



Canterbury Commercial Organics Group

Newsletter

Issue No 16: July 2001

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| <i>Coming Events</i> | <i>Date</i> |
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| Mid winter feast | 14 July |
| Tree Crops Field Day | 8 July |
| Tree Crops Speakers | 8 Aug |

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

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Don't miss the mid-winter feast!!

The annual mid-winter feast (pot luck dinner) is on again! This year it will be held in the Woodbury Hall, near Geraldine on July 14. The evening will begin at 6.00 pm, with dinner at 6.30 and the speakers after that. We have a great line-up of speakers - Haikai Tane and Ian Blakemore. Haikai is well known as an entertaining and informative speaker – he will speak on the history and the future of the Biological Husbandry Unit at Lincoln University and on his own work on sustainable systems at the Centre for Catchment Ecology. The Centre is the South Pacific field station for Agenda 21 programs working on the sustainable development of watersheds.

Ian Blakemore is an organic farmer from Pleasant Point, South Canterbury. He farms 130 ha of rolling country growing cattle, deer, and organic vegetables. Ian was a finalist in this year's organic farmer of the year competition. Ian is a great speaker and will also show a video of his farming operation.

Directions: Woodbury Hall is about 5 km from Geraldine. Approaching from Christchurch, turn right to Woodbury on the northern edge of Geraldine and go approx. 5 km – Woodbury Hall is on the right next to the cemetery and behind some trees. If you have gone through the Woodbury village you've gone too far.

Date and Time: July 14, from 6.00 pm.

Bring: A tasty something for dinner. Friends. Gold coin donation.

Transport: Rex Verity is organising a van and/or car-pooling from Christchurch. Contact Rex on Rex.Verity@paradise.net.nz or phone 389.4544.

Update on Interceptor

Joy McLeod, BIO-GRO auditor, has advised that Interceptor, an organic herbicide, has been approved as a restricted input by BIO-GRO. To use it, any BIO-GRO licensee must have written permission from the auditor. The situations where it **may** be approved for use are: control of grasses and weeds in drains and amenity areas where mulching and mechanical methods are not practical; spot control of weeds (e.g. gorse); control of noxious weeds in gullies; release around young trees in shelter belts, orchards etc.; pre and post emergent spray in arable and vegetable seed crops as an alternative to flame weeding.

Contact your auditor for more information.



Update - Small growers certification scheme

A meeting was held on June 14 to form the regional body of the local certification scheme (or SSPOP as it is formally known). Firstly my apologies for the lack of notice for all growers regarding this meeting. It was a failure in communication between three people involved in ensuring the release of the information, the e-mail system did NOT work!! Time was lost and we apologise - we have learnt a good lesson.

1. Chris May (the consultant) will present his report to Government at the end of June and this will be sent out to CCOG, Soil and Health and those growers already involved in this scheme. This will clarify the national structure etc. of the scheme.

2. Following this there will be a hui for all pilot groups -because Chris is going away this hui will be in August.

3. Our Canterbury regional committee will need to be legally finalised at that point. In the mean time the meeting decided to form a working committee to kick start the group and ensure decisions were made democratically. The ongoing tasks of this committee will be to oversee the certification of growers, keep records, manage the finances, and provide a contact point for new growers and organise education and new groups for them. This group can be called Canterbury Organics in the mean time.

4. Nominations were received and accepted for committee members: Matt Morris (office), Robyn Patchett (certification), Sue Cumberworth.

At the meeting it was decided that all group leaders of established groups will automatically be on the committee (if matters concerning their personal property were being discussed they would stand down). This brought Sue Neale and a rep from the community gardens group to be confirmed. Further committee members voted on Tremane Barr, Jean-Michel Libeau, Vanya Maw.

If anyone has any helpful input please call Robyn 3295725. Our groups will progress with the certifying process to be completed (the formalities allowing) before spring.

