



The Organic Research Centre - Elm Farm

Producer Conference:

organic farming:
for richer for poorer, for better for worse?

6th and 7th January 2009
Harper Adams University
Shropshire



The organisation of the conference was facilitated by
The Organic Research Centre - Elm Farm in collaboration with
Organic Inform, a Defra/RES part-funded project to exchange and
disseminate up-to-date market, research and policy information.

We would like to thank all the speakers and chair people for their time
and support. In addition, we thank the following for their help and
support in making this conference possible:

Doves Farm
Garden Organic
Institute of Organic Training and Advice
Organic Farmers and Growers
Organic Growers' Alliance
Soil Association (Food & Farming Department)
Triodos Bank
Vocational Training Scheme through Duchy College using funds from
the South West RDA

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Published by The Organic Research Centre -Elm Farm
Hamstead Marshall, Newbury, RG20 0HR
Tel: 00 44 (0) 1488 658298 Fax: 00 44 (0) 01488 658503
February 2009



As we move into 2009 the organic sector faces challenges like never before. There is a new Organic Regulation that will change the way producers manage the use of previously restricted inputs. There is a renewed assault by the pro-GM lobby along with sympathetic politicians in the name of feeding the world and stabilising prices.

The market is coming under increasing pressure in the current economic climate. Some see the mainstream organic market as becoming increasingly conventionalised. The oil price is affecting most of us, including the organic sector.

There are on-going debates on animal health issues particularly with respect to vaccination. There is still a huge imbalance between the production of organic feed in the UK and the demand from the organic livestock sectors.

Our third annual producer conference looked to address these and other issues. The market is tough at the moment and standards and practices need improvement. By working together we can make changes in our relationships to become a wiser and stronger community which can provide demonstrable benefits not only to the organic industry but also to the wider farming sector.

The Organic Research Centre - Elm Farm developed an exciting programme, with input from farmers and farmer groups. Speakers included producers, representatives from producer groups and researchers. Topics included:

- Feed – availability, nutrition, alternative feeds and on-farm production
- Personal experiences of organic farming and the market
- Technical sessions
- Vaccination and animal health

- Essential soil management
- Grazing management
- Surviving the credit crunch

In these changing times The Organic Research Centre decided that it is also time to change the venue to give better access for other parts of the country. This year, Harper Adams University in Shropshire hosted the third annual producer conference. Although this was a new venue, the quality of the debates and the warmth of the social interaction more than lived up to those of previous conferences. This was a conference that dealt with the real issues that face organic producers now and in the immediate future.

Roger Hitchings
Head of Advisory Services
The Organic Research Centre - Elm Farm



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TUESDAY 6th JANUARY

Plenary Session: (14:00 - 15:00)

Chair: Roger Hitchings

Producer Panel: How was it for you?

In the opening plenary session of the conference, four producers gave their opinions of the past year, and the present and future prospects for their farm and the organic sector.

Dominic Watts, an arable farmer from Bury St. Edmunds, gave an overview of his farm, and how it developed from a very intensive conventional system to a more sustainable organic one, after starting conversion in 2000. He talked of the challenges faced with weeds such as creeping thistle and wild oats as well as the economic cost of the fertility building phase. Dominic mentioned that they are thinking of introducing cattle into the rotation, to make use of the grass leys, and also said he would like to reduce the cost of labour involved in weed control, with the possibility of using a combine harvester to do this.

Dominic then mentioned exciting new developments at the farm such as using minimum tillage techniques to keep the wild oat seeds on the soil surface and a new reservoir they have built. They are also looking at the installation of a woodchip boiler, to be fed from 150 ha of woodland on the estate. The farm trustees are still considering this development. With reference to the future of the organic sector, Dominic said that he felt the use of sewage sludge for fertility building had potential and that the organic world should take a less dogmatic stance towards GM, as it may have a role to play in the future.

Pat Taylor, of Rutland Organic Turkeys in Lincolnshire, talked about their poultry enterprise, which completed organic conversion in 2007. Pat said that until 2007 they were doing year round table birds and eggs, plus turkeys for Christmas, and as a small operation, they got tired of the weekly “catch and slaughter” treadmill. So they decided to stop production in July-August

and January-February, when production was always slow, and instead focus on Christmas poultry and breeding. They still maintain sufficient poultry to keep their local profile, through farmers markets, and make use of direct marketing to promote the Christmas turkey sales. Pat also mentioned their recently acquired 60 head herd of fallow deer, and highlighted some problems they have experienced with keeping them inside the fences!

Pat said their 2008 experience of 2008 had been okay, and that by stopping production in July and August they were not caught out by the “summer-slow-down”. There were some negative aspects, however, in keeping on top of paperwork and red tape relating to animal and environmental health. She also said that they viewed with dismay the “organic holiday” on feed, and felt this could upset the organic grain market. Pat highlighted the importance of the organic market communicating that organic is both good for you and that it tastes better, and the organic sector needs to start producing more literature to this effect to encourage consumers during the “credit crunch”.

Collette Haynes, a vegetable grower from Sussex, described herself as a “born again organic grower” having lost faith in the organic movement a year ago, after feeling that it had “surfed a wave of popularity, and ended up somewhere it didn’t want to be”. Collette talked about the box scheme she and her husband had developed through word of mouth and how such schemes had been taken over by the multiple retailers with “the box” being seen as important rather than the consumer contact. She said that this didn’t really affect their business, as most customers were committed, but it allowed fear to set in that they were “living an illusion and were failing the soil”. Collette also stated that the relationship with customers wasn’t a good one a year ago, and they were having to bend over backwards to meet customers’ demands.

Collette said that she then found the “Organic Growers’ Alliance”, and found that hearing from other growers in the same situation reconfirmed her faith in what she was doing. Through this contact she was able to conclude that markets are only monsters if you let them be; “like teenagers with freedom without responsibility” and that we need to link principles to market forces. She stated the importance of remembering that we are not consumers, we are human beings, and that the ideas of equality and fairness can apply broadly. Collette also highlighted the importance of communicating well with consumers and that it had become clear to her that consumers do not believe eve-

rything they read, and see a box scheme like a marriage; willing to put up with the ups and downs. Collette finished by saying that now is no time to lose confidence, and that we shouldn't be afraid of the market (which is on its last legs), instead we need to work on building community relationships.

To read Collette's full presentation, visit the [Organic Inform website](#).

Patrick Holden, the director of the Soil Association, and a beef and arable farmer from Lampeter, started by saying that he feels 2009 presents a good opportunity for the organic movement. Patrick talked about hearing Rob Hopkins speak in 2006 about transition towns; during his presentation Rob highlighted the fact that it takes 10 Kcal of energy to produce 1 Kcal of food and that global food systems would soon unravel as a result. After this, Patrick said he felt that business as usual for an organic farmer was no longer an option. For his farm this meant trying to supply their own grain and straw for the animals. He then asked if after three years had they made any changes for the better on his farm. The answer was that progress was still slow; they are still importing about 70% of the grain they use and have tried to grow their own rush straw, but unfortunately this has failed. In terms of marketing, the farm is still relying on national markets; there are not enough local buyers who can afford the produce.

Patrick went on to highlight that most farms are still locked into nationalised distribution systems and that all farmers need to imagine the implications of a sudden interruption of diesel and electricity as there are no systems in place to reduce dependence on outside inputs. He said that we have about 15 years to switch from fossil to renewable energy before we are in "deep water", and stated that they had made some progress on this area, on his farm, having installed a ground source heat pump for the house. However, Patrick made the point that there is currently a gulf between what we are doing as farmers and growers and the public perception.

With regards to the future, Patrick stated that "lifestyle buyers" may be lost during the economic downturn, but those more committed will stay through-out; we need to work to increase the numbers of these consumers, and to do this we have to reconnect the public with organic farming's benefits. The best place to do this is on our farms; through farm open days, walks etc. Patrick finished by saying that we need to avoid looking at the new entrants to the organic market with hostility, saying "this would be very dangerous".

Workshops: Growers (15:00 - 15:50)

Chair: Alan Schofield

The growers held three workshop sessions, which participants could choose between. The objective of the sessions was to allow an open space for growers to bring up issues, concerns or problems on the chosen crop(s). The rationale was to utilise grower experiences to suggest solutions.

Write up courtesy of [The Organic Growers' Alliance](#) / [The Organic Grower](#)

Brassica session - Phil Sumption

In the open session on brassicas the following topics were discussed.

How to provide fertility for over-winter cabbages in the early spring, particularly after heavy rain has washed away a lot of nutrients:

- Manipulation of planting dates - it was suggested that an earlier planting date might help after heavy summer rain. Otherwise a range of planting dates could be a way of hedging bets.
- Pulse meals - the idea of using home-grown pulses, coarsely milled and applied as a top-dressing was discussed. Work at the University of Kassel in Germany investigated different organic fertilisers derived from plant materials (OFDP) with respect to their nitrogen fertilisation potential and as an alternative to common organic fertilisers derived from animal waste products. The study concluded that lupin seed meal, home-grown or purchased, could be a valid substitute for the coarse meal of ricinus or horn-meal. Fababeans seed meal is only viable if home-grown and pea seeds are less suitable due to high seed costs and consequently unfavourably high costs for the released nitrogen. *For more information visit the [OrgPrints website](#) (document is in German).*

Alternatives to calabrese. There was a feeling amongst some growers present, particularly those selling directly, that the ubiquitous calabrese is a bland and un-interesting vegetable to grow and eat. Are there other more exciting brassicas available that could be grown instead? Suggestions were:

- Bordeaux purple sprouting broccoli, which can be harvested from September to November. Hugh and Patsy Chapman from Dorset planted their

Bordeaux in late June, harvesting it from September until Christmas. Bordeaux has been replaced in the latest Elsoms catalogues with a very similar variety, Santee and is available as organic seed. Apparently it can be cropped from April until the beginning of March.

