



Organics in Canterbury

Issue No 36: November 2007

Contents

New Organic College	1
Organic Updates are out!	2
Calendar of events	3
Org Veg Growers field day	3
Sheep & beef field day	4
Marketing organic produce	5
Animal health & seed opps seminar reports	7
Grazing wheat grain crops	8
Kowhai Farm report	9

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

Back issues of the newsletter can be found on our website: www.organics.org.nz/

Newsletter contact:

Mary Ralston,
Back Track,
RD 12 Rakaia. Email: mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz
Phone: 03 3029202.

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

New Organic Training College!

Organic horticulture courses begin in January 2008

The new Organic Training College at the BHU, Lincoln, was launched on October 25 with great enthusiasm. The college will offer organic horticulture training courses and is a collaboration between Telford Rural Polytechnic, the BHU, Work and Income New Zealand and OANZ.

Zero fees will be a big draw-card for students. The new college aims to attract students who are interested in practical, hands-on training which will qualify them to work on organic horticulture properties. Two levels of course will be offered: Course 1 will begin in January 08 and run to October, Course 2 will begin in October 2008 and run to October 2009.

Practical subjects in Course 1 include sowing, planting and harvesting organic crops; composting, liquid fertilisers and worms; the living soil; organic pest and disease management and computer and life skills. Course 2 continues these subjects at a higher level and adds topics such as bees, permaculture, fruit production, beneficial organisms and water use. Students enrolling in Course 1 need not have any formal qualifications, however, Course 2 requires some experience.

The Organic Training College is an exciting development and a new direction for the BHU. The BHU is perhaps the oldest organic initiative at a tertiary institution in New Zealand – it was started in 1976 by the legendary Bob Crowder and since then has served as a “home base” for organics education, research and extension.

The Organic Training College will be run by Bill Martin who taught organic horticulture at the Christchurch Polytechnic.



CCOG





More information about the courses at the Organic Training College can be found by phoning the BHU on 03 325.3684, or by emailing the college on college@bhu.co.nz or looking at the website www.bhu.co.nz. Prospective students can also ring Telford for enrolment information on 0800.835.367 or write to: Telford Rural Polytechnic, Freepost 73901, Private Box 6, Balclutha, to request an enrolment form for the Organic Training College Courses.

The Organic Updates are out!!

Informative and entertaining!!! Essential reading for all organic growers – experienced or starting out!! A series of 20 Organic Updates has been produced which records the information from the seminars, workshops and research trials run by the Canterbury Organic Growers' group from 2000-2007, funded by the Sustainable Farming Fund, Heinz Wattie's and Foundation for Arable Research (FAR).

The updates cover a wide range of topics: effective microorganisms, weed management, cover crop mulching and minimum tillage, soil foodweb and compost teas, animal health – mineral nutrition and internal parasites, risk management, soil health and fertility, pastures, soil testing, cover crop trial results, cover crop literature review, holistic grazing management, organic livestock, growing organic process peas, growing organic carrot seed, undersowing, and Kowhai Farm.

The updates are available as PDF files from the CCOG website <http://www.organics.org.nz/> or can be purchased as a bound copy for \$10. Send a cheque to Mary Ralston, Back Track, RD 12 Rakaia, 7782.

Advertisements contact Mary mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz or ph 03 3029202 to place your ad

FOR SALE Greenhouse equipment 2 metal tables with coralite tops, each 10 m long (come in 3 sections). Growing trays, approx 220. Electric heaters for greenhouse (4). Fogger. Bags (PB 40) approx 100. Any offers considered. Phone Mary or Kem 03-3029202 kem@xtra.co.nz

See CCOG's website www.organics.org.nz/ Download Organic Updates from this site and source information from other sites we are linked to, such as the BHU, certification bodies (Canterbury Organic, Biogro, Agriquality), and OANZ.

