

# Organics in Canterbury

Issue No 39: October 2008

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This newsletter is published by the Canterbury Commercial Organics Group, in association with Heinz Wattie's, Canterbury Organics and the Biological Husbandry Unit, Lincoln University. Back issues of the newsletter (and other exciting information!) can be found on our website: [www.organics.org.nz/](http://www.organics.org.nz/)

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

## Organic Pastoral Discussion Group Field Day – Thurs 30 October, All welcome!

We will visit Aatahua farm, Roger and Nicki Beattie's sheep and cattle property at Kaituna, opposite Lake Ellesmere on Banks Peninsula. The farm is 8 months from full organic certification and comprises flat to rolling hills and some steep country. Weather allowing we will drive to the top of the farm, so please bring 4WD vehicles if they have them. Also BYO lunch; drinks will be provided.

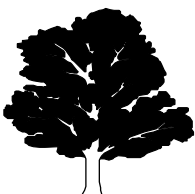
The property's stock include Pitt Island wild sheep, Murray Grey cattle and the Bo hipi sheep whose genetic makeup is a mix of Merino, feral Merino and other breeds, which originate from the small islands off the coast of New Zealand. Participants at this years Organic Mid-winter dinner at Lincoln heard AgResearch scientist David Scobie talk about the breeding, research and easy care farming of these sheep so this is your chance to see and discuss the farming of them.

As well as discussing the Pitt island and Bo hipi sheep Roger is keen for participants to offer suggestions on all his farming systems including soil management and fertiliser regimes, pasture species, stock health and tonics and lamb finishing and marketing.

In the afternoon two sessions are planned, to discuss and decide the future shape and direction of this Organic Pastoral Farming Discussion Group and to explore the issues and opportunities for marketing NZ organic meat.

A recent Straight Furrow article about Roger and Scobie and Bo hipi is

<http://straightfurrow.farmonline.co.nz/news/nationalrural/agribusiness-and-general/general/threepointed-attack-set-to-unseat-merino/1237800.aspx> (more details next page)



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CANTERBURY  
Organic



**Programme**

- Property** Roger and Nicki Beattie, Aatahua Farm, Kaituna, Banks Peninsula
- Date** Thursday 30 October 2008, 10:15 am - 5.00 pm
- Venue** "Aatahua Farm", Kaituna, Banks Peninsula (opposite Kaituna Valley Rail Trail carpark on SH 75 between Tai Tapu and Little River)
- BYO** Please bring your own lunch, drinks provided, and 4WD vehicle if you have one

**Objectives**

1. To develop an understanding of Roger and Nicki Beattie's farming system and discuss options to enhance this system. Provide helpful suggestions.
2. Discuss and decide the future processes and activities for an ongoing organic pastoral discussion group for Canterbury
3. To discuss issues and identify opportunities with marketing NZ Organic Meat

**Prior to field day** Roger Beattie would like information from farmers on their sheep and beef prices. He is researching marketing and pricing structures for organic meat and would like current prices. Farmers, please help with this. With accurate, timely information we can at the very least reduce weak sellers & at best lift the price. Phone 03 377 0365, fax 03 377 0366, mobile 0275 334 117, or email [roger@bluepearls.com](mailto:roger@bluepearls.com)

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**Calendar of Events**

**30 October (Thurs) Pastoral Field Day** run by Organic Pastoral Discussion Group, Beattie's property, Banks Peninsula. See page 1-2 for details.

**30 October Organic dinner, Lincoln.** A relaxed social event to follow the above field day. Details still to be finalised, contact Rebecca Reider, Organic Advisory Programme • 03 525 6111 • 027 359 4522; email <[rebecca.reider@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.reider@gmail.com)>

**14 November (Friday) Soil workshop, BHU, Lincoln.** See below for details.

**12-14 November Christchurch Show**

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**The Organic Advisory Programme of OANZ presents a  
SOIL WORKSHOP with Dr Tim Jenkins**

**Date:** Friday 14<sup>th</sup> November (Canterbury Show Day)

**Time:** 9.30 am – 5.00 pm

**Venue:** BHU, Lincoln University

**Directions:** From Ellesmere Junction Rd, turn into Lincoln University at Gate 2 (Calder Drive). Turn right after about 500m and follow road through University grounds, cross gravel road and follow signs to BHU.