- Italian sprouting broccoli De Cicco produces small heads, followed by many side-shoots. It is available from Johnny's Seed in the USA www.johnnyseeds.com and also E.W.King. It is recommended for spring and early use as well as late summer/autumn. The point being it is probably not very happy with high summer temperatures, (not a problem last year). The Chapmans started harvesting theirs in August from a late June planting and carried on until November.
- Romanesco cauliflower is another attractive alternative that does well for direct marketing. One grower found that it was susceptible to internal rots that are not apparent prior to cutting.
- Other options are the various coloured cauliflowers such as the green, orange and purple forms.

Brussels sprout varieties. The question was raised as to the best varieties of sprouts available. Both helemus (non-organic) and nautic (organic) have produced good results for growers. Results from NIAB organic variety trials are available, up to 2006/07, on the www.cosi.org.uk website.

Slugs have been a problem this last year for many crops, not just brassicas. It was suggested that a cultivated bare margin is a good way to deal with them, preventing incursion from the hedges.

Clubroot was raised by one grower as a problem. It can be worse in wet years but others in the group had not experienced problems this year. Increasing pH by liming was considered the best way to keep it in check.

Turnips - the potential for turnips as a crop was discussed. Early bunching turnips were a good fast crop in the spring when not much else about, apart from leafy vegetables. Golden ball was suggested as an attractive variety.

Indoor solanaceae session - Mike Westrip

The indoor solanaceae workshop ran as an open discussion to try to glean experiences from everyone within the group. As time was very much a limiting factor the decision was made to concentrate on one crop only: tomatoes.

The first point of discussion was variety. “Sakura” had a lot of advocates, a large cherry with good flavour and yields, which was thought to be suitable for any scale of production under either glass or plastic. Others mentioned were “Favorita” and “Claree” and of course “Gardeners Delight”. For an alternative to red “Yellow Submarine” was considered by some to be worth a try. It seemed that the cherry size varieties were the preference of the smaller, direct marketers. In the standard size bracket “Douglas”, “Cindel” and “Sparta” all got mentions but there didn't seem to be a real “banker” as there was with the cherries. Some beefsteak varieties were hailed, including “Brandywine”, “Velocity” and “Yasha”. Outdoor varieties were also touched on but everyone in the group had found them too vulnerable to blight to be worth the risk. Most of the varieties were thought to be available organically (see www.organicxseeds.co.uk for details of suppliers) or at least were available untreated.

Sowing for unheated tunnel crops generally seemed to start around mid February for planting in early May with first pickings, on the whole, reported as being late July. For heated glass however, sowing starts in October for November planting with picking commencing in mid February.

Grafting was untried by the bulk of the group, however Jill Vaughan (Delfland Nurseries - plant raisers) explained that many of their larger scale customers did use grafted plants. The rootstocks (varieties “Beaufort” and “Maxifort”) are started in small modules with the required variety sown separately (also in small modules). The plants are then grafted together approximately 10 days after germination. Jill said the implications of extra work and cost were generally outweighed by the better vigour and yields.

The issue of ensuring an adequate rotation was touched on, but time allowed for little discussion beyond a general acknowledgement of the difficulties of ensuring an adequate break between standard summer protected crops. Experience within the group of undersowing a green manure was limited. It was generally thought to be very difficult to get right, due to issues involved in establishment and keeping the undersown crop watered without inducing disease in the cash crop.

Two main problems were raised; blight and sclerotinia. An interesting biological control measure for the latter was mentioned by one member of the group. Called “Contans”, it is a permitted input containing the fungus *conio-*

thyrium minutans and is marketed by Belchim Crop Protection Ltd (www.belchim.com). Control of blight was agreed to be a function of good ventilation and cautious irrigation.

By this point time had most definitely run out. The feedback from the session on the whole was positive and hopefully all involved came away with something useful. There is a real tangible benefit to be had from these types of discussions and similar themes have already started to develop within the OG journal. There is a case for more of this at conferences and as one colleague suggested, "If people could come prepared, knowing they will be expected to contribute, there might be even more to be extracted".

Winter/autumn salads session - Pete Richardson

In this workshop session the group talked about numbers of bags sold per week. At Coleshill Organics they produce between 4-500 175g bags per week, supplying their boxes from mid September onwards, when the lettuce stops. There was much talk of the problems experienced with the biodegradable packaging from the Soil Association, as the salad in the bags cannot be seen and they also create moisture loss with the leaves going limp. At Coleshill they have started selling in loose crates, wrapped in damp newspaper.

Growing techniques were discussed. One way is to sow into 150 module trays in fertile fibre compost, planting into mypex at about 15cm (6") apart. This avoids soil splash and almost eradicates the need for weeding in the winter. Modules are multi-sown according to Charles Dowding's advice in his brilliant salads book.

Fertility is obtained from either application of green waste compost or residually from FYM applied in the spring to tomato or pepper crops.

Varieties were discussed of all the obvious salad crops. Rocket, Mizuna, land cress, claytonia, Grenoble red for lettuce, also used red chard and red Russian kale to provide more colour and interest.

Workshops: Growers (16:10 - 17:00)

Chair: Alan Schofield

Direct marketing: The weather and the credit crunch **Debra Schofield & Pete Richardson**

Write up courtesy of [The Organic Growers' Alliance](#) / [The Organic Grower](#)

The marketing session was the last of the grower's sessions on the first day of the producer conference. More than 65 people filled the room to hear the session which included presentations by Debra Schofield and Pete Richardson.

The whole point of the session was not to tell people how to market but more to report back on where we are now and to open up the discussion for all to have a say. Pete Richardson opened the session with a presentation on how the business Coleshill Organics, that he runs with his partner Sonia, is coping with the decline in box scheme numbers. Although 30% down on box numbers they were now wholesaling more, doing markets and selling to the local catering trade so have managed, just, to maintain turnover at existing levels. Despite being very worried about the apparent trend in the box market, they are optimistic that they can address the shortfall and make it up through other markets. More open days and even cared for allotments are being considered for the coming year.

Debra Schofield of Growing with Nature told the delegates of her and partner Alan's experience over the last 18 months. As a business they have seen a 40% decline in box numbers and a major loss of crops due to the weather in both 2007 and 2008. All of this has led to a major restructuring of the business with some staff being made redundant and the remainder now working a three day week. Open days had changed from a technical "how we do it" to a much friendlier "let's sit down, eat a meal and talk" showing people what can be made from the week's box. Debra talked about the market stall, which they opened for locals and is run on an honesty box basis. The major obstacle that Debra sees is the public perception that they are a luxury to be cut back on in times of hardship. She went on to ask five questions for the delegates to consider and debate:

What is more important, the product or the system of production?
How can we redress the misconception that we are an expensive luxury?
Is cooking history, and are we mad selling raw vegetables?
Are others looking at some form of processing on farm e.g. soups etc?
What, if anything, can certification do to help us in these difficult times?

Workshops: Arable, poultry, dairy, beef & sheep (15:00 - 15:50)

Chair: Dr Bruce Pearce

Are we making progress on feed? - Liz Findlay

Liz Findlay reported on her 10 years of egg production in an excellent presentation. When in 2006 she found that her wheat was coming from Kazakhstan she felt that something was not quite right and started to look more closely at local production. Liz noted a number of areas where conventional thinking had clouded the reality that local production could contribute importantly. Range, including hedges, is a priority for Liz, which she sees as an important part of poultry nutrition: particularly when it comes to meeting amino acid requirements. She also noted that wheat is not the only option for feeding. In 2007 she began growing triticale and pea crops on a little under 2 ha; both did quite well. In 2008 she grew naked oats which yielded at close to 3t/ha. Investing in a mill and mix gravity fed 4 kw hammer mill Liz found that she was able to make savings of around £80/t. Liz lets her feed supplier know what she is producing at home and they make up an appropriate balancer diet. She has not noticed a decrease in egg production although egg sizes may have decreased.

Liz's presentation was an excellent reminder that the hope of more local production can be achieved where we are willing to make real changes. In the discussion that followed it was suggested that for high lay rates amino acids would need to be supplied, although Liz was able to repeat that she had not found a problem, highlighting the importance of the range. Others suggested that in other sectors, notably dairy, breeding work would be necessary as Holstein blood is too great an influence. Discussion did stray on to the

“organic holiday” and it was noted that the issues both of breed and feeding should be addressed through conversion planning and the conversion process. An interesting observation was made by Rex Humphrey, who, in a relatively isolated scenario as an organic producer in Northern Ireland had turned to arable production on his enterprises in order to meet feed needs. Perhaps others could do the same.