Seven Oaks project Project Port Lyttelton (PPL) is currently negotiating with CPIT for use of the site at Seven Oaks campus in Opawa. The organisation has been gardening on the site for several months since negotiations began, and are already harvesting from the site and selling produce to an organic shop and local restaurants in Lyttelton. The long-term future of the site is still uncertain, but it's value as a food producing site in the metropolitan area will only become more pronounced as the effects of climate change and peak oil set in. If you would like to be kept in the loop about the PPL project there, please contact Margaret Jefferies to become a 'Friend of Seven Oaks'. Email: margaret.jefferies@clear.net.nz

Soil & Health Canterbury Branch Update The local branch of Soil & Health is continuing a process of revival. In February a visioning workshop was held at the Lyttelton Community Garden, from which a branch vision statement was collectively produced. Following on from this, at the branch AGM, a decision was made to expand our newsletter, Tilth, to help give life to that vision. In addition, we are re-establishing our branch library at Project Port Lyttelton, next to the Lyttelton Community Garden. Although historically a large organisation, we are now small, and are working within our available resources. For more information, please email Matt Morris at theyellowroom@xtra.co.nz

OFNZ Certification fee discount OFNZ is offering a certification fee discount of \$50 for anyone who has attended a workshop with Canterbury Organic and who gets their paperwork in before November 30th. Contact Gilda Otway for more info: 03 325.1344 or corganic@organics.org.nz



Calendar of Events

- 28 November** Organic sheep and beef field day. More info page 4.
- 4 December** Organic Vegetable and Mixed Farming Association Field Day. See below.
- 9 December** Biodynamic field day at Geoff & Ira Wilson's "Terrace Farm", near Methven. For start time, directions and further information, phone Gita Krenek (03) 377 1305, or email gita@krenek.org.nz
- January 2008** Course 1 begins at the new Organic Training College, BHU. See story page 1.

Organic Vegetable Field Day & Workshop

Date Tuesday 4 December 2007

Time 10.00 pm - 3.30 pm

Venue Lakeside Hall and Rainer's Patch at Harts Creek Farm, Central Canterbury

Purpose To bring together the collective knowledge and wisdom of organic vegetable growers in the South Island. Target audience is commercial organic vegetable growers. Results from the day will be compiled into a database of 'best practices,' to be made available to all organic vegetable growers.

Programme

10.00 am Morning Tea at Lakeside Hall
10.15 am Speakers
11.15 am Vegetable Crop Walk at Harts Creek Farm
12.30 pm Lunch at Lakeside Hall, BYO, drinks provided
1.15 pm Workshop
3.30 pm Close

Speakers

Soil preparation & structure, weed control – twitch	Tim Jenkins
Plant cultivars, pest & disease management	Don Pearson
Intensive organic vegetable growing	Rainer Ramharter
Workshop of growers' collective knowledge and wisdom	Holger Kahl and Sue Cumberworth

Please contact Raymond to book a space and to receive crop-growing guides before the day. Bring your own lunch, drinks provided. **Contact: Raymond Garb, 027 208 5199, raymondgarb@yahoo.co.nz**

This event is being organised by the Organic Vegetable and Mixed Farming Association, with funding from Organics Aotearoa New Zealand (OANZ).

Organic food more nutritious

Some organic foods, including fruit, vegetables and milk, may be more nutritious than non-organic produce, according to an investigation by British scientists. Early results from a study showed that organic fruit and vegetables contained up to 40% more antioxidants than non-organic varieties, according to Professor Carlo Leifert at Newcastle University, who leads the EU-funded Quality Low Input Food project. Larger differences were found in milk, with organic varieties containing more than 60% more antioxidants and healthy fatty acids, he said. Antioxidant-rich food is often promoted as healthier because in lab tests the compounds neutralise free radicals that are thought to contribute to ageing.



