



Organics in Canterbury

Issue No 34: April 2007

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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/

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Articles, letters to the editor and advertisements are always welcome.

Organic Growers Risk Management Project

SEMINAR and ORGANIC DINNER

On Thursday May 3rd, the Canterbury Organic Growers group will be celebrating the end of the 3 year Risk Management Project by holding a seminar and organic dinner at Lincoln University. There will be a summary of the project's achievements, two speakers and a panel discussion on the future of organics in New Zealand. It will be an evening to remember so make plans now to be there!

Date: Thursday 3 MAY 2007

Speakers: MARK HOUGHTON-BROWN - "AN OUTSIDERS VIEW" - NZ ORGANIC AGRICULTURE AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

KEN SHIRLEY - "ORGANICS AOTEAROA NZ"

VENUE: KAURI ROOM, LINCOLN UNIVERSITY

Time: 4.30 Registration & tea/coffee
4.45 – 6.30 Speakers & panel discussion
7.00 Organic dinner

Fee: \$25 per person

RSVP: 27 April, to Sue Cumberworth, Ph/Fax: 03 329 6456, 027 628 6110, email: sue@agribusinessgroup.com

The seminar is supported by the Sustainable Farming Fund, Foundation for Arable Research and Heinz Wattie's.

Details continued next page.





Mark Houghton-Brown has been an organic farmer in Southwest England for 20 years, and was Organic Farmer of the Year 2000. He has been involved with the Soil Association as a long standing elected council member, and director of their certification subsidiary, member of various Standards Committees, and chair of Certification Control Panel. He has also been a joint founder of several successful farmer owned collaborative businesses and developed his own award winning range of branded organic foods which are widely sold in whole food shops and supermarkets. He is now living in Nelson with his young family.

Ken Shirley is the Executive Director of Organics Aotearoa New Zealand (OANZ), an incorporated society formed in March 2006 to provide strategy, leadership and coordination across the New Zealand organics sector. He was formerly an ACT List Member of Parliament from 1996 to 2005 and the Member of Parliament for Tasman 1984-1990, serving as Minister of Fisheries and Associate Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Health.

Ken was the Executive Director of the New Zealand Forest Owners' Association between 1990 and 1996. During this period he was chairman/convenor of an international working party which wrote a framework for Sustainable Forest Management worldwide. He was also a member of the New Zealand delegation to the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992.

Advertisements & notices contact Mary kem@xtra.co.nz or 03 3029202 to place your ad

FOR SALE

ORGANIC APPLES Mixed banana box of apples and pears sent by courier for \$25. Biogro certified. Please e-mail Robyn on robbie123@xtra.co.nz

3 ACRES ORGANIC FARM N.Z CERTIFIED LAND, spring & pond for irrigation. 3 bedroom house, recently rebuilt/re-designed for free flowing living space. Located in North Otago graced with a great climate for growing/living in. Township has beautiful beach & is close to Moeraki. Contact Steph & Nath Davis on 03-6126092 or 021-2292793 to discuss price/options.

WORK WANTED We are looking for part or full-time work on an organic property. Both from farming backgrounds; deer, sheep & dry stock, dairy share milking. Very capable & reliable & very interested to extend our knowledge in organics. Please contact Dawn & Lance Baker on 03 3086771.

Seven Oaks Polytech Organic Gardens To Lease In Christchurch

Seven Oaks organic gardens in Christchurch is available to lease to a commercial operator or community group with the necessary experience to manage the property to a high standard. The gardens, in Opawa, include a certified organic orchard with pip fruit, stone fruit, nuts, berries and artichokes. There is also an extensive vegetable-growing area, including a twin-skin tunnel house, single-skin tunnel house, glasshouse, propagating house, nursery and chicken run. Access to tools, irrigation and propagation equipment is also included.

No fee will be charged, but the gardens must be maintained to an acceptable standard in exchange for their use. This is a fantastic opportunity to lease a ready-to-go organic site, which has been certified for more than 10 years.

Inquiries to Bill Martin (phone 03 940 8361), martinb@cpit.ac.nz or Suzanne Blyth (phone 03 940 8363).

