

Organics in Canterbury

Issue No 42: September/October 2009

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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/

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

Calendar of events

14 October (Wednesday), 2.30pm, Biological Husbandry Unit Organic Trust AGM. Venue: BHUOT building, end of Farm Road, BHU, Lincoln University, Contact: 03 325.3684.

15 October (Thursday), Organic Dairy & Pastoral Group Field Day - Topic: Large scale sheep/beef and conversion to organics. 10am morning tea, 10.30am - 4.00pm; Mount Cass, North Canterbury. More details page 2.

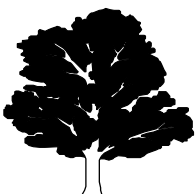
30th October (Friday), Seminar: Two topics: New ideas on organic conversion, and climate change. David Musgrave, BHU. More details page 2.

1 November (Sunday), Hazelnuts, Permaculture & Healthy Home Field Day, 9 Harmans Track, Little River, Banks Peninsula, 10am - 3pm. BYO lunch. \$10. Contact Gilda at 03 3251344, or email coorganic@organics.org.nz. to register.

4 November (Wednesday), ODPG Public Field Day - Topic: Large scale sheep/beef 10am morning tea, 10.30am - 4.00pm, Waitahuna (about 1 hr south of Dunedin). More details page 3.

November 13-15, 2009. Second National Organic Conference (organised by OANZ). University of Waikato. Theme: "Innovate: Go Organic!" The conference will focus on innovative ways to produce, market, and use organic products. Registration and more information: www.goorganic.org.nz.

25 November Public ODPG Field Day, Topic: Biodynamics. North Canterbury. More details to come in emails.



CCOG



Event details:
15 OCTOBER ODPG FIELD DAY – ORGANIC SHEEP & BEEF

Date: Thursday 15 October, 10am morning tea, 10.30am-4.00pm; with a BBQ finish

Venue: Andrew & Sarah Heard, Mount Cass, North Canterbury. Mount Cass Road (turn right approx. 10.5 kms north of Amberly – signs will be out)

Topic: Large scale sheep/beef and conversion to organics.

Introduction: Find out what happens when a small group of experienced people decided to buy a unique property and convert it to organic production. This field day will focus on the fundamentals of sheep/beef organic farming and the additional opportunities. The property, Mt Cass, is 2300 ha and is a partnership between Andrew and Sarah Heard, Leeston organic farmer Tim Chamberlain and Mark Houghton-Brown, who farmed organically in England before emigrating to New Zealand.

Cost: This is an Organic Dairy and Pastoral Group field day so is free to ODPG members, \$30 for others

Guest Speaker: Associate Professor David Norton from the University of Canterbury will be discussing environmental attributes found on and around this property. David's a pragmatic environmentalist who believes in integrated land management.

Contact: Dave Lucock, phone (03) 365 6804; cell 0272 580 771

30 OCTOBER SEMINAR: Two topics presented by David Musgrave

1. Important strategies for conversion to organics - considering soil fertility, pastures, use of compost and compost extracts

2. Climate change & global warming: the latest science, and what we can do at a personal, business and government level

DATE: Friday 30th October

TIME: 10.00am – 11.00 Strategies for conversion to organics

11.00 – 11.15 break - morning tea

11.15 - 12.15 Climate change

VENUE: BHU, Lincoln University

COST: \$10

David Musgrave has recently returned from a trip to Australia where he spoke to a group of South African biological farmers in central New South Wales. They visited six farms running various systems and in various stages of conversion to biological farming and gained some very interesting insights into the key aspects of the conversion process and the role of compost and compost extracts.

Several months ago David attended a training session on climate change in Melbourne run by Al Gore. He learnt about the latest science on global warming and climate change and how we must act without delay to have any hope of staving off runaway global warming and its attendant catastrophes.