During the four-year project, Prof Leifert's team, which is based at the university's Tesco centre for organic agriculture, reared cattle and grew fruit and vegetables on adjacent organic and non-organic sites across Europe, including a 725-acre farm attached to the university. The full results of the study will be released over the next 12 months. "What we're really interested in is finding out why there is so much variability ... What in the agricultural system gives a higher nutritional content and less of the baddies in the food?" Prof Leifert said. *Copyright Guardian Newspapers Limited 2007*

Sheep, beef and deer field day – A Smart Start to Organic Growing

Date: Wednesday, November 28th, 1.30 pm (sharp)

Venue: Peter and Julie Cloughley's 500 acre sheep, beef and deer farm at Tara Hill Road, Waihaorunga, 20 minutes past Waimate, signposted from Waihao Forks Hotel and from Glenavy

Contacts: Holger Kahl - holger.kahl@oanz.org.nz, 03-329 3157, 027-227 0181; Maurice Hallewell 03 689 2252, or Mike Studholme 03 689 7199



This field day will demonstrate successful organic farming practices as well as provide opportunities to find out what support is available from the Organic Advisory Programme. There will be a farm tour and talk, followed by brief presentations, discussions and refreshments. Everyone interested in organic sheep and beef farming is warmly invited.

The Organic Advisory Programme (OAP) was launched earlier this year to provide practical information and assistance to organic growers as well as new, converting growers. Government has provided \$2 million funding for the next 2 years to OANZ (Organics Aotearoa New Zealand) for this programme. This aim is to increase organic production through assisting growers and farmers to convert to and develop commercially viable, certified organic production.

OAP's Southern Coordinator Holger Kahl will be attending the field day. Other presenters and speakers will be organic certification representatives and organic meat and wool processors.

Organic sheep & beef farmers participate in national meeting

For the full report on the meeting, contact Rebecca Reider rebecca.reider@gmail.com ph 03 329 3157

Summary – Fourteen organic sheep and beef farmers representing regions from all over the country came together at a meeting in Wellington on 31 October to discuss their priorities for advisory projects and research and development, and to organise themselves as a sectoral organisation. Representatives came from Northland, Waikato, East Coast, Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa, Canterbury, Otago, and Southland. The meeting was sponsored by OANZ in order to help organic sheep and beef farmers get organised and get advisory and R&D projects off the ground throughout the country.

The main outcomes were:

- (1) Development of a priority list for advisory and R&D needs, which will be the basis for funding applications to the Organic Advisory Programme and Sustainable Farming Fund
- (2) The participants' decision to form a national organic sheep and beef farmers' organisation, as a subgroup within the already-existing Organic Dairy and Pastoral Group (ODPG), to give organic sheep and beef farmers a voice in the organic sector nationally and organise projects and funding as a group.

Anyone interested is welcome to contact the Canterbury representatives who were at the meeting: Ian Turnbull (mid/north Canterbury), 03 314 8155, ieturnbull@ihug.co.nz

Maurice Hellewell (South Canterbury/North Otago), 03 689 2259, maurice.h@xtra.co.nz

The ODPG has offered free membership to organic sheep and beef farmers until the end of the 2007 financial year, which will allow farmers to access the ODPG's online resources (discussion group and website). To join, contact ODPG secretary Kathy Bentham, RD1 Te Aroha, bentham.d.k@xtra.co.nz



Marketing your organic produce

Canterbury Organic organised a seminar in July to outline some options for marketing organic produce. Six different speakers outlined how they marketed their produce.

Processing and selling your own produce

Jenny Lawrence grows and processes organic and “wild” walnuts. The Lawrence’s business, A Cracker of a Nut, is based at West Melton, near Christchurch. They have 7 hectares of certified organic walnut trees, and they also process nuts from other growers. Jenny considers that the following points are crucial for anyone aiming to market their own product:

- Don’t expect overnight success
- You have to have time, energy, money and confidence
- Aim for a quality product
- Be generous with samples
- Get a good brand name and a good graphic designer
- Develop different labels to differentiate different products

Jenny Lawrence from A Cracker of a Nut can be contacted on Ph/Fax 64 3 347 8103 or email <crackernut@clear.net.nz>

David Musgrave runs Functional Wholefoods, a processor of linseed into flax seed oil at Geraldine. He started off growing and running the business himself then realised that he did not have the business or people skills to do this successfully. He now employs people with specialist skills to do the business side for him. David contracts other growers to grow the linseed (flax) for him and to make this a more attractive business proposition, helps them find other crops to grow in their arable rotation. Unlike many contractors of arable crops, he pays his growers throughout the year to help with their cash flow.