Gerry Minister, of Luddesdown Organic Farms suggested that Liz might not be aware of the value that livestock farmers could get from UK arable producers: prices not being as high as they might think. He also explained that much tighter links could be made between UK arable producers and livestock farms but that this would be put at risk under an “organic holiday” scenario.

Workshops: Arable (16:10 - 17:00)

Chair: Dr Bruce Pearce

Energy efficiency: Practical approaches to machinery and rotation management - Laurence Smith & Peter How

Laurence Smith and Peter How presented on the work of the Energy, Emissions, Ecology and Agricultural Systems Integration Programme (EASI). Laurence made recommendations for cutting carbon emissions from machinery on farm, including keeping tractor tyres at the correct pressure, keeping revs down, installing fuel meters and/or recording field use, keeping servicing and maintenance up to date and ensuring good ballast distribution. Two other main emitters of carbon are grain drying and storage and the rotation used. Things to consider are switching to low input crops, making use of undersowing, using crops with alternate root depths and making full use of leguminous species.

Discussion followed about the relative effectiveness of minimum tillage practice versus ploughing in relation to energy and emissions. Laurence said in terms of energy they may balance out as you may need an increased number of passes in minimum tillage systems to control weeds. Peter noted that you have the potential for increased organic matter in minimum tillage systems

but any hard patches in the soil are prone to release more emissions. Lawrence mentioned the possibility of direct drilling in minimum tillage systems to reduce passes. There is some machinery being developed for this purpose (the “Eco-Dyn”). It is currently being trialled and is in production but is not commercially available in the UK at present. The issue of training was also raised as important, particularly as available machinery and understanding of how to use it most efficiently is developed, the farming workforce ages and more and more temporary staff are employed.

Workshops: Poultry, dairy, beef & sheep (16:10 - 17:30)

Chair: Lawrence Woodward

Vaccination controversies and the homoeopathic alternative

- Richard Kempsey, Christopher Day & Will Best

Lawrence Woodward opened up the session by describing how the organic sector was “in a mess” regarding vaccination. He commented that differing positions were born of a varying mix of standards, necessity and idealism. Foot and Mouth (FMD) and Bird Flu influenced views and these views were contradictory. As a movement he believes that vaccinations should not be used routinely but only in an emergency; during the FMD crisis the use of vaccinations were argued for over the slaughter policy.

Vaccinations should not be used to mask bad management or “non-organic” management in a supposed organic system. Good husbandry brings about good health and welfare, but raised the question “how do we define welfare?” When the organic sector was beginning to become commercial and standards were being written many veterinarians were sceptical that an organic system would actually be beneficial for animal welfare. In response to this The Scottish Agricultural College and Reading University put together a decision making tool for deciding in a concise manner when it was best to vaccinate. For some reason this tool does not seem to be used any more.

No specific data is collected by the certification bodies on the use of vaccinations, but the use of them must be justified in each farm's individual management plan. There seems to be reluctance in newly converted farmers to move away from vaccinations. An example given was that of Welsh hill farmers; it was estimated that 75% still use a clostridial vaccination programme. Most vets will recommend a clostridial vaccination programme, so farmers easily receive derogations, but does this start to defeat what we are aiming for? The organic principle is that good husbandry should lead to good health and so animals, and indeed humans, should be able to resist things through a natural vitality. One argument to this was that vaccinations are expensive, so why would any farmer be using them unnecessarily? They should be used to eradicate disease and then usage should cease. The question of disease prevention then arose - what about diseases such as blue tongue, as no amount of good husbandry can help to prevent one's own herd being at risk.

Richard Kempsey then gave his experiences and views on the role of vaccinations in organic farming and in particular in the poultry sector.

Richard believes we need to retain access to vaccinations as part of a monitored health plan. He said that maternal immunity is the most important part of an animal's defence; this decreases between day one and fourteen as an active immunity launched by the young chick's own immune system. In the commercial world this maternal or passive immunity is not as strong, as chicks are not brooded with the mother hen in a natural environment. This kind of system could exist but only in a size enough to support farm gate sales - as soon as regulations are applicable this kind of brooding is impossible. This is why vaccinations are required.

Vaccinating requires a balanced system; blood samples of the previous and current flock should be used to look at the immune status as a whole and a vaccination programme devised as required. Blanket use should never be employed. Stonegate has a standard vaccination programme but stress usage must be justified in individual farm animal health plans.

There will always be zoonotic threats such as Avian Influenza so there will always be the need for some vaccinations. Organic farming also has to adhere to legislative decisions about vaccinations and soon it will be a requirement to vaccinate against salmonella. Richard questioned, "Are we too fearful of disease and has this helped to lead to a cycle of insurance vaccinations

and therefore lowered natural immunity?” Richard further questioned “the future of vaccinations is surely heading towards being genetically modified; where do we stand on that?”

Christopher Day, MRCVS, began his session by asking the audience to consider the safety of conventional vaccinations, which he said is not a given when we consider the use of aluminium, mercury, formaldehydes, benzoates, cell culture etc. The effects of vaccines can take 3 generations to be completely gone from breeding stock; this is perhaps less of a problem in short lived farm animals than other species.

Nosodes are the homeopathic alternative to vaccinations. They are made from specifically diseased material; they are not themselves strictly homeopathic as there is disease present but are a homeopathic type medicine. Chris turned to homeopathy where nutrition and conventional medicines were having very little effect. He decided to investigate it for himself. At the time there were no organic farmers and he was working in a conventional practice so the trials were done on conventional farms. The results were staggering: pig still born rates were cut in half and mastitis problems solved.

Nosode Safety: Nosodes are used as a preventative and no problems have ever been seen (except on one farm where the farmer was so impressed with the results he thought if a little worked well then a lot would do even better! That was not the case). But blind reliance still does not work; good management of nutrition and excellent husbandry are the platform to start from. Nosodes can be used as a preventative whether enzootic (present in your herd) or epizootic (not currently present in your herd but you are afraid it could be); they have been successful against *E. Coli*, BVD, enzootic abortion, mastitis and rain scald to name but a few. They have also helped to combat salmonella in many animals and Chris was sure that it would work in a commercial chicken flock although it is not something he has thus far been asked to tackle.

Conventional vaccinations, he believes, will not eradicate diseases and are not generally used to do so as they can mask carriers; they are better suited to disease control. When using vaccines we teach the immune system to resist a certain challenge at the expense of its general capability. Homeopathy has not yet been proven as we are not sure how it actually works but scientific evidence does support it. Nosodes do not promote antibody production.

Chris likened the working of nosodes to that of a C.D. in a computer; it is just a plastic disk but what the computer can do with it is amazing. He assumes that it is some kind of energetic coding at work, T and B cells work together to produce antibodies - the code is given to B cells so that they are ready to fight the virus. More research is required but funding is unlikely to be given as there is no major profit to be made, unlike in the pharmaceutical business.

A problem for organic farmers and certification bodies that comes from this lack of knowledge is that the law only listens to conventional vets. If a vet tells a farmer to do something and they disagree, they could be prosecuted under the new Animal Welfare Act. This is something the organic sector should begin to look at; there are other ways and other opinions, there is a wealth of knowledgeable people if we look for them. Chris will not deal with notifiable diseases unless expressly asked to; he offered to fund research himself but both M.A.F.F. and Defra declined his offer.

Will Best then spoke about his success with homeopathic remedies and nosodes on his dairy herd; he has not used hormones, anti-biotic vaccinations or steroids for 20 years. There were 2 exceptions; whilst renting ground from a neighbour, Red water was introduced to the herd. Although a specific injection was required for some cows they are now working a natural immunity into the rest of the herd. The second was Blue Tongue. Will's system is a shining example of how good stockmanship and homeopathy really can work to the advantage of the cows and the wallet!

Meetings: Open Session (17:00 - 17:30)

Chair: Mike Westrip

Young entrants, Apprentices and Open Gates

This “after hours” session was originally intended to focus on young entrants to organic production and in particular on the initiatives that exist to promote greater involvement. When word of a new self-assessment scheme for growers from the Soil Association began to circulate it was agreed that this session would largely be given over to a detailed discussion and debate on the merits of the new scheme.

Young entrants were not entirely pushed off the agenda as the session began with an introduction to the Apprenticeship Scheme run by a Soil Association led consortium that includes the Organic Advisory Service and the Organic Growers’ Alliance. This scheme has no links with nationally recognised qualifications and relies instead on grass roots support from growers (it will be extended to agriculture) and their workers. The scheme has been running as a pilot and is now in its second year. The Soil Association has received in excess of 60 enquiries from would be apprentices but there are few growers currently in a position to take them on in the current economic and market climate.

Patrick Holden and James Twine were then introduced as the session moved on to consider the Open Gate scheme. Patrick concentrated on the philosophy behind the proposal while James dealt with the more practical aspects. There are a lot of small scale growers right across the country that grow primarily for themselves but also exchange or sell small quantities to friends, neighbours and others in the community. The scheme is intended to provide some recognition that the food has been grown in a way that resonates with the philosophy of the Soil Association without using the terms “organic” or “organically grown”.

In terms of practicalities, the proposed pilot scheme would only be open to SA producer members with a maximum turnover of £5000 pa and a maximum land area of 1 hectare. Application and self-assessment would be carried out on-line with physical spot checks on a sample of producers every

year. The key descriptor of the produce would be “grown by a Soil Association member”.