Robyn Patchett

Select committee reports on organics

The select committee report titled "Organics - New Opportunities for the Future" is the result of nearly a year of investigation and consultation by the primary production select committee. The report officially recognises that there is "a good future for organic agriculture in New Zealand" and is backing its findings with a series of recommendations to Parliament. The government has already acted on two of the report's suggestions by announcing a grant of \$100,000 to enable MAF to establish a national minimum standard for organics and allocating a further \$150,000 for continuing work on a small growers' scheme. (from Horticulture News, June 2001).

Tree Crops Assn Events

Sunday 8th July: Native woodlot and Wheelwright Contact : Bob Craig, Ph. 03-3126181

Visit 1: At 1:30pm, meet at The Woodlands Centre, 309 Johns Road, just South of the Groynes. Here at Richard Wheeler's place, we will look at 20 acres of native trees which he started planting 8 years ago. This visit is a Must!

Visit 2: At 3:30pm, we take a look at Canterbury's Carriage & Accessories Ltd., Main South Road, just past Templeton (as you're going South) on the left hand side. Ken's letterbox is on the right hand side, and it looks like a carriage. Ken Macklan is a wheelwright and carriage builder, carrying out restoration and repairs, and making carriage wheels, and brass fittings for harness carriages and vintage cars. Something with a difference!

Wednesday 8th August: New members night - Contact person: Bob Craig, Ph. 03-3126181
A fantastic line-up of speakers to bring you the options and opportunities in Tree Cropping!

To be held 7:30pm-9:30pm in the Stewart 2 Lecture Hall at Lincoln University, at \$5 per person. All welcome, including existing members (bring a friend!). The speakers are: Jeff Elliot, Elliot Nurseries - Pistachios; Andrew Rosanowski, AgFirst Consultants - Olives; David McNeil, Lincoln University - the Nut Industry; M. Giller, Broadleaf Nurseries - Woodlots; Ross Jamieson, Quality Tree Company - everything else! To be followed by tea, coffee and biscuits.



Organics 2001 Conference Report

Here are some reports from the conference proceedings held by the Soil and Health Association in Ashburton on May 18-20.

Organic Dairy Farming - Jackie Clearwater

Jackie and her family have recently established an organic dairy farm at Peel Forest, near Geraldine. They took over the farm in May 1999 and farmed it organically from the beginning. The first winter they grazed their heifers there and built the shed; this year has been their first year of milking.

The Clearwater's property is 110 ha of Ruapuna and Mayfield silt loam soils in an area that receives about 850 mm of rainfall. They thought they would be "drought proof" and not need irrigation, but this year has made them think otherwise. Water is available, so they will look at installing irrigation. They have developed the property with laneways, troughs etc. and pastures gradually renewed with advice from David Musgrave and Nigel van Dorser.

Jackie and her husband have many years experience in the dairy industry but motivation to do it organically came from their background in horticulture. They sharemilked for some years, then leased a farm before buying the Peel Forest property. They are certified with Certenz, although they have adopted some of Biogro's standards, such as having a quarantine area. Under Certenz regulations, they can have a maximum of 220 cows. They currently have 150.

Their cows came on to the property from a conventional system and Jackie has been impressed that the incidence of animal health problems, especially lameness and mastitis, has been reduced. She attributes this mostly to the lower stocking rate, but also to the organic conditions, such as pasture fertilised with rock phosphate. They are also convinced that drenching the cows with cider vinegar and garlic is beneficial. In spring and autumn they give this to the cows twice a day (30-60 ml). They used some homeopathic remedies when they were dairying conventionally without good results but think that now they are more effective.

Jackie explained that the property is only small and the economics of running the dairy were pretty marginal – but they thought they could do it if they didn't have to "buy in" to one of the large dairy companies. So they have sold the milk privately - this year to the Talbot Forest Cheese Factory at Geraldine. Initially they sold the milk to calf rearers and also reared their own calves on it, feeding them for a longer time and getting them to a higher weaning weight than is usually done. This has helped keep the calves healthy. Diachomatous earth is used to treat any worm problems. Elemental sulphur is used against lice.

Jackie thinks there are only three other certified dairies in the South Island, and others in the process of conversion. What motivates her is her two children – they make it all worthwhile.