Points for successful marketing :

- Packaging very important – e.g., flax seed oil needs to be in black plastic bottles to prevent light degrading the oil. Packaging should be recyclable. Attractive labelling.
- Encourage contract growers – give a high premium over conventional price. Maintain good contact with growers. Help find other markets for their other products.
- Diversify by producing a range of products
- Use points of difference to your advantage – e.g., in Canterbury, the soils and weather conditions give the flax seed oil a unique flavour and has a 5-7% higher level of Omega 3 than flax than oil from the rest of the world.

David Musgrave of Functional Wholefoods can be contacted at 03 693 0034, or their website www.functionalwholefoods.co.nz

Selling to a retail co-operative

Selling to a retail outlet means you can concentrate on growing, so if the process of selling doesn’t satisfy you, it’s a good option. Piko Co-op has been a Christchurch fixture since 1979. It sells organic certified, uncertified and conventional produce. Major sales growth over the last few years has been in certified organic fresh produce and gluten free items. Piko welcomes enquires from growers wanting to sell their produce. In addition to the regular lines of fruit, veges, and dried goods, they need more suppliers of lentils, soy beans, rolled oats, buckwheat, ginger, garlic, brassicas, herb teas (esp. peppermint, nettle, lemon balm), and free range organic eggs.

Piko Wholefoods Co-operative is located at the corner of Kilmore & Barbados Streets, Christchurch, ph 03 366.8116, and on London st, Lyttelton, website www.pikowholefoods.co.nz

Vege box scheme

Scott Barclay grew veges and sold them through a box scheme. This involved the complete chain – they grew the vegetables, packaged and packed them into boxes and delivered them throughout Christchurch.



Scott says a box scheme can be a good way to start growing and selling. You can start with very little capital (1 ha of land is enough), but you do need a tractor and implements, a sprayer, hand tools, irrigation, packing shed, and chiller.

The benefits of producing and selling through a box scheme are:

- It's a good way to experiment with land (what will grow well here?)
- Growing a range of crops spreads risk
- Connectedness with customers is satisfying
- You can adapt quickly to what people want
- Retail margin is retained by the grower
- Minimal waste

But there are some down sides: its hard to grow a wide variety, its very time consuming, there's a long lead in time before income comes in (only November to May), it can be a high input system (compost etc.), there's a high admin component and at times you have to buy in (can be expensive).

Organic wholesaler

Steve Wiley works for the wholesaler Fresh Direct, sourcing organic produce for sale to supermarkets. Demand for organic produce is growing 10-20% per year and Steve says there are still many gaps in supply. Fresh Direct is interested in hearing from growers who have the following:

- Organic certification
- Quality product – it is crucial that organic produce looks good
- Consistent supply
- Consistent units – i.e., arrives in saleable sized packs, e.g., returnable crates
- NZGAP accreditation – this covers the post-harvest time frame, e.g., washing and packing facilities. This is not a hard accreditation to achieve.

Steve says Fresh Direct offers access to a nationwide market. He stressed that attention to quality will pay off and predicted that premiums should remain around 25% above conventional prices.

Steve Wiley can be contacted on 03 349.8393, mobile 021 2295 600, email swylie@freshdirect.co.nz

Farmers' markets

Karen Joblin sells her produce at the Selwyn Farmers' Market at Lincoln under the name Waihora Organics. Certified with OFNZ for 3 years, she owns 5 ha of land at Greenpark, near Lincoln. Karen says farmers' markets are a highly recommended outlet for a small grower who also likes customer contact.

The advantages of selling at farmers' markets:

- It's a good way to "test the water" without committing a lot of capital.
- Community – meeting the customers and selling directly is something Karen really enjoys about selling at the market. You get feedback on quality, price and the produce.
- It can be combined with a small box scheme – what doesn't sell at the market can be put into the boxes.
- Control – you can pick and sell as much or as little as you want.
- You can experiment with new and unusual crops – e.g., artichokes.
- It's a good way to promote organics.