A detailed debate followed the initial presentations as the many commercial growers present sought to ensure that there would be no threat to their businesses from such a development. The atmosphere was not hostile, as some had predicted, as it was greatly appreciated that SA had come to the conference to specifically discuss this measure and to seek the views of the organic growing community. The proposal that the pilot scheme would be introduced later this year, run for 12 months and then be reviewed was accepted by a majority of the 60 or so participants on a show of hands.

Meetings: Arable (17:00 - 17:30)

Chair: Andrew Trump

Arable meeting

Andrew Trump began with an introduction to [Organic Arable](#). He then raised three recent issues that the arable sector had faced: the melamine contamination in Chinese soya, herbicide contamination in oats, and the “Feed Holiday”.

In terms of contamination, it was asked whether dioxins (such as were found in Irish pork recently) can get from grain dryers into grain. It was thought this was caused by grain dryers being on the wrong setting - needs close monitoring. This is a potential issue that needs to be addressed.

There was general agreement that the organic sector is fragmented, and needs a more coordinated voice. Steven Jacobs said that it was this fragmentation that had led to the “Feed Holiday” issue, and that we need to be solution focussed. The debate has been held in public, rather than within the organic sector, and this has been damaging.

There is an increased concern about mycotoxins testing. However, Andrew Trump would resist regular residue testing as the costs are likely to be pushed onto farmers. Gerry Minister said he thought that mycotoxin contamination was nil risk, and asked who wanted it done. Michael Marriage answered that EU regulation brought in different levels of mycotoxins, and there is now a limit. There are often high levels of DON (Deoxynivalenol) in wheat, and the standards are set according to the limit of what they can detect. Consequently, the legal limit is about 1000 times smaller than hazardous levels. However there is a need to ensure due diligence. Michael Marriage also said that from his experience rye has been high on ochratoxin, and a product recall has been done, with the result that large quantities went into landfill. He said the FSA were paranoid and that we need to be cautious. He said that ochratoxin and aflatoxin could be affected by storage effects and weather, and that farmers should not be tempted to put any bad-looking wheat from the corners and sides of the grain store in with the grain going to the millers - this may result in the entire load being rejected.²² Andrew Trump said that (in answer to

Gerry Minister's earlier question) he had had positive results for tests on mycotoxins, but that these had not been above the legal limit. He tests one in 30 samples of the grain they sell. Doves Farm tests each load before accepting.

Steven Jacobs said that an increase in the organic arable sector was needed. It was agreed there is great imbalance in the market. Gerry commented that this was a long term problem, and that when the value of cereals dropped a few years ago, arable farmers introduced livestock to boost their finances. Andrew Trump added that it was because of derogations in the past that we have ended up relatively high livestock production and relatively low crop production. He said that it is when policy or certification interferes with the market that these problems occur. Steven Jacobs said that there was a need to stimulate organic arable production in the UK. Michael Marriage said that with cereals there was a 60% premium, and that with lambs the premium for organic was only 20%. Andrew Trump commented that if prices of crops go up, both the arable and the livestock sectors should be made profitable. He said that we should try and move away from the volatile market, and try to provide security for livestock producers and profitability for arable producers.

Michael Marriage asked how far in the future farmers should sell - should they settle for a contract in advance? Andrew Trump replied that the feed compounders are not the customer - the real customer is the livestock producer. Andrew Trump suggested that the organic market should look at specific food products, and target these. He said that we need to break it down to manageable targets of production.

Gerry Minister came back to the issue of fragmentation, and said that the organic sector was not working together adequately enough. Andrew Trump replied we have volatility in the market because we are not collaborating or adhering to some form of structure. He said that organic farmers needed to realise that a premium market is not available to every farmer, and only some farmers should aim for the premium (e.g. in wheat) rather than everyone aiming to produce the same product.

WEDNESDAY 7th JANUARY

Workshops: Growers & arable (09:00 - 10:30)

Chair: Stephen Briggs

Fertility management: A place for novel legumes? - Dr Anton Rosenfeld

Dr Anton Rosenfeld, of [Garden Organic](#) (HDRA) gave us a summary of the work he has been doing on legumes under the Defra project ([OF0363](#)).

The legumes have been grown for the last two years, and this year they are being grown as a cash crop. There have been on-farm trials, at 8 sites managed by farmers. The aim was to compare novel legumes with the farmers' standard fertility-building practices. Anton then described the results from some of the farms. The general picture was that whilst some legumes performed well early on in the trial, these species did less well at later stages. Both Persian Clover and Crimson Clover were examples of such species. A member of the audience asked if the legumes were mown, and Anton replied that they were, and this seemed to affect the legumes in different ways. Crimson clover performed less well when cut, Yellow Trefoil was almost killed when it was not cut, and Red Clover did not seem to be strongly affected by mowing.

Anton described some of the characteristics of each species that were found out during the trial, such as Red Clover being disease prone, Persian Clover generally meeting the approval of farmers, and Sweet Clover providing uneven establishment.

Michael Marriage commented that he had found there to be a taint problem with Sweet Clover when grown prior to milling wheat, because the very small seeds get into the wheat and the wheat has to be rejected. Anton was asked whether or not any measurements were done on nitrogen fixation, to which he answered that nitrogen fixation was very difficult to measure. Instead, final biomass was measured, and the performance of the subsequent

crop is also an indicator of nitrogen fixation. It was asked whether Persian Clover needs an inoculant. Anton answered that it did not, but that Lucerne does perform better with an inoculant. Stephen Briggs added that some work had been done at Newcastle on the benefits of adding inoculant to different species.

Legume Link - Peter How

Peter How introduced [The Organic Research Centre's](#) (ORC) Legume Link project.

Pete said that there was a strong industry pull to the project, in terms of improving nitrogen-use efficiency, which would reduce the impact on the environment. He highlighted the high energy cost of producing artificial nitrogen fertiliser, and the need to reduce leaching, which is caused by the imbalance of soil nitrogen supply and demand. The basis for the new Legume Link project is that residue composition varies with species, and that this affects the rate of breakdown of the plant, and hence nitrogen release. A legume mixture contains residues with varying rates of breakdown, and would provide stability.

Pete outlined the stages in the project; the legume species are being selected through consultation with the partners in the project, and will be assessed on 35 participatory farms as an ASM (All Species Mixture), which would contain up to 14 legume species and 4 grasses. The species involved will be evaluated across their environmental range and this information will feed into the design of a Legume Based Mixture. The practicalities of being a participatory farmer were explained: farmers would be expected to grow 0.5ha of the ASM alongside their own standard legume. If the farmers intended to graze the ley then exclusion cages would need to be set up to protect some of the crop for biomass sampling. The ley needs to be grown for 2 years, and during this time assessments would be carried out by ORC research staff. These include soil sampling, species presence, and species biomass. Pete was asked whether the mixture contains all combinations of species, to which he replied that the mixture would contain all 14 species of legume, and that we could not do different mixtures containing different species combinations because of funding and practical issues. Stephen Briggs added that he thought the project sounded good and that people should get involved.

The role of green manures - Dr Liz Stockdale

Dr Liz Stockdale from [Newcastle University](#) gave an informative and engaging talk on the relationship between green manures and soil health.

Liz began by explaining that many of the factors deciding the choice of legume will be related to what has occurred beforehand in the soil: the soil condition, temperature, moisture content, nutrient availability and distribution, soil tilth, and pH. She added that autumn sowing and spring sowing would not necessarily suit the same legumes. Species with larger seeds can manage in soils with lower nutrient availability because of the nutrients contained within the seeds. Green manures will do better where soil health is better, but too much nitrogen already present in the soil is detrimental to the legume. Green manures interfere with the soil, through root exudates, associations with soil microorganisms, and nutrient demand. In terms of incorporation, the timing again depends on soil conditions.

Green manures have a large effect on soil structure. Different species have different rooting morphologies, and will interact differently with the soil. Soil structure is also affected by physical processes, such as freeze/thaw cycles, and by roots forcing open gaps in the soil. However, Liz reminded us that we should not rely on this to solve soil compaction. Plant roots can interact chemically with the soil, such as lupins which reduce the pH and increase the phosphorous available. Nitrogen fixation relies on a symbiotic relationship between the legume and soil microorganisms. There is a cost for the legume in terms of carbohydrate, so if there is already plenty of nitrogen in the soil then it will not fix nitrogen. A healthy-looking legume crop does not mean high rates of nitrogen fixation. Mowing legumes can stop fixation because of the nitrogen released from mulching. Fungal-plant mutual parasitism involves the vesicular arbuscular mycorrhizae associating itself with both the legume root and the surrounding soil, such that the effective surface area of the legume root is increased, which increases nutrient uptake. If high levels of phosphorous are present in the soil (P index above 3 or 4), these fungal relationships do not work.

In order to maximise nutrient use efficiency and minimise nitrogen leaching, good cover crops should be chosen. There is a need to synchronise the leaching of nitrate and the uptake, and therefore there should always be something

growing. Other fertility is needed for nitrogen fixation; potassium is important, and this is found in green material. Green manures are particularly important in sandy soils because they reduce potassium leaching. The green manure should be chosen for its ability to improve both phosphorous and nitrogen.