Canterbury Farmers Market is held every Saturday at Riccarton House. Prospective stall holders can find more information at www.canterburyfarmersmarket.co.nz



Calendar of Events

Thursday 3 May. “Organics – the future” Seminar and dinner, Lincoln University. See page 1 for details.

Saturday 12 May, & Tues 15 May. Workshop on ‘Organic Growing Under Cover/Protected Cropping (e.g. tunnel houses)’. Location: 251 Marshlands Rd, Chch. Time: 10am - 1pm. Presenter: Tony Mallard. Cost: \$10. Organised by Canterbury Organic (Organic Farm NZ). To register, contact Gilda, ph. 03 325 1344 or email corganic@organics.org.nz

Saturday 12 May. EM Course at CPIT Seven Oaks. Effective Microorganisms (EM) for Home and Garden. 9am to 1pm. Cost \$26. Introduction to the principles and practice of using EM to improve soil health and the quality and yield of crops. The EM Bokashi composting system for recycling food scraps will also be covered.

August 17-19, National Organics Conference 2007. “Our Organic Future – Cottage or Corporate?” Lincoln University, Canterbury. See article p.4.

See CCOG’s new website

CCOG’s website has been updated!! It’s still no-frills so it doesn’t take forever to download. Have a look at it – feedback welcome. www.organics.org.nz/

Organic Updates

A series of 18 Organic Updates has been produced which records the information from the seminars, workshops and research trials run by the Canterbury Organic Growers Risk Management Project, which has been funded by the Sustainable Farming Fund. These updates cover a wide range of topics, from managing risk, to organic livestock, weed control, cover crops, soils, pastures, etc. The Updates are still to be finalised but will be available as PDF files from the new CCOG website or can be purchased as a bound copy. More details next newsletter or watch the website.

OANZ launches advisory programme

The Organic Advisory Programme, operated through Organics Aotearoa New Zealand was launched on March 15 at Lincoln University. The objectives of the programme are:

- To promote organics to non-organic growers,
- To support non-organic growers to make good decisions to convert,
- To support newly converted and existing organic growers.

‘Smart Start’ service – helping farmers convert to organics

The highlight of the programme is the ‘Smart Start’ service, providing growers considering conversion to organics with a subsidised on-farm consultancy service. The Smart Start service gives producers access to a one-on-one consultancy on their own property, looking at the property’s potential for conversion to certified organic production.



The current criteria for Smart Start require the producer to have commercial organic aims in excess of \$20,000. Cost of the subsidised service is only \$200 which includes a ½ day visit from a consultant who will answer questions on organic production, and systematically review your current management system, performance and goals to identify issues that may arise following conversion to organic production. The consultant will then prepare a report outlining options, strategies, impacts and support available for organic conversion

For more information about the Smart Start Service, contact Holger Kahl, Organic Advisory Programme's Southern Co-ordinator, ph. 03 3293299, 0272.270181, Kahl.stoppel@xtra.co.nz

Other initiatives underway from the Organic Advisory Programme include the 0800-Organic Helpline, a website www.oanz.org.nz, workshops, a mentorship programme and focus groups.

Workshops The South Island Organic Small Farms Workshops will be run by OANZ and Canterbury Organic, the certification body for small-scale growers in Canterbury.

The next workshop will be on **Organic Growing Under Cover/Protected Cropping**

Location: 251 Marshlands Rd, **Date:** 12th May (Saturday) and 15th May (Tuesday)

Time: 10am - 1pm. **Presenter:** Tony Mallard (more than 20 years experience as an organic market gardener). **Cost:** \$10, refreshments provided. Please bring a chair if possible.

To register, contact Gilda, ph. 03 325.1344 or email corganic@organics.org.nz

Each workshop topic will be run 3 times – Saturday and Tues in Canterbury and once in Otago.

Other workshops – details still to be finalised - contact Gilda for more information

June: Improving biological soil fertility

September: Non chemical disease control

July: Options for marketing your produce

October: Organic pest management

August 10 & 14: Organic Livestock

November: Organic weed control

Organic mentors A mentorship programme to help new organic farmers in Canterbury is starting up with funding from the Organic Advisory Programme. New growers will be paired with experienced growers for advice and support on converting to organic production. At this stage we are looking for mentors – experienced organic farmers and growers with a variety of specialties – and also looking for new organic growers who are interested in participating. Mentors will be paid for their time.