The weather can deter customers and fluctuating sales can be disappointing. At the same time though, consistency from the stallholders is very important – both being at the market every week and selling the same range of product at a consistently high quality. An attractive, uncluttered stall is important and Karen found that most people like to bring their own bags and prefer not to have things pre-packaged.



Farmers' markets

Canterbury now has a number of wonderful farmers' and produce markets – here's a list (thanks to The Press). If you know of others, please let me know and I will include in the next edition.

Canterbury Farmers' Market – Riccarton House, 16 Kahu St, Riccarton, every Sat, 9am – 12 noon.

Lyttelton Farmers' Market – at Lyttelton Main School, Oxford St, Lyttelton, every Sat 10 am – 1 pm.

Selwyn Farmers' Market (Lincoln) – proposed opening Nov 24 and then every Sat until May, 9am – noon. New location this year, see www.selwynfarmersmarket.org.nz for site and date confirmation.

Waipara Valley Farmers' Market – at Pegasus Bay Winery, Stockgrove Rd, 5 min north of Amberley, every Sat till autumn, 9 am – noon.

Ashburton Farmers' Market – new market opening Nov 10, running on the second and fourth Sat of the month, West St carpark, 9am – noon.

Geraldine Farmers' Market – at the Village Inn carpark, open Sat 9 am – 12.30.

The Winshed Farmers' Market (Tai Tapu) – at The Winshed, 29 Cossars Rd, Tai Tapu, every Sat, 10 am – 2 pm.

Kaiapoi Produce Market – every Sat until Queen's Birthday weekend, at the William Morgan Reserve, Charles St, 9 am – noon.

Oxford Farmers' Market – Main St, Oxford, Sundays, 9 am – noon.

Purau Valley Produce Market – Saturdays every 2 weeks until autumn, at the Diamond Harbour village centre.

Waimate Farmers' Market – Sundays 11am – 3pm. Cost: \$10 per 3x3m site, phone Sandra Day: 03 689 7973 ext 0, night: 03 689 7382.

Canterbury Organic Animal Health Seminar August 2007

Summary of info presented at a seminar run by Canterbury Organic in August 2007. For a copy of the full report please email Mary Ralston (mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz).

- Plenty of good quality feed is the best way to keep animals healthy and prevent illness.
- Both sheep and cattle can suffer from internal (worms) and external (lice) parasites.
- Mixed species pastures, with legumes, chicory and other herbs, provide a range of minerals which helps maintain stock health and prevent parasite problems.
- "Clean" feed is especially valuable – minimises exposure to worm eggs.
- Some sheep and breeds are more resistant to parasites than others.
- Select individuals that show resistance, and cull those that are most susceptible.
- Make sure fences are in good order.
- Sick animals must be treated, even if it means they will temporarily lose certification.
- Certified stock that need treatment with conventional medicines should be put into a quarantine paddock for 48 hours and will lose their certification for one year.

Opportunities for growing organic seed crops in Canterbury

Summary of info presented at a seminar run by the Organic Vegetable and Mixed Farming Association, September 2007. For a copy of the full report please email Mary Ralston (mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz).

- Organic seed must be used to grow a certified organic crop if it is available. In practice however, it is often unavailable in which case untreated conventional seed can be sown. Contact Biogro or AgriQuality auditors for more information or see their websites <http://www.bio-gro.co.nz/> or http://www.agriquality.com/auditing_and_inspection/organics.cfm
- Worldwide there is a huge demand for organic vegetable seed but there is currently a lack of a "critical mass" of certified organic land and farmers in New Zealand to be able to take up the opportunities.
- Organic clover seed is in high demand. Contact Ross Wilson, Midlands Seeds, office@midlands.co.nz, 03 308 1265.



