



Action plan for change – is organic leading the way?

It is estimated that half of the UK's food will come from overseas within a generation, as a rising population, stalling farm productivity and environmental concerns combine to erode what remains of the UK's self-sufficiency.

Professor Nic Lampkin, Executive Director of the Organic Research Centre said, "To remain resilient, productive and profitable, British agriculture has to change. Labels and polarised positions on how we produce our food need to be replaced by the positives of exploring common ground in organic and conventional systems, based on ecological as well as technological innovation."

While the organic food movement has often been considered 'niche', research is showing that many of the practices employed in organic production are in fact helping to boost not just the quality of food produced by the industry but crucially helping to ensure it has a sustainable future.

Nic Lampkin explains, "For example, 'agroecology*', which adapts the principles of ecology to managing farming systems, is finding new ways to grow abundant and affordable food while enhancing the environment, helping farm finances and contributing to the well-being of farmers, farm workers and rural communities. Consumers – whose concerns range from farm working conditions to animal welfare to food safety - are increasingly seeking out organic and alternatively grown foods at farmer's markets and farm shops."

Countries such as France, Scotland and Denmark are leading the way in changing their agricultural practices to embrace change. In France for example, their Agroecology Action Plan launched in 2014, embraces pesticide and antibiotic reduction, as well as targeting pollinators, organic farming and agroforestry. Other EU countries have similar action plans, which are linked to pursuing ambitious targets for school food and public procurement.

Significantly, Scotland too is launching a new organic action plan on the 27th January on the first day of the Organic Research Centre's conference being held in Bristol.

Wendy Seel, Chair of the Scottish Organic Forum, who have built the new plan following an extensive consultation says "Scotland's bold new plan "Organic Ambitions" is built on feedback from those engaged throughout the food and drink supply chain, in related areas of research and education, and a broad range of environmental organisations. It focuses on building knowledge about organics, strength in the organic supply chain, skills across the organic sector, and resilience – strengthening the capacity of Scotland's organic farms to preserve and enhance natural capital, and in turn to build a more resilient food supply chain."

To date, we do not have a similar action plan for England.

Director: Prof. Nicolas Lampkin

Council of Management: M. Turnbull (Chairman), V. Agrawal, A. Astor, A. Jedwell, C. Marriage, P. Thomas, D. Wilson, D. Wolfe.

Patrons: C.A. Bielenberg, The Countess of March and Kinrara, Peter Kindersley, Juliet Kindersley, Yvonne Pye, Jan Sundt, Prof. Dr. Hardy Vogtmann.

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Eric Giry, from the French Embassy, explains their approach, “We launched our agroecology project in 2012 in response to the concerns about food security, and the environmental challenge of conserving resources. It is an ambitious, inspirational project that aims to shift agriculture towards the objective of combining economic, environment and social performance.”

Professor Lampkin says, “We have reached the point where we need to change in order to feed our people and manage our environment but do it better for both. Agroecology shows the way forward but we need to find common ground and make the adoption of agro-ecological practices practical and appealing for farmers as well as profitable. This will be the key theme of our conference on 27-28th January, where we will be debating and sharing ideas with researchers and advisers on how we make agriculture perform better for businesses and society.”

Common ground is the title of the Organic Research Centre’s sell-out annual Organic Producers’ Conference, which aims to highlight the many challenges facing producers in their efforts to deliver better food, farming and health. It is being held on 27-28th January at the Novotel, Victoria Street in Bristol.

END

ENDS

Notes for Editors

The Organic Research Centre (ORC) based at Elm Farm near Newbury is the UK’s leading independent research centre dedicated to the development of sustainable food systems based on organic/agroecological principles. Further information on ORC’s activities can be found at www.organicresearchcentre.com

*Agroecology: reconciles productivity and environmental sustainability goals by incorporating the application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of agricultural systems.

This series of Organic Producers’ Conferences was initiated at the end of 2006 with financial support from Defra and the EU for the Organic Inform project. Since 2010, the conference has been self-financing and attracts 200+ participants annually. Further details can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/ORCOPC16> Tickets are sold out for day one, 27th January, but are still available for day two, 28th January.

The SOLID conference runs together with the Organic Producers’ Conference, to be held at the same venue on 27-28 January. More information at <http://tinyurl.com/ORC-SOLID>

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Press passes will be available for the conference – if you would like to attend, please contact Phil Sumption.

The Organic Producers’ Conference can be followed on twitter #ORC16 and @OrgResCent.

The conference is sponsored by Accor Hotels, Triodos Bank, Obsalim and the Woodland Trust with the active support of IOTA, Organic Growers Alliance, Organic Farmers & Growers, Soil Association, Land Workers Alliance, Coventry University (CAWR), Garden Organic, Organic Arable and SRUC.

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