This project is organised through the Biological Husbandry Unit at Lincoln University. Anyone interested please contact Rebecca Reider, rebecca.reider@gmail.com, 027-359-4522.

Conference 2007 OANZ will hold its inaugural national organic sector conference on 17-19 August 2007 at Lincoln University. The conference has the theme "Our Organic Future – Cottage or Corporate?" The conference will address these, and other, questions:

- If New Zealand is able to significantly expand organic production, consumption and exports, what will the consequences be?
- How will organic production, marketing and trading look in the future?
- How can farmers convert to organics and meet the challenges of organic development?
- How can we develop a strong and effective advisory and extension service?
- How will we foster meaningful organic research?



The conference programme will include practical, hands-on workshops and field trips and a day dedicated to organics research. Papers, presentations, workshops and suggestions for topics and features for the general conference as well as for the research day are called for. Register your interest by visiting <http://events.lincoln.ac.nz/organics> or call (03) 325 3849.

Organic Arable Demonstration Day

The air was cold and wet but interest was high at the Canterbury Organic Growers arable demonstration day held at “Longlea,” Midlands Seeds organic farm near Ashburton. The 82 ha farm is leased by Tim Chamberlain who grows organic carrot seed, process peas, linseed and runs sheep.

The demonstration day was one of the activities of the Canterbury Organic Growers Risk Management Project. The group has been running for three years and is supported by the Sustainable Farming Fund, Heinz Watties, and the Foundation for Arable Research (FAR).

The idea for the day was to demonstrate to farmers particular methods or techniques that can be used in organic arable farming which will minimise the risks inherent in organic cropping. Without the “quick fixes” that can be used in conventional farming – soluble fertilizers, fungicides, sheep drench etc. – organic farmers have to be particularly proactive in their management. Soil health and fertility had been previously identified by the group as being one of the major risks they face in organics. Weeds were another one high on the list. These areas were the subject of particular focus at the demonstration day.

At “Longlea” soil health and fertility, and weeds, are taken very seriously and nothing is left to chance. We first looked at the 15 ha field of organic carrots grown for seed: rows of big healthy carrots just beginning to flower – with barely a weed in sight thanks to a strict weed control programme. Conventionally grown carrot seed crops are planted from seed in late summer; however these organic ones were transplanted as seedlings in the spring. This was done so that a weed problem would not build up over the winter and early spring when control by cultivation would not be possible due to wet conditions. After transplanting, interrow hoeing is used to manage weeds.

Next stop was a walk through the process pea crop to look at Tim’s undersowing trial. Undersowing is a major objective of Tim’s both here at Longlea and at his home farm at Leeston. Undersowing is the establishment of a secondary crop underneath the first one – in this case, a range of species were sown under the peas to provide grazing for sheep once the peas are harvested. This practice not only saves time compared to establishing the crop later, but helps with weed control and minimises the amount of cultivation required. The second crop also provides nitrogen and organic matter to the soil, to fertilise subsequent crops.

The peas had been tined twice to kill weeds. At the second tine weed, the seed of the undersown crop was sown with a drill mounted on the front of the tractor. Species in Tim’s trial were ryegrass and serradella, sulla, lotus, rape, kale, and red clover with chicory and plantain. The combination Tim most frequently uses is ryegrass and clover – the seed is fairly cheap and quick to establish, and clover, being a legume, provides nitrogen to the soil and is a high quality feed for sheep. Lambs are brought onto the paddock after the peas are harvested in early



December and can graze until the spring when the paddock will be cultivated for next summer's crop.

Anthony White, agronomist for Heinz Watties, outlined the ideal conditions for growing organic process peas. He stressed that the major objective is to grow an even a crop as possible. All decisions and operations – from paddock selection, drilling and weed control to irrigation – should be made with this in mind. Low weed pressure is required and to achieve this, several “false seedbeds” should be used (a false seedbed is the technique of preparing the seedbed, then letting it sit for a week or so until a flush of weeds has appeared, then recultivating shallowly to kill these weeds before drilling the crop).