- There is a big demand for both certified organic and spray-free linseed. Contact David Musgrave of Functional Whole Foods at Geraldine on 03 693.0034, david@fwf.co.nz, or Ross Wilson of Midlands Seeds (details above) for more information.
- Strong demand exists for some organically grown culinary and medicinal herb seeds such as chives, oregano, thyme, echinaceae and sage. Contact Gerry Ovenden on 03 329.1634, ovendens@xtra.co.nz.
- Organic grains, seeds and pulses (e.g., wheat, oats, lentils, peas) for human and stock food are in high demand. Premiums are around 100% for certified organic. Contact Harry Lowe at New Zealand Biograins on 03 308.7349, nzbiograins@xtra.co.nz.
- Lupins are well suited to an organic regime and there is good demand. Contact Peter Steven, Steven's Seeds, stevensseed@ashburton.co.nz, 03 307.8900.
- For more information about the Organic Vegetable and Mixed Farming Association contact field day organiser Raymond Garb, raymondgarb@yahoo.co.nz or the chairman, Tim Chamberlain, tim@hartscreekfarm.co.nz, 03 324.3549.

Grazing the wheat grain crop *From "FAR Crop Action 20th July 2007"*

Leading up to mid-late August (the ideal timing for grazing wheat) consider the opportunity of grazing your wheat crop: free grazing, and weed control. An on-farm grazing demonstration marked the completion of a three year SFF/FAR funded project named "Grazing of the wheat grain crop – A forgotten opportunity". The 4.5 ha demo was hosted by Don & Andrew Hart, Methven. The demo area was basically a grazed/ungrazed comparison (4 replicates).

Main results from the demo area were:

- April sown wheat grazed 11th September 2006 at GS31 – first node detectable
- 460 kg DM grazed herbage (less than previous years, but valuable feed in Sept 06!), 329 hoggets/ha/day
- 11.8 MJME/kgDM, crude protein 25.2%, organic matter digestibility 77.8%

	Ungrazed	Grazed	LSD (5%)
Grain yield (t/ha)	12.66	11.90	0.80
Test weight	74.6	75.8	1.5
TGW	57.2	50.7	6.2
Screenings	0.8	1.2	1.6
Plant height at harvest (cm)	92	89	0.8
Heads/m ² at harvest	568	571	90

Grazing saw a reduction in TGW and a non-significant trend to a small reduction in grain yield. After five years of wheat grazing trials, grazing at GS30-31 shows little or no grain yield reduction.

The hosts were so impressed with the regrowth after grazing the demo area, that grazing of other commercial crops quickly followed. They suggest they would be encouraged to do it again in a season with feed shortages or if the crop was very growthy coming out of winter. Some of the management considerations for whether to graze will revolve around factors influencing the land of biomass for example sowing date, soil nitrogen status, sowing rate, temperature over winter, pest and disease damage (grass grub or take-all).

A booklet produced at the culmination of the project named "Grazing of the wheat grain crop" is available from the FAR office 03 325 6353 or <http://far.org.nz/shop>

**Kowhai Farm Update – November 2007**

Five different crops have been established on Kowhai Farm during spring in three of the six main paddocks. The remaining three paddocks are in permanent pasture.

Kowhai Farm Crop Rotation Summary 2007-08

Paddock	Winter 2007	Summer 2007-08
A1	Pasture	Pasture
A2a	Oats and Tares	Carrots Seed
A2b	Oats and Tares	Potatoes
A2c	Oats and Tares	Carrots
A3	Pasture/Barley Leaf	Pasture
A4	Pasture	Peas
A5a	Oats and Tares	Peas
A5b	Fallow	Radish Seed
A6	Pasture	Pasture

Paddock A1 – Permanent Pasture

- Mixed species pasture sward established in autumn 2007.
- Grazed periodically over winter and spring and performing well.

Paddock A2 – Carrot Seed, Potatoes & Carrots**Carrots for seed**

- Ploughed and cultivated in August.
- Carrot sticklings hand-planted in September.
- Sticklings established by October and have now been inter-row hoed and tine weeded several times.