The overall message was that the physics, chemistry and biology of the soil interact with each other. There are many different factors affecting the soil, and it is therefore difficult to predict the effect on the soil. We need to use the knowledge and experience of our farms, and those of others, together with advisors.

Liz was asked how phosphorous can be removed from the soil without adding it. Liz answered that we cannot keep removing phosphorous without adding it, and that farmers need to check that the intake equals the offtake. Otherwise, in 50 years or so we will have run down the levels of soil phosphorous. There was a discussion on using a mix of legumes, with someone commenting that functional biodiversity seemed so beneficial that it was surprising that anyone would use a single species of green manure. Stephen Briggs added that a greater number of species would allow better resource protection, and Liz said that even in conventional systems, single species are very rarely used. A farmer asked Liz whether his soil, which rarely has a P index of less than 3, can maintain its level of phosphorous without adding rock phosphate. Liz replied that he didn't need to add any rock phosphate, but that he should monitor the levels of phosphorous in his soil in case the situation should change.

Liz was asked whether any work had been done on the nutrients in the food, and Liz cited the [QLIF project](#) as being an example of this. Another question was asked as to the receptiveness of Defra to this type of work, to which Liz replied that Defra is made up of a large number of people who are rapidly changing, so we need to work at keeping a culture of understanding. OELS still exists which demonstrates that Defra is not too negative about organic farming. Martin Wolfe commented that he felt there was a big change in Europe regarding the plant and animal science community, and that more people were beginning to think about complexity in systems. Stephen Briggs said that not enough work had been done on legumes and that we were now trying to catch up.

John Newman asked about how the Legume Link participatory farm trials would be run: would it be topped, or grazed? Pete answered that he would not stipulate how the farms were managed, and Martin added that the management would be the farmer's choice. Stephen Briggs said that the best scientists were the farmers themselves. One farmer commented that he thought Legume Link seemed like a brilliant project, and it gives the opportunity to latch into a network of farmers. An important question was raised as to the risk of volunteer weed burden, and Steven Briggs said that this would need to be investigated further. Anton said that this might be a problem with Crimson Clover. It was asked if the farmer's experience of the last 10-15 years could be tapped into as part of this research, and Pete replied that this was one of the advantages of the participatory approach.

Workshops: Poultry (09:00 - 10:30)

Chair: Dr Bruce Pearce

Managing the range: Are we getting it right? - Gerald Osborne

Gerald Osborne talked about range management and experience at Lawn Farm, which changed from conventional dairy to produce organic eggs under a Stonegate contract.

The choice of site is important to how successful ranging behaviour will be, as well as shelter belts at the edges. The number of range enhancements can be achieved relatively easily, temporary shelter with bales, camouflage netting, logs, trailers, and bales for outside perches. Gerald also talked about planting infield coppices, and the use of companion animals both for sward management and with the case of Alpacas for fox and other predator control.

Gerald said real differences were noticed between conventionally reared flock, which was poorly feathered and lacked ranging ability, whereas the subsequent organically reared flocks had much better feather conditions and were more inclined to range. These improvements have been further built

upon by rearing day olds on the farm, using converted cow kennels. His key message was that organic rearing and enhanced range are critical.

Gerald then answered a few questions from the audience:

Q. What breed and why? **A.** Colombian Black Tails (Rhode Island Red X Leghorn), chosen for ranging behaviour and egg quality.

Q. Flock Age? **A.** Contract specifies up to 72 weeks, some are re-homed after this and carry-on laying.

Q. Tips for grass management? **A.** Needs topping during the summer: top & leave, but can be grazed by sheep. The added benefit to home rearing is the increased bond between the birds and the stock person.

Range and feed experiences at Sheepdrove - Becky Kelly

Becky Kelly described the use of the Sheepdrove table bird production system to trial the use of on farm produced feeds.

Organic chicks of a Hubbard type are bought in as day olds, brooded indoors for 28 days, moved to field sheds in combinations of 500 and 1000 bird sheds, phasing out to all 500 bird houses. Birds are reared to 12-13 weeks before being slaughtered and processed on farm.

Range rotation included three fields with agro-forestry strips and herb strips, followed by spring cereal (often wheat).

Recent trials have been investigating what home grown feeds could be used in the ration. So far grass and naked oats, and wholewheat have used. Grass was pelleted but not palatable to chickens. Naked oats were hairy. Using a 30% wholegrain wheat choice feeding trial resulted in increased carcass weights. Future trials will include peas, oats and wheat with specially formulated balancers.

Becky then answered a few questions from the audience:

Q. In terms of range enhancement is there a role for compost? **A.** Well composted Farm Yard Manure (FYM) to scratch then spread and crop behind has potential but the practicalities need to be worked out

Q. Does this raise any concerns with farm assurance schemes, because with beef and lamb it would be a non-compliance if animals were grazed in a field with stacked FYM? **A.** No, but there would be little difference between the FYM and the bedding.

Q. What bedding was used? **A.** Both shavings and straw have been used dependent on availability and cost.

Q. What proportion of intake comes from the herb strips? **A.** No data available but it would be interesting to monitor. The birds certainly eat into the strips, particularly brassicas at certain times of the year.

Q. If home grown feed is the way forward, how many hectares would be needed and what are the cost implications? **A.** The costs are likely to be cheaper but the land area required is unknown.

Q. On the 30% wheat ration was there a change in carcass composition and quality? **A.** The trial finished in December when processing was very busy and the opportunity to make these types of assessments was not practical.

Q. Could sprouted grains be an option? **A.** An ADAS desk study some years ago suggested it would be difficult and expensive, although times have changed and it may be worth re-investigating.

Q. With the removal of synthetic amino acids from the ration, have there been any problems? **A.** No, none seen in meat birds.

Q. Are the starter rations 100% organic? **A.** The grower ration is and has been for some time, and it is intended to start moving towards 100% starter ration soon.

Q. Are the chicks organic? **A.** Yes from a slow growing strain.

95% organic ration in 2010: Is it achievable?

- Dr Cliff Nixey

Dr Cliff Nixey looked at the problems of 5% non-organic ingredients. In his presentation Cliff addressed the problems of formulating feed for organic poultry and balancing the energy and protein requirements with the ingredients available while still allowing sufficient capacity for minerals.

The presentation looked at the protein crops available from organic sources and the availability of two key amino acids, Lysine and Methionine. Methionine and cystine are the first limiting in organic diets and this is balanced by maize gluten otherwise known as prairie meal. However, there are problems associated with reliance on maize gluten: it is not a UK crop, it is prone to GM contamination, and it leads to high N excretion and a higher water demand by the birds.

After examination of alternative crops, a proposal was put forward that synthetic amino acids should be reconsidered.

Debate/Discussion ensued; the argument was as to whether or not synthetic should be allowed to be re-introduced to organic rations if the 100% organic component was to be upheld. The EU regulation has approved the 95% leading to 100% organic diets for all pigs and poultry and synthetic amino acids were not permitted. There will not be a change in the regulation, however much it is argued for. Debate should not be re-opened but focus on how to make 100% diets work and if this included soya and/or fishmeal.

Q. Would fishmeal be acceptable and would it cause taint? **A.** At levels less than 3% it was unlikely to affect the flavour. It would be a requirement that the fishmeal came from a sustainable source.

Q. Was there any difference between marine and freshwater fish? **A.** Interesting point worthy of further research.

Q. Could dehauling peas and beans improve their quality? **A.** It may do, it is worth following up with PGRO and millers like Doves Farm.

Q. Could hemp be a useful protein source? **A.** Not known

Q. Can oil seed rape be used? **A.** It is problematic in the mill in terms of cross contamination to ruminant feed and increased salmonella risk and it is a difficult crop to grow organically.

Q. Is it likely that the 100% requirement for organic feed may disrupt market development and indeed force out producers? **A.** This may not be the case.

Q. Do we have the correct breeds of poultry for organic systems? **A.** There is a mismatch between the research into appropriate breeds and strains and the 100% feed requirement. In the past, rare breed pheasants were fed hard boiled eggs to help with protein requirements.

There were more questions than answers during this session, giving a general feeling that there are still some big issues facing poultry production within the spirit of organic farming. Marketing and understanding the contribution that range and its associated biodiversity contributes is far from being quantified. Protein sources and ration formulation remain a big discussion point.

Workshops: Dairy, beef & sheep (09:00 - 10:30)

Chair: Mark Measures

Managing grazing for pest, disease and weed control - Mark Measures

In a change to the programme, **Mark Measures** ([IOTA](#)) began this session by summarising the current research on organic ruminant feeding. He highlighted that most research is based on conventional systems and that there is still no good information on 100% forage rations for dairy cows. Mark recommended that if you are moving towards a high forage diet, you should be looking to stimulate rumen activity; introduce a range of forage types including wholecrop silage, cut early and seal clamps effectively to improve quality, ensure long silage chop length and provide concentrates with minimal processing. Mark also highlighted the importance of cross breeding for achieving better feed efficiency, and stated this area is not as complicated as many people think. Mark went on to point out that some of the most interesting ideas about cereals and how to use them are not being applied and that there are important lessons to be learnt from research on how to stimulate rumen activity.