What's better than ryegrass based pastures? David Musgrave

David is well qualified to discuss this topic, with his background in agronomy, working for MAF for 13 years and for AgResearch as a plant breeder. He now runs his own farm at Waihi Bush, near Geraldine, where he grows and processes organic linseed. Within three years of taking over the farm, there was no ryegrass left on the property. He contends there are valid scientific reasons for this step and outlined them at the conference.

Firstly, why has ryegrass been so popular? It tolerates a wide range of management conditions, it establishes at low temperatures and has reasonably high productivity. It has also become cheap to produce.

On the down side, ryegrass productivity could be better; it can have animal health problems; it is susceptible to weed invasion; it is very susceptible to insect damage and the high endophyte varieties can suppress clover. (Endophytes are fungi spread by the seed, they move up the plant and give the plant tolerance to Argentine stem weevil, but sheep do not like eating it.)

The early pasture mixes were often based on Wana cocksfoot and designed for set stocking regimes. However under rotational grazing, which was frequently how the pastures were used, the cocksfoot became dominant and this put many people off the concept of mixed species rather



than the traditional ryegrass/white clover combination. This was very unfortunate as reviews of pasture productivity show that mixed pastures are substantially more productive than ryegrass/white clover. Mixed pastures also allow for the substitution of species over time which helps to maintain production and quality.

In a mixed pasture, clover usually dominates early on because the soil is low in nitrogen. After nitrogen is returned, grass becomes more dominant but herbal components such as plantain and chicory are still there. A mixed pasture has a broader base of species and thus a broader range of minerals available to the animals. Chicory especially is a very valuable plant for this – its long tap root can extract minerals from further down the soil profile than other species and is particularly zinc-rich – in fact it has been shown to have 10 times more zinc than ryegrass on the same site. Zinc is valuable for maintaining the immune system and gives protection against footrot and other conditions.

In a Hawkes Bay trial measuring lamb liveweight gain on tall fescue compared with Nui ryegrass, there was similar lamb liveweight gain but the regrowth of the tall fescue in autumn after summer drought gave 13 and 23 extra lambs the following year.

Ryegrass staggers can be a serious problem on ryegrass dominant pastures. It especially affects alpacas and deer, but also sheep and cattle. The antifeedant properties of the endophytes on the ryegrass can mean that even on lush looking pasture lambs can be hungry, and it can be hard to get weight gain of more than 30 g/day. On a mixed pasture weight gain can be 200 g/day and on clover up to 300 g/day. When growing slowly lambs are inherently more susceptible to internal parasites.

Susceptibility to weed invasion is another downside of ryegrass pastures. In a trial measuring numbers of nodding thistles per square metre, perennial ryegrass, prairie grass and Italian ryegrass had many more than tall fescue, chicory, sheep's burnett and cocksfoot, due to their vigorous autumn growth. In year 7, the competitive effect of chicory was still apparent.

Grass grub can be a major problem in ryegrass pastures. Phalaris and lotus are resistant and tall fescue is tolerant. At 300 grubs / sq m in a ryegrass pasture there was no grass left, but at 1000 grubs/ sq m the fescue was still OK. David maintains that there wouldn't be the DDT residue prob-

lem in Canterbury if other species had been used for pastures rather than ryegrass.

So, if ryegrass is out, what are the good alternatives? David is a fan of tall fescue; it can have excellent early spring growth (depending on the cultivar), it has good grass grub tolerance, it is drought and stem weevil tolerant, it is compatible with clover and lucerne, it has excellent summer quality (no re-heading), and is palatable to stock, especially in mixes. On the downside, it needs warm temperatures for establishment. Early autumn or spring sowing is suitable if there is about 6 weeks of growth.

What species should you include in a mix? Tall fescue, timothy, phalaris, prairie grass, cocksfoot (only a small amount – maybe 0.5 kg), red clover, white clover, puna chicory, tonic plantain and lotus.

David can be contacted at Waihi Bush Organic Farm, 21 RD, Geraldine.

The establishment of an organic vineyard - Helena Phillips

Sirocco Wines is an organic vineyard and winery at Rakaia. Helena Phillips and her husband started the vineyard from scratch 15 years ago and have managed it organically from the outset. They were motivated by the desire for a self-sufficient organic lifestyle, and sustainability and health reasons.