David worked as a research agronomist in agriculture for 16 years and has been organic farming for over 20 years near Geraldine. He runs Waihi Bush Organic Farm, a company producing flax seed oil products. Please register your interest in coming by Friday 23 Oct: contact Mary Ralston mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz

4 NOVEMBER PUBLIC ODPG FIELD DAY – ORGANIC SHEEP & BEEF

Date: Wednesday 4 November, ODPG Public Field Day, 10am morning tea, 10.30am - 4.00pm, with a BBQ finish

Venue: Glenn and Kate Mead, Waitahuna (about 1 hour south of Dunedin, turn left from SH8, heading west, on to Waitahuna West Road and drive for about 16 kms – signs will be out)

Introduction: Sheep/beef and a small amount of crop is harvested on rolling hill country. Glenn and Kate are currently at C1 Biogro and have biological controls for weeds underway. An ideal day to look at their direction and to take stock of yours. Roy Harlow will be speaking on the topic of embracing the natural principles of farming.

Guest Speaker: Roy Harlow is the Managing Director of Integrated Systems Engineering, which developed the Bio-Digester. Roy also hosts the Midday Farm Report on 106.7 FM and is best explained by the following quotes: "We cannot think that nature can endlessly compensate for our misuse of resources and our continued contamination. Something has to change. Either it will be by choice or it will be by force. The choice is ours, the time is now and the fact is that man is dependent on the land".

Contact: Dave Lucock, phone (03) 365 6804; cell 0272 580 771

25 NOVEMBER PUBLIC ODPG FIELD DAY – BIODYNAMICS, NORTH CANTERBURY.

DETAILS TO COME. Special guests – Dr Jon Tanner and Derek Broadmore from OANZ.

Contact: Dave Lucock, phone (03) 365 6804; cell 0272 580 771

BHU News The Organic Training College at the BHU starts its new course in Organic Horticulture on October 19. There are still 5 spaces left on the Year 1 programme; Year 2 programme is full. There are full time and part time options. The course involves practical hands-on training in horticulture at the BHU organic unit at Lincoln. Contact: Bill Martin, ph 325 3684, 0800 835 367, email college@bhu.co.nz

Graduating BHU Students Looking for Work Several of the BHU students who graduated this September are looking for work. They all have a sound background in the fundamentals of horticulture and organics, year 2 students have added experience from growing at the BHU under Organic Farm NZ Certification. For more information contact Bill Martin: bill@bhu.co.nz

Remote Organics – Funding is available for people to travel to ODPG field days. Applications close on November 15. For more details contact Ian Turnbull, ieturnbull@ihug.co.nz Maurice Hellewell Maurice.h@xtra.co.nz or Neville Parkinson, 03 246.9539, email nmparkinson@farmiside.co.nz

Producing organic food – is this for you?

New booklet available on gross margins for various crops and livestock options

A new publication which provides information on gross margins for both organic and conventional farming systems is now available. The 42 page booklet *Crop and Livestock Gross Margins, Organic and Conventional Systems 2008-09* describes eight different cropping varieties and four livestock farming situations. In addition, information on organic production systems in New Zealand, key contacts and frequently asked questions are included. The aim is to provide potential organic farmers with basic information to assist them when deciding whether organic farming is an option for them.

Gross margin details are provided for barley, linseed, oats, peas, spring and winter wheat, white clover and juicing carrots. Livestock gross margins are recorded for sheep breeding, lamb and steer finishing, and dairy heifer grazing.

The booklet describes what is involved in establishing an organic production system and lists the first steps. Useful contacts and information sources provide helpful links for those wishing to access more in-depth information. Potential markets for organic produce are also discussed.

A frequently asked question section provides answers to questions ranging from "Can I convert my conventional animals into organically certified?" to "Is there financial assistance or grants to help offset the conversion costs?".

The project was managed by Functional Whole Foods NZ Ltd and had additional industry funding from Midlands Seeds, NZ Bio Grains Ltd, Timaru Concentrates and Foundation for Arable Research.

The booklet *Crop and Livestock Gross Margins, Organic and Conventional Systems 2008-09* can be downloaded from the SFF website by [clicking here](#). (329K pdf) or free copies (while stocks last) are available from the Foundation for Arable Research. Contact far@far.org.nz or telephone 03 325 6353 to obtain your copy.

Advertisements email mary.ralston@xtra.co.nz to place your ad in the next issue

ENJO CLEANING CLOTHS Environmentally friendly cleaning with a clear conscience. These cloths use only water, no chemicals. Create a healthier home. For a demonstration or to book a party please phone Margaret Johnson 03. 302.8197.

ORGANIC PEA STRAW WANTED Desperate Nelson gardeners require organic pea straw – for this season or to organise for next. Large or small amounts. Please email Hilary Johnston bruce.hils@clear.net.nz or phone 03.545-2665.