Tine weeding the crop pre- and post-emergence can also make a big difference to annual weeds. It is also crucial to apply irrigation evenly, and to ensure the crop is never stressed. Applying small amounts of irrigation frequently is the best strategy (although nature was doing the job quite well by herself that day!).

Soil tests were made before the demonstration day. Tim Jenkins outlined the results and how they could be interpreted. The soil at Longlea is a stony Lismore silt loam which is not particularly inherently fertile. Soil pH results were all in the range 6.0 to 6.4, which is nearly ideal for horticultural uses, although at 6.4 there may be some effect on trace element availability (e.g., zinc and copper) which can effect livestock health.

Soil test results showed that magnesium is quite low. A dolomite application would be recommended for the lower pH paddocks and calcined magnesite (a restricted input) or kieserite. Limeflour would be a good way of increasing calcium availability without lifting pH (which occurs when applying calcium in the form of lime). A major limiting nutrient is phosphorous. Tim's recommendation was for a bulk application of RPR (reactive rock phosphate) before cultivation for pasture establishment.

Another result from the tests indicated that organic matter levels could be improved. This would also improve general fertility and soil biological activity. The best way to achieve this would be to have a vigorous pasture phase of several years duration. The aim should be to maximise clover growth which helps drive the whole pasture system.

It was an extremely useful day in terms of information (practical ideas for weed control, undersowing and agronomy) – and inspiration – here were great looking crops showing what could be done with hard work, attention to detail, proactive management and a willingness to try new things. Wet weather or not, it was well worthwhile.

Kowhai Farm – Heinz Wattie's Organic Farm at Lincoln University

Farm Report for Spring and Summer 2006-07 *Anthony White*

During the 2006-07 season, 75% of Kowhai Farm produced crops, including peas, beans, carrots, potatoes and onions. One paddock remained in pasture. Despite a cool damp summer most of the crops grew well although it was necessary to direct a lot of resources towards managing weeds.



Paddock A1 – Beans → Pasture

- Direct-drilled oats and tares grew well despite the wet winter last year and were partially grazed off in early September 2006.
- Remaining green crop residue was ploughed under and the paddock was later subsoiled to disturb any areas of Californian thistles and to combat any soil compaction.
- Dwarf green beans were drilled on 10 December 2006 following final soil cultivation.
- Subsequent weed control included one pre-emergence harrowing, two post emergence tine weedings and two passes with the inter-row hoe.
- The crop was irrigated three times and grew extremely well.
- Harvested in early March with the crop yielding 13.95 tonnes/ha and grossing \$5243/ha.
- Immediately after harvest the bean crop residue was mulched, the paddock rotary hoed and rolled in one pass and a roller drill was used to sow mixed species pasture seed.
- Fortuitously rain arrived right after drilling, enabling the pasture to strike well.

Paddock A2 – Peas → Oats & Tares

- Organic peas had never been grown in A2 prior to the 2006-07 season due to the large population of Californian Thistles in the paddock. However a general reduction in the population in recent years made it possible to “risk” growing a pea crop.
- Once ploughed the paddock was subsoiled using a “winged” subsoiler to cause maximum disruption to the thistle root systems.
- After rolling, Humic Acid, molasses and liquid fish were applied in combination with fine lime in suspension. Same fertiliser application was made to paddocks A3, A5 & A6.
- Final cultivation consisted of power harrowing and rolling, peas drilled on 19 September.
- Weed management included pre and post emergence tine weeding plus topping of Californian thistle heads prior to harvest.
- Crop harvested 19 Jan - good result grossing \$3943/ha; pea vine baled and sold.
- Paddock grazed, subsoiled again, rotary hoed and oats and tares drilled.
- Paddock irrigated once, oats and tares emerged well.

Paddock A3 – Peas/Onions/Potatoes → Pasture

Peas → Pasture

- After last season’s potato crop was harvested this area remained very wet throughout the winter and consequently the pea crop performed poorly.
- Once peas were harvested the area was worked and drilled in permanent pasture.

Onions

- Onions were drilled in early Oct with rain falling soon after resulting in very slow emergence.
- Flameweeded numerous times prior to emergence and then handweeded.
- Challenging season with weeds overtaking the crop in parts of the paddock.