The Phillips started out with tunnelhouses growing flowers for some income while they waited for their vines to grow. They now have 7 acres in grapes and sold their first wine in March 1999. Their largest vintage has been 3000 bottles. Their vineyard and winery are certified with Biogro.

Sirocco was the first vineyard in the Ashburton district. They have sandy free-draining soil which suits grapes. At first they planted cuttings but now have mostly replaced them with grafted varieties which are better suited to an organic regime, such as savignon blanc, reisling, chardonnay and pinot noir. The muller thurgau vines were pulled out as they were too susceptible to powdery mildew. Six years ago they started using biodynamic preparations.



Leaf roller and powdery mildew are the biggest disease problems in an organic system. Weed control is the other big headache. Powdery mildew is dealt with by applying copper at bud burst with a hand gun, and by cutting off tips that are infected.

Weeds are controlled by mowing; often a job given to the wwoofers that come to work on the property. Mulches were used at first but they impeded mowing too much and weeds grew through them. Irrigation was first laid along the ground but this was a nuisance when mowing so they have hung them on wires 45 cm above the ground.

Fish and seaweed fertilisers are spread in the irrigation water, and sometimes applied directly to the vines to help with powdery mildew control. Leaf analysis is used to help detect deficiency in the soil. Boron and magnesium are crucial for vines.

Helena now also works as a consultant to others setting up organic vineyards. She has learnt that it is crucial to observe your local weather conditions, know your vines, get to know the industry, write everything down and compare notes with other vineyard owners. Sirocco Wines have a web-site: www.sirocco.web.com, and Helena can be contacted on helena@ihug.co.nz.

“Wasting” our organic matter - Gerard Gillespie

Gerard Gillespie, who was manager of Zero-Waste New Zealand from mid 1997-99, is now the General Manager of the South-East Waste Board, NSW, Australia. This board takes in 16 local government areas and has the job of co-ordinating the NSW government's waste minimisation policy in these local regions.

Gerard spoke passionately about the ridiculousness and expense of precious organic matter (OM) going into the waste stream. He contends there is a disassociation in our society between people and the world around them. Most people have no idea what happens to the waste they generate and make no attempt to minimise their waste, or to ensure that as much as possible is reused or recycled.

As much as 80% of what goes into the waste stream is made up of OM, at a time when much of the agricultural soil of Australia is alarmingly low in

OM (for example, soils in the wheat belt of Australia have an OM level of around 1% - soils are considered biologically dead when OM levels go below 10%). Gerard described the process of growing wheat for the Australians living in the cities on the eastern coast as akin to mining – precious minerals from the soil grow the wheat, which is transported across to the cities and ends up in sewage which is mostly pumped out into the ocean. Soils are degraded, more and more chemical fertilisers are required, pH drops. Australian agriculture will collapse unless this loop is closed and OM is returned (as well as changing other agricultural practices).

One success story is that of the new sewage treatment plant at Albury, which is on the Murray River on the border between Victoria and NSW. The new plant cost \$30 million, but the water that comes from the treatment plant is of such a high quality that it can be released into the river for irrigation and to provide wetlands with water which has attracted huge amounts of birds. This has become a major tourist attraction and brought a lot of money into the town. Forestry plantations are fertilised with the “solids”. In about 10 years the debt will be paid back and the plant will be making a profit in dollar terms, as well as in environmental terms.

Part of the process of society's consumption of “goods” entails the “away” process. Almost everything we buy has packaging that is thrown away, and the goods themselves usually have a limited life, and then they are thrown “away”. This away process costs billions of dollars each year, and to try to keep a cap on these costs, governments have resurrected the idea of incineration. This is an absurdity, says Gerard. A USA Environment Protection Agency report (EPA) estimated that incineration would result in ONLY a fraction of a percentage rise in deaths from cancer – however this translated into thousands of people, which should be unacceptable. It is hugely expensive in every way – dollars, environmentally or in health terms. It is not necessary to spend more to divert OM from the waste stream, money just needs to be spent in a different way. Incineration is “setting fire to your organic future”.