Mark also picked up on the area of trace elements, stating that they are directly linked to health and that it is important to look at the possibility of using chicory and yarrow, and that we should be looking for a more “organic” strategy than the various mineral supplements, boluses or jabs which we are currently over reliant upon. Mark pointed out that there is still a question mark over the use of trace element soil additives, partly because of concern about toxicity and that there is no clear evidence of the effectiveness of improving trace element availability through the use of soil structure and mineral balancing techniques, although they certainly show promise. However, he pointed out that there is clear evidence for the benefits of herbal pastures in terms of reduction of parasites, provision of minerals and drought prevention.

Mark concluded by saying that the top 33% of beef cattle (in terms of net margin per kg) were spending more money on forage than concentrate, and that we need to look to maximise the forage content of ruminant diets to increase gross margins.

The crucial role of grass and herbage in reducing concentrate use and improving animal health

- Dr Heather McCalman

Dr. Heather McCalman ([IBERS, Aberystwyth](#)) spoke on the crucial role of grass and herbage in reducing concentrate use and improving animal health. Heather spoke of the importance of grassland management, and of developing a system appropriate to the farm's resources. She also mentioned the importance of managing clover swards to meet livestock needs and to maintain a good balance of clover/grass. Heather then spoke about the importance of grassland management for reducing the risk of parasites in sheep, and highlighted that the protein, provided by clover, is used for repairing the animal's gut following a case of Parasitic Gastro Enteritis (PGE).

Heather also mentioned the high feed digestibility of clover and the fact that it can increase intake by up to 20%. She pointed to research showing that the liveweight gain of Simmentals and Welsh Blacks was higher with clover content in the sward. Heather went on to highlight the benefits of mixed grazing (cattle and sheep) in terms of reducing parasites and the benefits of grazing with cattle in the early spring, to keep the grass content down, before grazing with sheep later on. She then described the differences between red and white clover, and showed the much higher crude protein content in red clover silage, although went on to highlight potential problems with bloat and oestrogen levels when using red clover for grazing. White clover was shown to match the growth pattern of grass well and that an amount of about 30% in the sward was desirable.

Heather also mentioned the role of alternative forages for parasite control, and talked about the potential for herbs such as Lotus and Chicory for reducing parasite burdens. She highlighted the fact that crops with higher protein and tannin levels were having a suppressive effect on parasite levels.

Heather highlighted the importance of having a flexible grazing plan, and of measuring the sward to match the grass to the livestock's needs. She said that it is important to integrate the unimproved and semi-improved pastures into grazing plans by using the appropriate carrying capacity for all areas.

Heather stated that the key to getting white clover to survive the winter is getting a good establishment in the autumn; if you continuously graze “tight” (i.e. less than 4cm) you will lose clover content; if you can give the clover a rest of 6-8 weeks, especially in July and August, you will get a much better survival rate over winter.

Heather then talked about the risk of bloat with red clover and highlighted the following methods for preventing it:

- Avoiding grazing hungry animals
- Avoiding turning out on cold and wet mornings
- Increasing levels of tannins in the diet (tannins are found in birdsfoot trefoil)
- Gradual introductions with any change in feed/diet

With preventing Oestrogen problems in ewes, the following measures were suggested:

- Avoiding grazing ewes on red clover before and just after tupping
- Use of new varieties specifically bred for sheep
- Small risks from feeding red clover silage (instead of grazing)

Animal health compendium - Dr Stephen Roderick

Dr Stephen Roderick then gave a presentation on the [Organic Animal Health and Welfare Compendium](#), an online tool aimed at helping organic farmers to make decisions regarding health and welfare. He stated that the aim of this Defra funded project was to review all existing research material on animal health and synthesise it into an advisory format.

Stephen gave an outline of the tool which is split into three sections:

1. Veterinary management: this section gives an outline of the Defra compendium of animal health standards, animal health plans, biosecurity, zoonoses, vaccinations, homeopathy, food safety and alternative treatments.
2. Health and welfare: this section is broken down into various subsections on breeding, breed selection, concepts for breeding organically and also includes sections on housing and feeding.
3. Disease management: this section is broken down into an alphabetical in-

dex, and gives a background of each condition, control and prevention measures, e.g. breeding resistance, tannin rich crops, faecal egg counting.

Stephen highlighted that everything within the compendium is fully referenced, so that it is possible to check data sources for yourself, and that he feels it is a particularly useful resource for vets who wish to learn more/ become more engaged in the process of the organic management of animals.

Plenary: The credit crunch & the organic market - Sponsored by Triodos Bank (11:00 - 12:30)

Chair: Dr Nic Lampkin

The following session looked at the credit crunch and organic market. How bad is it? Is it as bad as we think? The session brought together people who are engaged with the sector and encouraged discussion regarding what actions we should be taking.

The real picture: Producer experiences from across the sectors - Lawrence Woodward

Lawrence described the organic movement, highlighting that this is a movement, not an industry, a sector, or anything else.

He went on to describe what was happening in different parts of the organic sector. There seems to be a mixed picture. The perspective depends on your market, marketing and relationship with your customers.

Beef and sheep - there has been a dramatic and traumatic situation of drops in prices, there are concerns about the impact of new entrants on the price drop. Some marketing is directed towards the multiples sector.

Milk - difficulties are less than the beef and sheep sector but price pressures exist. Some pressures relate to export. OMSCo is developing export arrangements with France. An interesting dilemma in that, although there is currently price pressure, in the future, supply could be a problem due to low conversion (according to OMSCo).

Horticulture - mixed bag depending on where you are and who you are marketing to. Sales are dropping. Prices in some vegetables are dropping, but others are not. The perspective that there is a general drop through sales in supermarkets is clear - this seems to be shared by box schemes but not across the board.

Arable - harvest difficulties this year and a clear downturn in demand and pressure on prices. Two things are affecting this - a downturn in the livestock market, particularly the poultry industry, has put pressure on sales. The future buying by some processing companies has created difficulties for the UK market. Andrew Trump reports that there are still opportunities.

Poultry - there is a clear distinction between large scale poultry production selling into the supermarkets where there is a clear downturn and smaller producers who are experiencing different changes in demand. It depends upon where markets are.

There are differences in opinion on how we react to the changing market. Some wish to maintain supply to keep the future market viable. However, the strategy or response may be different again depending upon whether producers supply supermarkets or local markets.

How should the organic movement react or respond to this current situation? We are facing significant market failure, on a massive scale. This is going to “crunch” many businesses and initiatives. Some may not survive. But those that do will be facing a totally different economic environment. The era of cheap energy and the onset of climate change mean that business as usual and economic growth is no longer an option. The underlying terms of trade have changed.

The economy will be characterised by volatility, making our kind of enterprises very difficult because they are not appropriate to economies of scale, high volumes and the pursuit of growth. Organic systems are suited to a framework of more sustainability, husbanding finite resources and using them in a different way, not the pursuit of uninterrupted consumption.

We have always faced these hostile economic conditions. Even in good times, organic farmers have been vulnerable. Small, local producer box

schemes have been preyed on by corporate, national schemes. This is because those corporate schemes are more appropriate to our economic situation than smaller schemes.

What can we do? We need to sharpen up business skills, get better advice, looking at costs, better advertising, etc. All of these things are right and correct, but we also need to consider real structural changes. Changes in relationships, about how we produce and consume, for example, along the lines of relationships that gave rise to co-operative movements in the nineteenth century. We need to start to see people as citizens, not consumers.

We have to find a way to manifest these relationships in the real world. We have to work together to make sure that farms and businesses that have the movement's principles at heart survive. By this I mean that there is a strong case for getting rid of businesses from the organic movement that are neo-conventional businesses that masquerade as organic. We have to do that to give clarity about what we are and what we say and what we stand for if we are going to reach out to other people for help, whether other businesses or citizens or whatever.

We have to look at those people who claim to be part of the organic movement to really play a part in the movement. Can those with financial muscle or knowledge use their skills or resources to help people who are more vulnerable? Can ethical banks support a radical movement? Can organic millionaires provide loans, funding? Can the certification bodies step in and protect the genuine organic producers and businesses. Can large farmers work with small farmers? Can they cooperate on feed, sharing equipment, land? Can we find a fundamentally different way about going about our businesses? Can we act as a coherent movement rather than following the conventional model?

Yes, we can! But the prerequisite is to avoid the business as usual mentality. I am sure that genuine organic businesses and the organic movement will survive. But we have to adopt a radical movement mentality. We need to act according to that mentality.

Sources of assistance - Ian Price, Triodos Bank

I joined Triodos 4 years ago after 34 years with Nat West. I knew that the industry I was involved with was unsustainable. I knew that day to day life was unsustainable, for example, I would come up with good propositions but farmers would go to Triodos. It's a very basic concept that if you connect savers and borrowers you can do okay.

I want to be really upbeat. In real terms, we've quadrupled our lending book in the last three years and we're involved with tremendous projects and great customers. But the credit crunch does impact upon us. Our model probably works - it's a simple business. We don't have derivatives; we don't go to the money markets. Maybe simple businesses are more likely to be successful going through the credit crunch.

Some figures on the agricultural industry: UK banks lend about £10 billion - this is just under 20% of the total lending it does to business. One in five pounds is lent to people in agriculture.