Potatoes

- Potato area ploughed, subsoiled, power harrowed and rolled; potatoes planted mid October.
- Weed control included tinweeding, grubbing, harrowing and moulding.
- Crop established well. Irrigated several times during the latter part of summer.

Paddock A4 – Permanent Pasture

- Remained in pasture throughout the last season, grazed by ewes and lambs.



- Topped numerous times and irrigated twice.

Paddock A5 – Beans/Carrots → Oats & Tares

- Entire paddock came out of permanent pasture in early September.
- Surface rotary hoed then ploughed and subsoiled.
- The paddock was quite twitchy so with a long lead time to drilling of the beans was grubbed and maxitilled at regularly intervals, beans drilled 10 December 2006 into moist seedbed.
- Harrowed soon after drilling then tine weeded twice after emergence.
- Started to look weedy with annual weeds so inter-row hoed three times.
- Managed to harvest most of the paddock except for an extremely weedy area.
- Bean yield 8.2 tonnes/ha, grossing \$3209/ha.
- Crop residue and weeds mulched after harvest, paddock rotary hoed and rolled and oats and tares drilled; adequate soil moisture enabled good establishment of green crop.

Carrots

- Carrot moulds were pulled up in late September and it didn't take too long to realise that there was a serious twitch problem here too.
- Before the carrot seed was sown the area between the moulds was grubbed and remoulded several times and the moulds flameweeded to control annual weeds such as wire weed.
- Rain delayed planting until early November but good to sow into a moist seedbed.
- Flameweeded twice prior to emergence and once the seedlings were just big enough further intensive mechanical weed control took place (hoeing, grubbing, moulding etc).
- Handweeded twice, finally achieving a good level of weed control.
- Final mould on 28 Feb, irrigated several times, crop is looking great and should yield well.

Paddock A6 – Peas → Permanent Pasture

- Ploughed mid September and finished off with power harrow and roller.
- Treated similarly to paddock A2 in regards to tineweeding and irrigation.
- Crop also harvested 19 January 2007, grossing \$4029/ha (slightly better than A2).
- Pea vine baled and moved to hayshed.
- Paddock subsoiled, rotary hoed and roller drilled with mixed species pasture seed.
- Irrigated twice and now growing well.

Organic Market Trends and Sustainability

Jon Manhire spoke to the Kowhai Farm field day last November on organic market trends and sustainability. This was a very timely presentation as there had been recent media discussion about "food miles" and whether New Zealand food exports to the UK were "unsustainable" due to the long distances they had to travel to the market place. This issue continues in the media.

Food miles New Zealand exports are very energy efficient in terms of production and transport compared to the same food produced in Britain and kept in cold storage to be available for consumption in the winter. Studies by Andrew Barber and Caroline Saunders of New Zealand's lamb, dairy products, apples and onions exported to the UK were undertaken and compared to the UK equivalents. These commodities were looked at in a "whole lifecycle" approach, not just food miles: energy use, including direct, indirect, capital and transport to the UK were taken into account, as well as emissions produced.



Food miles vs energy use Exporting lamb to the UK in our summer/their winter turns out to be four times more efficient than producing the lamb in the UK and keeping it in storage until consumption. This lower energy cost reflects the different method of production – the New Zealand system of grass-fed agriculture is inherently lower energy-consumptive than the UK model. For onions, New Zealand is less efficient in production than the UK but when storage and transport are taken into consideration, New Zealand onions are the lower energy product.

In fact, “food miles” is a over-simplistic and flawed concept. It only considers travel distance and excludes energy use and emissions produced during the production of the food. To make a true comparison the relative costs of production should be included as well as transport costs.

Trends in consumer demand In the wealthy Western world only a small proportion of income (less than 10%) is spent on food. Attributes of the food have become more important to the consumer than price. These attributes include taste, naturalness and food safety. Emerging trends are the importance of environmental and sustainability factors such as the environmental impact of farming, efficiency of water and energy use, animal welfare, the welfare of workers and waste management.

