & Food Research ([www.crop.cri.nz/books/](http://www.crop.cri.nz/books/))

## **Canterbury Commercial Organics Group Newsletter**

C/- Mary Ralston  
Back Track  
RD 12 Rakaia

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

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 Canterbury Commercial Organics 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.