Most of those banks are having difficulty. That is having an impact and will have an increased impact over the next 6-12 months. We haven't yet seen what the banks' positions will have on *your* businesses, this will emerge. Banks are currently increasing your fees and margins, but you are insulated from that at the moment because the base rate is low. When the base rate increases, you will notice the difference. Banks are changing their credit criteria. Over the next 6-12 months, you are all likely to go through credit reviews; they will look at you in terms of credit risk and they will review overdrafts. Overdrafts are payable on demand, meaning that they can give you one month's notice to repay. A lot of organic businesses have already had a couple of really bad years in terms of growing. A small number of businesses are already struggling through competition from box schemes and margins being cut. We are seeing 1/10 businesses starting to struggle and need support. Some growers are saying "we can't see another bad year".

Right now, single farm payments are in the bank; there has been a slight rise in Christmas trade so cash flows are looking positive. Like most farmers, cash flow is the most important thing; if there is cash in the bank, they feel good. There is a real issue of working capital though, which will impact this year, especially if we have a bad summer.

It will affect a large number of people in this room and beyond. Twenty percent of farmers make 80% of the profit. The challenge is that the 80% aspires to be in the 20%. I think IOTA and others have a part to play in that. I challenge consultants to widen their knowledge base to support the farmers.

I am very confident; the people I deal with are fantastic - the entrepreneurial streak that goes through organic farming, the fact that everyone is really committed to the sector are positive from a bank point of view of being committed to the sector.

As a bank, there are challenges: Do we do biofuels? Where should we be lending and what types of projects? I don't think other banks have these thoughts in terms of sustainable lending. The challenge for me is to develop a model in terms of the resilience of the business. How do we identify the resilience of the business?

There are a few things you can do to help yourself survive the "credit crunch". Develop a good relationship with your bank, produce cash flow plans and cut costs. There is scope to do planning on the risks of the business and assess how well each area is doing. How resilient is your business? There are challenges but there are great opportunities to work through too.

Costs, prices and margins - Nic Lampkin

It would be dangerous to focus too much upon organic premiums in the sector rather than on farming and the ability to work with a broader market. This is especially the case in the beef and sheep sectors. There is a good potential for returns to be maintained at the level of prices that conventional producers are getting, without thinking about switching. Both in beef and lamb, you are looking at conventional prices this year that are on a level with organic prices last year. Last year, our figures showed that producers were able to generate a better return overall than conventional producers. Data doesn't support the idea that producers will benefit financially from converting back to conventional production. Discussion needs to pick up more on available data and look at what the real implications are. A lot is made of the fact that feed prices for organic producers are very high. But actually, feed costs per kilo of meat produced compared to conventional farms are little different. Farmers have adjusted by reducing the level of purchased feed. Feed

cost savings are not necessarily a key driver of shifting people back to save money.

Evidence shows potential to reduce fixed costs. Organic systems do come up significantly worse than conventional in terms of costs of production. When things are going well, the desire to control costs slips. If organic farmers were doing better than conventional, they would tend to spend more on overhead costs.

In summary, before we focus too much on premium prices and profitability within organic systems, we all need to get to grips with the costs of production in much more detail and look at how they can be updated. There is potential for us to maintain returns at current conventional prices and even without organic premiums through reduced cost inputs, e.g. fertiliser, etc.

A view of the organic market - Susanne Padel

We often hear about the state of the market but we should look at the evidence rather than just speculating.

Trends

Since 2005, there has been growth in UK organic certified land. This trend seems to be continuing in 2008. Most sales in this country are through multiples, in which there has been growth in sales. Both Mintel (Oct 2008) and KeyNote (May 2008) suggest market growth, even in 2008, although the level of growth is less than that suggested by the Soil Association report. However, we must not forget that overall, the organic market is less than 2% of the overall food market.

- **Fruit and vegetables** constitute 34% of organic sales and are the most important sector, with an equal split between fruit and vegetables. This is the first entry point for many consumers who associate organic with not spraying and home-grown produce. Taste is important. There has been a ten percent increase in horticultural land in 2007. There have been reports of price reduction in the autumn of 2008 to stimulate demand.
- **Dairy** is the second largest sector, with 21% of the market. There has been above average growth, mainly in milk sales and yoghurts and deserts. There has been commitment from key players (Federation of Organic Milk Groups and Milk Development Council) to keep this market

moving in the future. Health claims are important for consumers. Growth is expected to continue but at a lower rate.

- **Cereals and pulses** mainly sell into the feed market rather than directly to end customers. Supply and demand are not in balance, which has created price fluctuations in 2008.
- **Meat** has experienced above average growth rates. Beef (25% of the meat market) was undersupplied in 2007 but there are now increases in production. Lamb (10% of the meat market) is affected by seasonality and sales to non-organic outlets. There is increasing production in this area, but this may lead to oversupply. Pork and bacon/ham (about 20% of meat market) is split between two outlets: multiples and direct sales. Taste is an important motive for buying but the sales price does not always cover the costs of production.
- **Poultry and eggs** have been strongly affected by decreases in non-organic feed allowances and feed shortages in 2007/08. There have been reductions in organic production. Organic poultry and eggs are associated with free range but consumers find this confusing. Price-conscious consumers could trade-down.

Consumers

- **Regular/committed consumers** account for more than 80% of organic produce sales. They are likely to be well educated, health aware with middle income levels. They believe in organic product quality and seek other attributes including the environment, animal welfare and social aspects. They have a “Missionary zeal”.
- **Occasional consumers** account for less than 20% of organic sales. They are more price and convenience sensitive and are likely to be more sceptical about some organic claims. They have relatively little knowledge.

Competition

Organic food is competing in the market with Natural, Local, Fair-Trade and products labelled with Low carbon footprints. However, organic is the only sector which has clearly defined standards and a European regulation.

Mintel outlook

- Consumers may review spending on premium organic foods:
 - if they do not fully understand the benefits
 - But, a growing trend of people are seeking ways to make a difference
 - Market is largely driven by committed regulars

- “What is needed is a **unified** voice from the organic industry, extolling the virtues of their products”.

Our challenge: speak with one voice on issues, not twenty different ones.

Support for organic farming in Wales - Sue Fowler

The Welsh Assembly Government supports organic farming in a number of practical ways. These include the Organic Conversion Information Service to help those considering organic conversion; Organic Centre Wales disseminates information; the Farming Connect Organic Development programme works with each of the agricultural sector development programmes and includes meetings, events and technical information; Agri food partnerships with other sectors and an Organic Sector Manager supports the work of the Action Plans. The main aspect of support is in the form of the Organic Farming Scheme which provides support for conversion payments and ongoing organic management. The Rural Development Plan runs from 2007 to 2013 and offers grants to obtain Supply Chain Efficiencies and Processing and Marketing Grants. Organic Centre Wales is coordinating a Supply Chains Efficiency bid to perform market based work, especially for beef and sheep.

In addition, Wales’ constitution includes sustainable development and there is a broad political consensus supporting organic farming. However, this can be problematic as organic farming is accepted as being a good thing without discussion or actions. The “One Wales” document maintains a restrictive stance on GM and although it is not pro organic, it is also not against.

Public support

The role of public support in Wales is to address “market failure” by purchasing “public goods” from farmers, e.g. Biodiversity, Water management, Carbon capture, Pollution reduction/mitigation. Another objective is to ensure long-term sustainability for rural communities - including food production (“Our children cannot eat lamb alone”).

Can we rely on public support?

The Rural Development Plan runs until 2013, so we will have support until at least then. However, support levels do change over time with changes in government, agendas, and personnel. There is a lot of ignorance amongst

civil servants and communications between departments can be limited, resulting in slow/halted progress. All this means that we need to talk louder about what we are doing, even inviting government representatives to our farms.

What needs to be done?

- Take responsibility - we need to show what organic farming can deliver - communicate with government, the public, farming unions, etc. It isn't scary, it isn't a threat.
- Get informed - know your costs of production, carbon footprint, nutrient balances. The Welsh Assembly (and other governments) base support for public goods on evidence.
- Be exemplary - and show it off!

Discussion - Views from the audience

- Nic Lampkin The closure of the English Action Plan with no intention to renew it has been a real sign of back pedalling. We need to show what organic has to offer. Speakers have highlighted that speaking with one voice is important.
- Mark Measures Collaboration is important, identifying the organic message, at a policy level or standards level. This is a challenge for organic organisations to establish a proper forum for dialogue and collaboration in the future.
- Joy Greenall Our movement needs communication and facilitation. We're tackling difficult issues and we need to talk and promote our message. I don't want to moan to other people, but I do want to talk things over with them. We need facilitators to talk about things privately before we go public.
- Martin Peck Going back to Lawrence's view on our economic systems. We need to hold out and realise that what is going on is undermining any future sustainable economic systems. The systems we have do not fit with the natural environment. We need to look at the bigger picture and our economic systems have to start rewarding things that matter, like food production.