Home composting and recycling are all very well, says Gerard, but guilt is usually the motivation and many people will give up. Most people are basically not interested in compost and so government policy has to change and take a lead, firstly by recognising the true costs of waste disposal. About one tonne of waste is generated by each person each year.



The South-East Waste Board has the vision of diverting the organic matter from the waste stream, converting it into compost and returning it to the farm at a reasonable rate. The visible cost of disposal of the area's waste is \$2.5 billion, this would go a long way toward the costs of the project. It is also estimated that the costs of lost agricultural production due to degraded soils may be up to \$700 million/year.

Five essentials to make the Soil Rejuvenation Project work have been identified: separation at the point of consumption, incentives for co-operation (e.g. random checks on garbage with substantial rewards for correct sorting), inexpensive non-polluting transportation, sorting/reprocessing methods, product definition and efficient marketing, and effective communication.

Possible organic control for varroa bee mite

Varroa, a bee-killing mite that was discovered in New Zealand a little over a year ago, has the potential to inflict serious damage to our pastoral based economy. Bees contribute – through pollination – close to \$2 billion/yr to the economy. Currently the only way to control varroa is with chemicals, but organic methods of control are soon to be trialled.

MAF varroa programme coordinator Paul Bolger said experiments with formic and oxalic acids would be undertaken. Both are already used in Scandinavia and Germany. New Zealand Beekeepers Assn president Richard Hatfield said many beekeepers were excited the possible introduction of organic methods of varroa control. "Organics offer two factors – the mites cannot develop resistance and it's cheaper."

(from Rural News, May 21, 2001)

Letters to the Editor, news items and notices of events are welcome. Please send any newsletter material to Mary Ralston, RD 12, Rakaia, email kemj@voyager.co.nz

Weed Management In Organic Crops

This is the title of a recently funded project from the CCOG group. The project is funded by an AGMARDT Progressive Farming Grant and will run for three years. Two large-acre farmers of our group, Andrew Brooker and Philip Rushton, are actively involved by having the trials at their farms. The first round of experiments will start this growing season in wheat. The objectives of these experiments are to find the effects of land preparation techniques on the weed seed recruitment from the soil and to compare five tine weeding treatments for their effects on weed removal as well as on the crop itself.

The project will also look into weed problems in peas and will test some of the above treatments in this crop. Dr Farhad Dastgheib is the Science Manager for the project and will direct the research in collaboration with CCOG. Please feel free to contact him on (03) 3252132, if you have any comments or ideas on this project or on weed management in general.

The project also has financial support from Foundation for Arable Research and Heinz Wattie's. Experiments on peas will be conducted at the Kowhai farm of Heinz Watties as well as at the farmers' fields. We will keep you updated with the progress of the project.

Kowhai Farm Update

The second growing season has passed on Kowhai Farm, Heinz Wattie's Organic Farm at Lincoln University. Crops grown on the 57ha property included process peas and beans for Heinz Wattie's, linseed for Waihi Bush Ltd and buckwheat for Midlands Seeds Ltd of Ashburton.

Crop Results 2000-2001

The pea crop, for Heinz Wattie's, was the first crop to be sown last year in late October and consequently was the first crop to be harvested on Kowhai Farm this year. The paddock was tine weeded three times to control annual weeds and this proved to be successful resulting in a relatively weed-free crop, which yielded 6.7 t/ha. This was down a bit on last year's crop which yielded



of 8.6t/ha, however it was still a very satisfactory result.

The beans on Kowhai Farm were planted in early December last year and were harvested in late February. The crop received plenty of attention, starting with the application of BIO-GRO certified organic fertiliser (Ravensdown RPR and Elemental Sulphur and Sealord Fish & Bone Meal as a source of Nitrogen) just before planting. After germination the beans were sprayed with a BIO-GRO certified foliar fertiliser, then inter-row hoed to control weeds. Remaining weeds were pulled out by hand and finally the crop received another application of a BIO-GRO certified fish and seaweed-based foliar fertiliser to help prevent disease. The crop yielded a massive 13.1 t/ha which is considerably higher than the average yield of 10.5t/ha for conventionally grown bean crops in Canterbury.