Trends in the organic market In the last 10 years, the demand for organic products has grown at around 15-20% pa which makes it the fastest growing food sector. This equates to a market value of US\$40 billion. The overall food sector is growing at 4-5% pa. In NZ, there is a \$100 m export trade in organic produce and an approx. \$100 m local trade in organic produce.

“Supermarketization” An emerging trend is the power shift from producers and processors to the retailers who manage supply. Organic produce, like all food sales, is becoming dominated by large vertically integrated supermarket chains (that is, the supermarket sometimes owns the farm, processing factory and retail outlet). Global supermarket chains are appearing that have huge power in the marketplace – a process called “supermarketization”. In NZ, Australia, and the UK 3 or 4 chains sell up to 70% of food sales. This has given them great control over food price and supply.

Another trend appearing is that of large food companies acquiring organic brands, such as Cadbury Schweppes (organic juices), Coca Cola, Heinz and Kelloggs. There has also been a consolidation of production, processing, certification and distribution. For example, in California, 2% of organic growers represent 50% of organic sales.

Emerging issues The “conventionalisation” of the organic supply chain has occurred in some areas, which has led to increasing organic monocultures, reduced market access to smallholders, decreased transparency of profits across the organic food chain, and damage to local economies. Partly in response to this, there has been a refocus on founding principles of organic agriculture such as health, ecology, fairness, care/precaution of ecological limits and equitable social relationships.

There has been an emergence of organic differentiation – standards and labels to promote different forms of short supply chains for local community development e.g., farmers markets and box schemes.



Growing Organically? Networks to Expand Organic Agriculture in New Zealand

Rebecca Reider Fulbright Fellow, Agribusiness & Economics Research Unit, Lincoln University
To contact the author: rebecca.reider@gmail.com Full report will be available at: ww.lincoln.ac.nz/AERU

Report Summary Organic agriculture is rapidly growing worldwide. Will it expand in New Zealand, and if so, how? This study looks at how *human networks* – specifically information networks, and market networks – are shaping organic production across New Zealand. Through case studies of three large-scale commercial organic sectors, this report examines how organic production has grown in the past, in order to make recommendations for future programs and policies.

The case studies are: mixed arable cropping in Canterbury, apple orcharding in Hawke's Bay, and dairy farming in the Waikato. All three took off in bursts, as groups of producers turned organic together. Canterbury organic cropping went through a growth spurt in the 1990s, as the Wattie's vegetable processing company helped farmers convert – but the organic sector there has stopped growing in recent years. Hawke's Bay's organic apple export business is lucrative and expanding, though some question the industry's long-term sustainability. Meanwhile, in three areas on the North Island, Fonterra is struggling to convert more dairy farmers to produce organic milk to meet international demand. Together, these three sectors illustrate the potential for growth – and ecological and economic trade-offs involved – when organic production goes big and corporate. The Canterbury and Hawke's Bay case studies also offer a glance at diverse local organic production for the domestic market.

Organic information flows The farmers and growers interviewed turned organic for a wide variety of reasons, ranging from deep commitment to organic farm practices, to the financial allure of organic price premiums. The initial three-year conversion period is the hardest time for most new organic producers. Information exchange is critical to help them learn a new organic system. In all three cases studied, farmers and growers appreciated learning through direct contact with fellow organic producers. Facilitated discussion groups helped producers in all three sectors. Close relationships with researchers advanced organic production in some cases, as in the apple industry, where researchers have helped organic growers solve technical challenges. In the other sectors, farmers have more mixed opinions of academic research.

Serious barriers still impede the flow of organic information in New Zealand. Information flows in parallel to commercial products throughout the farming world; both conventional and organic producers receive much of their information from people selling products. This means that many vital organic ideas and practices – especially practices related to technique and system design, rather than the use of a particular product – do not normally circulate to farmers. Furthermore, conventional agricultural extension organisations are not always supportive of organics. Many conventional producers still hold negative perceptions about organics; some of those perceptions are based on lack of information.

Corporate organic Large corporations have played a mixed role in growing organic production in New Zealand. Corporations have powerfully used their economic resources to increase the amount of organic land in the country. They have supported farmers in the transition to



organics, by providing informational support and conversion premiums. They have also helped New Zealand producers reach international organic markets.