WANTED – CARROT WASHER Please email Michele Cherry stonecircleorganics@hotmail.com or phone 03. 314-9144.



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Mid-winter event report

Canterbury Organics and Canterbury Commercial Organics Group held their annual mid-winter get-together at the BHU in July. About 30 people came to the BHU to hear speakers Robin Wybrow and Merf (Charles Merfield), and to have a delicious organic lunch.

Robin Wybrow is on the Board of He Oranga Pounamu and Te Runanga O Ngai Tahu. He talked about restoring the Roto Wairewa /Lake Forsyth and the significance this lake has for local Maori. Ngai Tahu has a management concept of “from the mountains to the sea” – an authentic sustainable working model for the lake to return to health so that it can again provide kai (food). The Mahingai kai cultural park is an amalgamation of Western science and indigenous knowledge to create environmental sustainability and organic solutions.

Wairewa/Lake Forsyth is thought to be about 7000 years old and was once famous for the quality and quantity of food it produced. This is shown by the large number of pa sites around the lake. Eels and tuna were plentiful. Deforestation above the lake changed the nutrient status and the sediment accumulation closed the lake mouth in the 1880s. Research in 2005 showed that there was low recruitment of eels due to the mouth closure. Opening was first discussed in the 1930s. Tidal flows need to be used because now there is very little inflow into the lake. Gravel needs to be removed to create a permanent opening so the sea can re-charge the estuarine environment. An ultimate sign of success would be to again see whales! For more information see <http://www.wairewa.org.nz/>

Merf spoke to us about farming in Ireland. Merf is originally from the UK where he studied commercial horticulture before managing organic vegetable farms in the UK and then NZ where he has spent most of the last fifteen years. He studied for his Masters and PhD at Lincoln University and was the founding chair, and editor of the CCOG newsletter.

He has just finished a two year contract in the Republic of Ireland working for Teagasc - the Irish Government's Agriculture and Food Development agency - as the only dedicated organic scientist in the country. After initially working on nutrient management strategies for organics he then worked on weed management, machinery, soil ecology, pests and diseases, and research and extension, such as field days and workshops.

Organics is a very small part of Irish agriculture and horticulture – only about 1% of production. Irish farming is a lot like the situation in New Zealand, but the big difference is subsidies and latitude. The North Atlantic Drift is a warm sea current which means there is only a 10 deg variation between summer and winter temperatures. It is warmest in the west where some areas are frost-free. Soils are a mixed bag. Generally there is a high rainfall and in the flat central areas peat bogs are found. Ireland was deforested in the Neolithic age, leaving behind bouldery fields in many places – ideal for pasture which occupies 91% of agricultural area. Cereals also do well and in fact the highest yields in all of the EU are from Ireland. But at times the problem is getting the machinery onto the fields to harvest the grain (because of the wet weather and heavy soils) and there is little arable production.

Agriculture dominates the landscape and sheep can be found on top of the highest peaks. However only 7% of the workforce is involved in agriculture, average farm size is 32 ha and 50% of farms are less than 20 ha. Huge amounts of money is paid out in subsidies and there is other general farm support such as payment for fencing off streams. Even with subsidies many farms can't survive and 60% of farm income comes from off the farm. BUT farm land is exorbitantly expensive.

Vegetable production is dying and commercial horticulture is no longer taught at agricultural colleges. Cattle are housed over winter because of the wet weather and the heavy soils – organic producers have to have them on straw, so there is lots of farm-yard manure, which has to be stored over winter. Conventional farmers do not have to use straw and just put the slurry back on the fields. Organic dairying is being pushed and is consistently profitable – the pasture-based system is their major asset. There has been considerable interest in getting clover back into pastures since fossil fuel prices rose markedly several years ago.

Pests and diseases and fungal diseases are never a problem here. However despite these seemingly ideal conditions for organics only 1% of farmland is certified organic (average throughout the EU is 6%). There is very little organic horticulture but what there is, is very successful – there is big scope for expansion and is starting to take off. A good incentive is a 60% Government refund on machinery purchases!!!