**Content:**

1. What is soil (Brief overview)
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- Physical
- Biological (soil foodweb, humus, soil –plant interaction)
- CEC, BS, nutrients (Nitrogen, minerals, trace elements) availability, balance, and budget

## 2. Objectives of good organic soil management and how one can assess this

## 3. Soil Assessment and Interpretation (Case studies)

- Soil maps, soil information
- Field evaluation (physical, visual, worm counts)
- Soil and Plant testing (chemical, biological) with example test results
- Alternative methods of pasture and crop testing

## 4. Ways of achieving key objectives

5. **Production systems and their soil management** (Participants establish what's important for their particular production area [bring soil test results along])

## 6. Certification Standards and soil management (what to do and what not)

**Cost: \$30.00** (Refreshments and hot drinks provided, bring your own lunch)

**Registrations: Please contact** [holger.kahl@oanz.org.nz](mailto:holger.kahl@oanz.org.nz) 03-329 3157 027 227 0181

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**Advertisements** email [mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz) to place your ad in the next issue

**FOR SALE: SAFFRON CORMS.** Were fully certified BioGro, are currently being leased and have been kept spray free/organic. Approximately 30,000 corms, small or large offers welcome, negotiable. Owner overseas and regrettably unable to continue with them. Email: Ellen Stevenson [estevenson@kadac.com.au](mailto:estevenson@kadac.com.au) or phone Helen 03 9818821.

**ORGANIC CHOOK WHEAT** (Demeter & BioGro certified). Contact Ira and Geoff Wilson 03 3028663 or email [terracefarm@slingshot.co.nz](mailto:terracefarm@slingshot.co.nz)

**GREENHOUSE EQUIPMENT:** 2 metal tables with coralite (corrugated plastic) tops, each 10 m long (they come in 3 sections for easy transportation) \$150/table. Growing trays, approx 200. Electric heaters for greenhouse (4). Fogger. Bags (PB 40) approx 100. Any offers considered. Phone Mary or Kem 03-3029202 or email [kem@xtra.co.nz](mailto:kem@xtra.co.nz)

**WANTED: ORGANIC STRAW or HAY** to use as mulch. Please phone Karen on 3297010.

**NOTICES: Christchurch Show 12 - 14 November.** There will be an organic display in the Food and Wine marquee at this year's A & P Show. Some more volunteers are required to help staff and give out samples of organic goodies. Please contact Holger Kahl 329 3157 [holger.kahl@oanz.org.nz](mailto:holger.kahl@oanz.org.nz)

**HELP WANTED WITH ELLERSLIE EXHIBIT:** Project Lyttelton and the Canterbury Branch of Soil and Health are having an exhibition garden at the International Ellerslie Flower Show in Christchurch next March. This community exhibit focuses on the Lyttelton Community Garden and seeks to show how we can all create an affordable, healthy food garden from recycled materials, compost, heritage seeds and community participation.

To bring the garden to life the team would appreciate help. There are many things that we need donated and many tasks that require labour. We need help to source recycled materials i.e. corrugated iron and untreated wood, draft and build some wooden platforms and a door. Create a fence from the iron, construct a garden seat, help with planting, general garden construction

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and transport to and from the site. If you'd like to be involved please contact Rod Lawrence 328 9093 [rod@lyttelton.net.nz](mailto:rod@lyttelton.net.nz) or Matt Morris 386 1025 or email [theyellowroom@xtra.co.nz](mailto:theyellowroom@xtra.co.nz)

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## Mid winter event report

The mid-winter event, organised by Canterbury Organics and CCOG (Canterbury Commercial Organics Group) was held on 26 July. It was a great afternoon with three very interesting speakers who followed a delicious organic lunch put on by the Lincoln University caterers.