Potatoes and carrots for processing

- Ploughed and then cultivated (primarily using a powerharrow) during September.
- Several passes with roller-undercutter bar to control successive weed strikes.
- Carrots were drilled in beds on 25th October and steam weeded 10 days later.
- Potatoes planted on 31st October.

Paddock A3 – Permanent Pasture

- Part of paddock A3 was drilled in pasture in autumn and has been grazed numerous times since establishment.
- The remainder of the paddock was drilled in barley (for barley leaf) in June and later it was undersown with pasture seed during tineweeding. This area is currently being grazed.

Paddock A4 – Peas

- Following final grazing the paddock was surface rotary-hoed to chop up the turf, then ploughed and cultivated.
- Peas were drilled on 24th October, tine weeded 7 days later just prior to emergence and then tine weeded for a second time after emergence on 12th November.

Paddock A5 – Peas & Radish Seed**Radish for seed**

- Radish seed was drilled into half of paddock A5 in late September and quickly germinated and emerged along with a large population of weeds.



- The crop has been inter-row hoed twice so far. The verdict at this point is that it would have been better to wait another 10 days (before planting) to get a cleaner seed bed.

Peas

- Peas drilled on 23rd October and tine weeded on 31st October and again on 12th November.

Paddock A6 – Permanent Pasture

- Has been grazed over recent months but is getting a break at present.
- Is currently being irrigated and the regrowth (mixed species pasture) looks good.

OANZ Conference

The OANZ Conference held at Lincoln in August was an inspiring event: new and exciting information and people gave everyone lots to think about. Here are brief reports on some of the presentations I attended.

David Horne: Comparison of nitrate leaching from organic and conventional dairy farms

Leaching of nutrients from dairy farms can be a serious problem, and the risk increases as dairying becomes more intensive. In 2001, Massey University began a trial to determine the advantages and disadvantages of organic compared to conventional dairy production. An existing farm was split into two – one side managed organically and the other conventionally. Both were managed to standards considered “best practice” and the cows were grazed off-site in winter so there was not a lot of nitrate N leaching from the system. The soil has poor natural drainage. A mole pipe system for drainage was installed and nitrate N measured at the outlets of drainage pipes. There was a 42% reduction in nitrate N leaching from the organic farm compared to the conventional.

The researchers asked if there is an intrinsic difference in organic systems over and above the difference in stocking rate. They found that the concentration of urine N was correlated with milk N; the organic cows take in less N than conventional and they urinate 22% less N. They concluded that the differences in the cows’ rumen was responsible for the lower N level in urine.

Andre Leu: Sequestering carbon into the soil and ameliorating the effects of carbon change

Andre outlined the benefits of organic farming with respect to reducing atmospheric carbon: many organic farms have higher levels of organic matter due to returning crop residues to the paddock and having an active policy of building soil organic matter. Organic farming uses less fossil fuels than conventional (due to non-use of synthetic fertilisers, despite more cultivation in many instances). For every tonne of C lost from the soil 3.67 tonnes of CO₂ goes into the atmosphere. A 100 ha farm that increased its soil’s organic matter would be removing 8800t CO₂.

OGCT REVIVAL In July some of the old members of the Organic Garden City Trust got together to celebrate its tenth anniversary. During the lunch-time conversation the idea was raised of reviving the Trust. Those present decided to test the waters and contact individuals who had expressed an interest in the OGCT in the past to see what the general level of interest was, with a follow-up meeting planned to report back. This process is still underway. The OGCT was always about its projects, and these, especially Kids’ Edible Gardens, the Canterbury Commercial Organic Group and the Christchurch Community Gardens Association, are still active while the Trust itself has not been operational for some years. This means new project ideas have not been incubated while the established ones have had to look elsewhere for support. If you are interested in finding out more about the possibilities for the OGCT, please contact Matt Morris by emailing theyellowroom@xtra.co.nz

Saffron Growers – did you know there was a Canterbury Saffron Growers Association?

90% of our growers are either certified organic, growing chemical free, and our member who isn’t organic is looking at changing his ways! Contact Pam Donnelly, Chairperson, on 313.1507 for any information.