However the linseed and buckwheat crops did not perform quite so well. Large numbers of birds preyed upon the linseed crop from the end of flowering (late January) right through to harvest in mid March. The budgeted crop yield was 2t/ha (last seasons crop yielded 2.1t/ha) however the estimated yield appears to be just over 1t/ha.

The buckwheat crop was also harvested in mid March. Overall yield of machine dressed seed was about 1.5t/ha, whereas the budgeted yield for the crop was 2.5t/ha. While the crop looked good during the season and flowered quite evenly it appears that it may have succumbed to the heat during flowering, resulting in a large proportion of light seed that was not up to grade.

Autumn 2001 on Kowhai Farm

A green manure crop of lupins followed the pea crop. Measurements taken just before the lupins were ploughed under in late autumn showed that the crop contained an average of 120kg/ha of N. This included N taken up by the plants, therefore prevented from leaching, as well as N fixed by the lupins. Ryecorn (for harvest early next year) has now been planted in the paddock and this crop should use most of the N, as it becomes available from the decomposing lupins.

Oat and lupin green manure crops followed both the bean and linseed crops, while the buckwheat paddock was direct drilled into permanent pasture. This paddock has a lot of Californian Thistles in it and strategic topping is planned during the pasture phase to deplete the underground reserves of this troublesome weed.

Next Season on Kowhai Farm

Following a recent successful BIO-GRO audit Kowhai Farm now moves from C1 status to C2. Crops planned for Conversion Year 2 (next season) include the already drilled ryecorn crop, peas and beans for Heinz Wattie's and a wheat crop. The wheat will be drilled soon following the incorporation of a green manure crop and a pasture paddock will be cultivated in spring to make way for the bean crop.

Discussion Group For Broadacre Organic Arable Farmers

A successful discussion group is operating in Central Canterbury for broadacre organic arable and process vegetable growers as part of a technology transfer project funded by MAF's Sustainable Farming Fund. The aim of the project is to enhance financial and environmental sustainability of group member's properties. Four organically farmed properties have been visited this autumn to discuss and explore on-farm management issues as well as the specific topics of animal health, soils and fertilisers.

The project will continue for two more years and will include public field days in the spring and media articles. Growers interested in finding out more should contact Sue Cumberworth at Agriculture New Zealand, phone (03) 348 0963, fax (03) 348 1867, email cumberwo@chch.agnz.co.nz or Anthony White at Heinz Wattie's, phone (03) 349 1637, Fax (03) 349 5688.

Organic milk powder?

New Zealand will have a source of organic milk powder in 6 months to a year, said Kiwi Dairies spokesman John Evans. He said the dairy industry has taken the first steps into organics and his company was already selling organic milk to a number of different manufacturers. He said the industry needs to expand its base and move into more sophisticated products such as cheeses. "We need to capture and utilise all the existing organic milk. Its criminal that some organic milk that is just going into the vat." (from Rural News, June 4, 2001)



Advertising

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS WANTED!!

Farmers, processors, retailers, scientists, students - anyone involved in organics is welcome to join the CCOG Committee. We meet monthly to arrange field days, events, etc. In the last year we have also made an impact (we hope) with submissions to the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification and the Primary Production Select Committee Enquiry into Organic Agriculture. New members would be very welcome. If you are interested please phone Robyn Patchett, 03-329 5725.

Advertising rates are \$1a line (eight words a line) up to a quarter page, \$25 per quarter page, \$50 half page, \$90 page. All enquires to Mary, email kemj@voyager.co.nz, phone 03-3029202.

FOR SALE Biogro certified white clover seed - available ex Ashburton or Ellesmere. Phone Robyn or Brian 3295725 Ch-Ch.

FOR SALE Heritage apple trees. Available now for this season's planting. Many hardy more disease resistant varieties. Contact Quality Tree Co, Linda Gardner Ph 344.1977.

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Canterbury Commercial Organics Group - Newsletter

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