**Easy-care, low-cost sheep.** Dr David Scobie, from AgResearch, Lincoln, spoke about easy-care, low-cost sheep which he has been breeding for about 10 years. These composite sheep (i.e., selected from many different breeds, such as Border Leicester, East Friesian, Cheviot, Finnish Land Race and others) have bare bellies and backsides and so are less likely to get flystrike. They are also quicker and therefore cheaper to shear.

Dr Scobie was recently awarded the Agmardt Technology Transfer award for his promotion of the sheep to farmers, and he was featured in TVNZ's Country Calendar earlier this year. Dr Scobie brought some of his easy-care sheep to the seminar which made the talk especially interesting. As it was winter, they had full woolly coats, but the bellies and the wool around the tail are lost in spring/summer.

Easy-care sheep have been developed by selecting lambs which have bare skin underneath the tail – this makes them relatively “dag-proof”. Short tails are also selected for. Selecting against dags is also automatically selecting for natural resistance to internal parasites. Animal welfare is improved by eliminating docking and flystrike and reduces the requirement for crutching, dagging and application of chemicals.

Dr Scobie has a research flock of 200 animals. They have a lambing rate of 150% at weaning. In a trial of undocked first-cross easy-care sheep compared with undocked half-bred sheep, 3% of the easy-care sheep got flystrike compared to 12% of the half-breds. Straight Romneys grazing on high-endophyte ryegrass got flystrike at a rate of 56%. On an organic farm in West Otago straight Perendales were twice as daggy as the easy-care sheep.

Dorper and Wiltshire sheep (which lose all their wool) also have a place on organic farms as good breeds which are also likely to have resistance to internal parasites and less dags and therefore less flystrike, however this research has been undertaken with funding from Meat and Wool NZ, so sheep breeds that had good fleeces have been used. Easy-care rams with these characteristics are available from some breeders, and there is about a 55% heritability of the bare tail/bare belly characteristics.

For more information, Dr Scobie can be contacted on [scobie@agresearch.co.nz](mailto:scobie@agresearch.co.nz) or phone 03 321.8688 and there are several items on the internet (google “Scobie sheep”).

**Biodynamics.** Lis Alington spoke to us about biodynamic farming. In 1924 Rudolf Steiner was concerned about the direction of farming – he gave a series of lectures and developed methods that put energy back into the soil. Biodynamics (“biological-dynamics”) is a method of organic agriculture which can be applied to any farm or horticultural enterprise, by following a series of practical steps. The steps emphasise building soil fertility, and are carefully tailored to the particular property. They include:

- Use of biodynamic sprays to stimulate biological activity in the soil, and improve retention of nutrients, such as animal wastes
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- Stocking with several different animal species to vary grazing patterns and reduce pasture borne parasites
- Widening the range of pasture species
- Planting trees for multiple purposes
- Crop rotation designs to enhance soil fertility and control weeds and plant pests which include the use of green manures
- Recycling of organic wastes, where possible, by large scale composting
- Changing from chemical pest control to prevention strategies based on good plant and animal nutrition and careful cultivar selection.

Biodynamics is a systems approach where the farm is viewed as a living whole, in which each farm activity affects the others. Because biodynamics uses very limited external inputs, and reuses most on farm waste, it has a low impact on the environment. It provides an economical way of farming in which most of the costs are met at the time they are incurred. It thus offers a solution to conflicts between economics and the environment. A further benefit is the quality of the produce. Flavour and keeping quality of the foods, lustre and comfort of fibres are improved. The international trademark Demeter assures buyers that produce is biodynamically grown.

Lis talked about the preparations: preparation 500 is made by packing cow manure into cow horns which are buried in the ground over winter. In spring the horns are dug up and the manure (now colloidal compost) is added to water, stirred and then applied at a very low rate over paddocks or vegetable gardens. It operates on lower realms – the soil. Preparation 501 is made from ground quartz; this is applied at very low rates into the air and affects the upper realms – only a quarter of a teaspoon per bucket is needed. It has benefits of capturing carbon, for instance grain is much harder when 501 is used.

There is also a set of compost preparations for the middle realm which affect plant growth and hormones. When the whole set of preparations is used there are remarkable improvements in the soil, plant growth and quality of produce.