However, corporate support does not necessarily foster long-term stability in the organic industry. Corporate organics has grown most quickly in New Zealand in single-commodity systems – monocultures. This pattern exists for multiple reasons. Marketing is simplest for companies to organise around one organic export crop, such as apples. In contrast, marketing is more complicated for mixed crop organic producers, as Canterbury organic farmers have discovered. Information exchange is also easiest to organise when all producers are using the same system to grow one single product.

The current organic monoculture trend has multiple drawbacks. Ecologically, monocultures are vulnerable to a wide variety of problems, particularly pests and diseases. Economically, many organic farmers who depend on a single crop are currently thriving. But in the future, these producers could find themselves in a difficult position if supermarkets gain the upper hand in bargaining and prices fluctuate the way they do for conventional crops.

Recommendations for growing organic production in New Zealand

Information transfer

Working with established growth patterns

- Invest in supporting pioneers who are the first in their area to go organic. Once a few successful organic models are in place, others follow.
- Promote farmer-to-farmer links. Create programs to make successful organic producers into visible examples and mentors. Provide formal opportunities for peer support, such as discussion groups.
- Work through existing commercial channels, such as organic input supply companies, which already provide information to organic and conventional farmers. Create other forums to teach non-product-based organic practices and farming system design.
- Promote halfway-organic systems as stepping stones to full organic production.
- Newly converting farmers need the most assistance – including information and financial support to get through the conversion period.

Diverse programs for diverse needs

- Provide individualised advice to producers outside of the big corporate organic industries; they currently receive the least information support.
- Offer a range of information sources, different farmers prefer to learn in different ways.
- Organic and synthetic-chemical-intensive farming are two extremes on a spectrum of farming styles. Offer different extension activities to get farmers onto the organic pathway, and to move them along it: from awareness, to use of some organic practices, to conversion, and finally to deeper agroecological understanding.

Beyond the farm

- More research may be needed in some organic sectors, but priorities must be determined by farmers and growers themselves.
- Work with the official levy-funded agricultural extension organisations to disseminate basic information on organics, but do not depend on them exclusively; these organisations do not always have the experience or enthusiasm to take organics forward.
- Organic agriculture could benefit from an improved image in New Zealand, through increased publicity about the benefits of organic food and farming, and the problems with conventional.



Market coordination

- Encourage organic producers to diversify, resisting the trend toward organic monocultures. Help producers find market opportunities beyond the main organic commodities.
- Improve coordination among producers in the domestic fresh produce market, to ensure a more stable supply.
- Organise suppliers' bargaining power, nationally and internationally, to protect organic price premiums for the future.

Sally Fallon speaks on "The health benefits of traditional foods"

Tues. May 8th - 7 pm Christchurch Girl's High School Auditorium. 10 Matai East St., Riccarton
Hear about . . . The health benefits of enzyme-rich lacto-fermented foods; the vital role of pasture-fed & organic animal fats; the health benefits of raw milk; the dangers of modern vegetable oils; the dark side of modern soy foods; grains for optimal digestion; practical steps to change your diet. Sally is President of the Weston A. Price Foundation www.westonaprice.org and author of the best-selling cookbook *Nourishing Traditions*. \$30 at the door, \$25 payment by 4th May. For those coming in from areas like Methven or Ashburton etc. the door fee will be \$20. Let people at the door know where you have come from. [Tickets on sale at:](#) Inspirations, Nature's Organics, or Naturia. **Contact** Kieran Whelan: 03 3519 733 * 021 253 5333 sundara12003@yahoo.com.au

Walnut Themed Harvest Dinner At Langdales Winery, West Melton

25 May 2007 at 7.00pm GUEST SPEAKER : Professor Steve Wratten, 'Garden to Plate; the benefits of home grown fresh food'. Cost per person \$55. A reduction of \$5 per person to Soil and Health members. This dinner is almost fully booked but another evening has been planned with the same venue and menu for Friday 7 September. This will include a tour of the Lawrence's walnut factory and viewing of a walnut oil pressing before heading off to Langdales. For further information and please contact Heather Thompson at ph/fax O3 3478 103 or email crackernut@clear.net.nz

Organics in Canterbury Newsletter

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

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