Merf is now back in NZ, he is working on a number of projects including consulting, research, a weeding machinery company www.physicalweeding.com and an organic farmland investment company www.agro-ecological.com. He can be contacted via his website www.merfield.com

NTS Certificate in Sustainable Agriculture

A Four day Comprehensive Course
23-26th November 2009

Learn biological farming:

Building soil humus
Harnessing microbes
Foliar feeding
Pest Management
Human Health

The Certificate in Sustainable Agriculture features the NTS Management Approach where biological agronomists cover every aspect of microbe, soil and plant nutrition (and protection). The four days feature Mineral Management, Microbe Management, Plant Management and Pest Management with Human Health Management interspersed throughout.

“Healthy food, healthy people, healthy plant and how we manage the soil is the key. Graeme Sait is brilliant at communicating such a complex subject, making the connections between how we manage soils, plants, animals and ultimately our own health all seem common sense” Greg Hart (Abron Client).

For more information, contact Megan Pitcon 07 888.4868 or megan.pitcon@abron.co.nz

New study confirms benefits of organic farming

A panel of prominent US scientists has concluded there are major benefits for soils, food and health from farming organically. Their findings were announced at a recent symposium in Chicago, "Living Soil, Food Quality, and the Future of Food", organised by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). A growing body of sophisticated research over the last decade has compared the impacts of organic and conventional farming systems on

soil and food quality. Based on this body of research, some of it carried out in field experiments and laboratories, the panel concluded:

1. Studies of apple production demonstrate that organically farmed soils display improved soil health as measured by increased biological diversity, greater soil organic matter, and improved chemical and physical properties. Enhancement of soil quality in organic apple production systems can lead to measurable improvements in fruit nutritional quality, taste, and storability.
2. Organically farmed tomatoes have significantly higher levels of soluble solids and natural plant molecules called secondary plant metabolites, including flavonoids, lycopene, and Vitamin C. Most secondary plant metabolites are antioxidants, a class of plant compounds that have been linked to improved human health in populations that consume relatively high levels of fruit and vegetables.
3. Organic farming can, under some circumstances, delay the onset of the "dilution effect." In hundreds of studies, scientists have shown that incrementally higher levels of fertiliser negatively impact the density of certain nutrients in harvested foodstuffs, hence the name, the "dilution (of nutrients) effect." Specifically, tomatoes grown with organic fertilisers maintain constant concentrations of beneficial phenolic secondary plant metabolites and antioxidants, even as fruit grow larger, whereas concentrations of these same beneficial compounds decline with increasing fruit size when the same tomato cultivar is grown using conventional methods and fertiliser.
4. Studies of 27 cultivars of organically grown spinach demonstrate significantly higher levels of flavonoids and vitamin C, and lower levels of nitrates. Nitrates in food are considered detrimental to human health as they can form carcinogenic compounds (nitrosamines) in the GI tract and can convert haemoglobin to a form that can no longer carry oxygen in the blood.
5. The levels of secondary plant metabolites in food appear to be driven by the forms of nitrogen added to a farming system, as well as the ways in which the biological communities of organisms in the soil process nitrogen. Compared to typical conventional farms, the nitrogen cycle on organic farms is rooted in substantially more complex biological processes and soil-plant interactions, and for this reason, organic farming offers great promise in consistently producing nutrient-enriched foods.
6. Organic soil fertility methods, which use less readily available forms of nutrients, especially nitrogen, improve plant gene expression patterns in ways that lead to more efficient assimilation of nitrogen and carbon in tomatoes. This improvement in the efficiency of nutrient uptake leaves plants with more energy to produce beneficial plant secondary metabolites, compounds that promote plant health as well as human health.

National Radio's Country Life – Good podcasts to listen to: Gray Baldwin used to be a fertiliser company CEO. He now runs an award winning organic farm near Putaruru, and says the conversion was solely commercial - to make more money from milk. The farm also has a huge variety of trees for stock food and human consumption.

http://podcast.radionz.co.nz/clife/clife-20090911-2128-No_Fuzzy_La_La_Organics_Here-048.mp3

Inmate organics: The Paparoa Men's Prison near Christchurch runs a commercially successful 35-acre organic market garden that also provides the inmates who work there with horticultural qualifications. Southern horticultural manager Stuart Whyte is the driving force behind this growing venture.

http://podcast.radionz.co.nz/clife/clife-20090918-2129-Inmate_organics-048.mp3