Lis finished her talk by reminding us of the fragility of our topsoil by comparing the earth to an apple –

1. Imagine the Earth as an apple.
2. Cut it into four quarters. One part is covered by land – the rest is covered by water.
3. Cut the land section in half. One of these halves is covered with mountains, desert or ice.
4. Cut this remaining part into fourths. Three of these are rocky, wet, hot, infertile, or covered with roads or cities.
5. Only 1/32nd of the apple remains.
6. The peel of this section of apple represents the topsoil that must feed the world.

Courtesy: earth action network <[www.earthaction.org](http://www.earthaction.org)>

**Seed saving.** Martin Tickner, from the Southern Seed Exchange, talked about the seed exchange and what is involved in saving seeds. Membership of the Southern Seed Exchange is now growing and stands at about 150 members. Some are involved in growing on and multiplying heritage and old varieties of seed, which are not available commercially. Seed swaps are held at the Botanic Gardens. The Southern Seed Exchange puts out a seed list in about August for the coming season. Seed guardians grow the plants from seed (or tubers) and send the seed (or tubers) back to the exchange. A cuttings list is also made in spring and garlic is distributed in autumn. The exchange is mostly for food plants, particularly vegetables; some

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herbs and some natives are also grown. Local heirlooms are the most important and are of the most interest to people, for example the Banks Peninsula carrot, a white carrot that may have come with the very early French settlers.

Isolation distance is an important idea – that is, if you are trying to maintain a pure line of a vegetable, it is important that it is not able to cross-pollinate with another variety. Climbing beans are mostly self-fertile (i.e., they won't cross-pollinate) but runner beans need an isolation distance of 700 metres to ensure that pollen is not transferred from one variety to another.

The Southern Seed Exchange tries to link people who are growing the same rare variety – it is good insurance to have two or more people growing a rare type, and they can keep in touch and share growing tips (e.g., discuss how the plants are going and whether they do well in a hot/damp, or cool/moist or hot/dry conditions). Regular newsletters are also produced.

Chamomile flowers have been found to be a good anti-fungicide and so they are used to pack around the seed for storage so the seeds don't go mouldy. For more information on the Southern Seed Exchange phone Martin Tickner 03 325.1310.

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## **The world catches on to compost!! 3 great stories**

### **1. EM in super-blend compost** *Laura Melville, Mid Canterbury Herald*

Wastebusters Ashburton has developed a composted soil conditioner that can radically benefit contaminated and over-depleted soil. The organisation developed the compound in a venture with Andar Holdings to clean-up wool scour residue at what became a test site for the new blend. "The wool scour products mixed with the compost had accumulated on the site for over 100 years," Wastebusters business manager Tony Dawson said. Within six months, the team had mixed and tested the product, removed contaminants and restored the area to a healthy condition. The super compost was developed by Wastebusters's General Manager Sheryl Stivens. The product was manufactured using a purpose-built mixer manufactured by Andar in Timaru. The key ingredient is effective micro organisms - but more than that, no one will say. "It's a natural product blended with green waste, sawdust and gypsum, which is a soil conditioner," Mr Dawson said.

One of the problems presented at the site was the lack of water. Mr Hall developed his own method of adding the necessary moisture to the mix to break it down. "We formed the product into windrows. The movement helped to break down the waste and by rolling it on wet days we could add the necessary moisture to the mix." Three combinations of the mix were blended for different weather conditions. The blend has wide-scale application for both commercial farmers and industrial sites, Mr Kroening said. At present, Wastebusters have 5000 cubic metres of the mix but are looking to source more raw product.

The long-term benefits for the environment are matched by the application's cost-effectiveness and the associated carbon footprint, Mr Dawson said. "It's a natural product that repairs the soil structure. Over-fertilising and over-watering breaks down the soil structure and with agricultural practices becoming more intensive, this is a natural long term solution to these problems."

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### **2. Compost proves its worth in crop trial** *Gerald Piddock, Farm Review & Timaru Herald*

Compost could greatly enhance forage crop production following some outstanding preliminary observations from a trial conducted on a farm near Albury. Organised by Crop & Food Research and funded by the Timaru District Council, Ecan, Canterbury Waste Joint committee

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and Transpacific Industries, the trial has found that the compost has provided a significant boost to ryegrass and kale crop yields.

The trial had two parts, with the first comparing a ryegrass crop treated with 50t/ha of compost versus a crop treated with 200kg/ha of super 10 applied during establishment. The second component of the trial involved comparing four treatments of compost at 0, 25, 50 and 100 t/ha applied to forage kale.

Crop & Food's Craig Tregurtha said it was one of the first trials of its type in NZ. He said it was hard to know what to expect when the trials started because similar overseas trials had been inconclusive. "We were expecting the compost to benefit the crops, but how much we didn't know. I was expecting differences in year two and three, but not so much in the first year."

The ryegrass treated with the compost was noticeably bigger and was a darker shade of green, while the kale result was "amazing". Measured half-way through the growing season, the kale control plots with no compost were 700mm, those with 25t/ha of compost had grown to 800mm, at 50t/ha they were 1500mm and at 100t/ha 950mm.

Transpacific Industries' Geoff Hemm believed the 100t/ha result was lower than the 50t/ha plots because the compost was applied as a dressing on the surface, and not incorporated. The seed was then direct drilled. "At 100t/ha the compost acted like a mulch blanket and it actually slowed the germination by quite a bit, and that section of the paddock was the last to come away. Mr Hemm said the results of the trial might persuade farmers to take a second look at using compost. In the past, farmers have been less inclined to use compost because of its bulk. Overseas, up to 80% of the total cost of using compost is in transportation and spreading, which limits its use in agriculture. But with the price of fertiliser skyrocketing, Mr Tregurtha said it was the right time to conduct a trial, but concedes that the economic viability of compost is "the big question."

Mr Hemm said that while compost has a lower nutrient value compared to fertiliser on a weight-for-weight basis, it boosts the organic matter of the soil. This in turn promotes the soil's microorganism biodiversity, its water holding capacity, its nutrient holding capacity, improves structure and soil friability. "If you apply compost you get a palette full of nutrients and other benefits, whereas if you apply fertiliser, you only get those nutrients."

The compost is produced by Transpacific Industries Group which runs a Timaru-based operation under contract using organic waste collected from green-lidded domestic wheelie bins, transfer stations and general garden waste. The company currently supplies 4000 tonnes of compost a year, predominantly for household use, but had not yet moved into bulk supply while the trial is being completed.

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### **3. First step to composting** *The Press 11 June 2008*

Christchurch's garden waste and food scraps may soon help boost the fertility of Canterbury soils. Yesterday the site of one of the largest composting plants in Australasia was blessed during a ground-breaking ceremony in Bromley in the first step towards tonnes of the city's waste being turned into high-quality compost. The \$21 million plant, which will open next year, will be able to convert 65,000 tonnes of waste annually.

Rob Fenwick, a founder of Living Earth which has the contract to design, build and run the 3000sq m facility for the Christchurch City Council, said the nutritional value of the compost was "surprising." General manager George Fietje said the compost would offer growers an alternative to traditional fertilizers, the prices of which had soared due to fuel costs and demand

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from Asia. He said Ngai Tahu corporation's farming interests had already shown an interest in the carbon-rich compost.

Mayor Bob Parker said the plant was a key component in the city's waste minimisation plan. "This will result in less carbon emissions and 1000 fewer truck movements to the Kate Valley landfill," he said. Meanwhile, Rangiora couple Karl and Karen Upston plan to open their disposable nappy composting plant in the Hurunui District by the end of the year.

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**Minimum tillage DVDs** If you would like to see these 3 DVDs and have not yet put your name on the list with Mary, please contact [mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz](mailto:mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz). These are very good and have been extremely popular, so it is taking quite a while to get them to everyone (I haven't forgotten). Also could I remind those who have them to return them promptly (within 2 weeks).

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**Organic Updates** Don't forget to read the Organic Updates – they cover a wide range of topics: from weed management, cover crop mulching and minimum tillage, to animal health, growing organic process peas, 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.

## Organics in Canterbury Newsletter

C/- Mary Ralston  
Back Track  
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If any of your details are incorrect please contact Mary at the return address.

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