- Michael Marriage I don't know why we are so down hearted. We're in the best industry we can be in. They have to have food. We're in an industry that in 2-3 years will be much better than conventional farming because they will run out of energy and oil, product costs will go up. The price of commodities will come back up in the next 18-20 months. You are talking yourself into despair. Times are tight. Most people on salaries are earning the same this year as last year. A few people are unemployed. Banks will be tighter, we need to be more cautious, keep costs under control. It could be worse, you could be running a removals firm or be an estate agent!
- Alan Schofield I agree with what Michael has said. An opportunity: historically, in the organic industry our competition has come from Europe. But now that the £ has dropped, UK production is going to get more competitive. We just need to get more positive and get out there and do it.
- Jan Deane I don't think that we're down beat. But I think a lot of producers have had a second bad year. We have become more thoughtful. We all know that we're in a good business – we produce food and we produce good food. That's not what people are down about. They are thoughtful about looking at how we can survive this and how we can carry on doing what we are doing. We want to survive. I think we will.
- Gerry Minister The point about communications is a vital one, but not just amongst ourselves. We need to connect more with our customers. We have a really good story to tell and we are not getting it out enough. I'm looking forward to the future.
- Deborah Schofield I have a question for Ian Price, from Triodos: How will you sustain business if interest rates fall? If we lose our savers, don't we lose our overdrafts, mortgages, loans, etc? People are putting their money in the rest of Europe or investing in tangibles. And if there are any organic millionaires – keep your money here!

- Ian Price
(Triodos) We all have to start looking at the implications of the way we run our lives. As a bank, the model we have of transparency, where our savers know and direct us where to lend money means that we have a tremendous amount of loyalty. At this stage, this means that savings are not being removed, but are in fact growing. If rates fall, more educated savers will look elsewhere, but the banking industry lives on the fact that people are very lazy, they don't look around. However, if rates stay at zero, there will be severe issues for all the banks. Lenders will survive by offering percentage points above the base rates.
- Will Best When Susanne put the model up about where organic produce is sold, the main one was multiples, but the next one was the independent sector. I spent many years dealing with independent retailers. They are the sort of people that producers can cooperate with, who love to promote organic and know their customers. Don't forget the independent sector – don't forget them as part of the movement.
- Mike Westrip I'm positive but slightly confused. From Susanne's slide, the reasons that people don't buy organic include natural, local, fair trade and carbon footprint. I'm confused because I'm an organic grower and that's what organic is. I'm concerned that there is a message block. The notion that organic is being avoided because it's not natural and fair trade concerns me.
- Michael Marriage I will explain that: when you push your trolley down the supermarket aisle and you see biscuits and you see some from your own town, some fair trade, some organic – you suddenly have a choice. So they are your competitors. So if you tick all the boxes of organic, ethical, local, fair trade, there is no need for them not to buy your products. They are your competitors.

Pete
Richardson

I'm slightly confused and bemused by Lawrence's comments. He used words like neo conventional and businesses preying on other businesses. That is your role to upset and disturb us and challenge us. I feel that in the spirit of what we have been talking about at this conference, we need to move on and Lawrence has challenged us to move on in that sense. We have been working hard in the last year to work with everyone. There is a danger that we will have to exclude people. And I don't think we should exclude anyone. Whatever business model they have, we survive on the merits of our businesses, not necessarily on the business model itself.

Lawrence
Woodward

I agree, in theory. I also agree that we should all be speaking with one voice and collaborating. But the reality is somewhat different. Although people have been working together, there have been local box schemes that have been preyed upon by national box schemes, and national box schemes who have sent leafleters around following the delivery of local box schemes. That behaviour by those national box schemes is not part of being a movement. If you have shared ideals and shared goals, you don't do that kind of thing. One of the newly framed IFOAM principles is the principle of Fairness. Within that it talks about equity and equitable relationships within the whole supply chain. We can only talk with one voice if we want to say the same thing and mean the same thing by the same words.

We have a disparate organic sector. As it appears on the shelves, the organic label is the same for the larger producer as for the smaller producer. But the economies of scale, the care that goes into the smaller production, in terms of animal welfare and quality of the product is so much greater in the smaller producers than the larger producers. It's not a differential that is not actually recognised in the market. We have to be clear about who we are and what we represent. We don't represent that industrial type – neo conventional production organic production. We represent something different.

- Andrew Trump We spoke earlier about money leaving the country, and this is a real issue in the organic arable sector where huge sums of money leave for the importation of cereals. I would like to encourage livestock producers to buy UK production ahead of imported production. Then those farmers who have sold their arable products put that money in Triodos and that closes a system. I feel that's what Lawrence is talking about: closing the system. So, a plea to livestock producers, think about where your feedstuff is from. I don't have a problem with imported feedstuff, but it should be supplementing, not substituting UK feed.
- Martin Peck The money system that we are using is like a yardstick and means different things to different people. We are dealing with a corrupt market place that is ill-founded. There is more money in the world than goods to meet its value. Our survival depends upon us setting up a fair economic system, with fair exchanges and values.
- Godfrey Meynall One of the boxes I like to tick when I sell my organic products is that it's good for wildlife. Just having an organic farm is not enough. We have the background to be hotspots for wildlife. Just not spraying is not enough, we could do more with farm biodiversity but we could be seen as real wildlife havens: we could do a lot more.

Nic Lampkin

We should relish the struggle of surviving in a positive way and use it for appropriate reflection about how to take businesses forward in the long term.

Plenary: Facing the future - The debate (14:00 - 15:00)

Chair: Roger Hitchings

The importance of maintaining organic principles - Lawrence Woodward & Rex Humphrey

“This house believes there is too much practice and not enough principle”.

Lawrence Woodward

What do we mean by principles? We mean that which is fundamental or essential. This means that they cannot be readily or easily changed. There is a lot of pressure for changes to principles and this comes about when there are issues that arise that appear to be of critical importance resulting in the need for the principle to change. However, principles are immovable and need to be maintained.

Organic principles come from three strands – the Biodynamic or anthroposophical school of Steiner; the Organic-Biological school of Muller and Rusch and the Organic school of Howard and Balfour Steiner. Although there are differences between these strands, there are three key concepts that underlie the organic movement:

- The farm as a living organism, tending towards a closed system.
- The concept of soil fertility through a living soil.
- The notion that these things are linked together and there is a whole system which is dynamic and linked in ways that we do not yet understand.

What does this mean at the farm level? A definition of organic farming by the United States Department of Agriculture is as follows.

“Organic farming is a production system that avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetically compounded fertilisers, growth regulators and livestock additives.

To the maximum extent feasible organic farming relies on crop rotations, crop residues, animal manures, legumes, green manures, off-farm organic

wastes, mechanical cultivations and mineral bearing rocks and biological pest control.

To maintain soil productivity, to supply plant nutrients and control diseases, pests and weeds.”

The concept of the soil and the living system is critical to this definition. This describes what organic farming should be – it does not matter where you are in the world. Farm management is making adjustments to the balance of nutrient supply and inputs. These principles can be used in the management of large and small farms, newly converted as well as older farms.

What does it mean if the practice of organic farming leaves aside these principles? An example is the old Organic Farmers & Growers (OF&G) of the 1970s and 80s (not the existing certification body). It began life in 1975 as an agricultural cooperative – out of the Soil Association. It received a grant from Government that paid for its administration for three years. When the grant ran out, the organisation had to pay for its own administration through commission. The only crop they could sell with enough premium to be able to pay for this was milling wheat. Therefore farmers were encouraged to include more wheat in their rotations, resulting in Nitrogen deficiencies and weed problems. To address this they changed the standards to allow for chemical inputs. They had lost sight of their principles.

We are in a similar situation now. I don't see a conflict between principles and practice - principles should inform practice. There is too much practice and not enough principle.

Rex Humphrey

I am a practicing farmer, as are most of you. We know how hard it is to make a living in organic farming today. We know how hard the market place is getting. The economies throughout the world are in a dire situation.

Organic food requires 15-20% margin, premium over conventional for organic farmers to survive. Is it reasonable to put an extra burden on farmers? There is a hidden agenda to crank up standards, resulting in increased production costs.

I make this clear, I do not want to see standards reduced or diluted. But to

more rigorously interpret the EU standards will have a detrimental effect on all of us. We do not have a level playing field across EU. For example, some countries in the rest of the EU interpret access to the outdoors for pigs to mean a concrete yard, not fields. There are many examples in different sectors.

The term “sustainable” is often applied to organic farms. But I maintain that no farming is sustainable unless it is profitable. An average farm must produce an average income for an average family, otherwise it will not be there for the next generation. So we are currently not sustainable. If organic farming is not profitable then it becomes just a rich man’s hobby or just for the independently wealthy.

We cannot produce organic food that is so expensive only the rich can afford it. We are told that the social groups A and B1 (whatever they are) buy most organic food. These are “rich” people. This motion wants us to push prices up even more. If we are only producing food for the *nouveau riche* then we are without honour. We must get our food into schools, hospitals and the underprivileged at a price they can afford to pay; but this does not mean cheap.

It is easy to pontificate about raising organic standards (quasi, neo, conventional?). This is the “let them eat cake” brigade. They take exception at the term “organic industry” as if it is a dirty word. But it *is* an industry. If you believe that organic food is healthier, safer and better for the environment, surely we want more people to avail themselves of organic food. Surely we want to see larger areas of land farmed organic. That requires a properly organised, properly structured *industry*.

I am passionate about organic farming and the regulation. We on our farm are a group of 6 linked farms with 10 families dependent on it. We have to recognise and adopt basic business principles as well as organic principles.

If we allow academics and non-practitioners to crank up standards we will drive out the smaller producers first but the larger producers will also go at the end. If we allow this to happen then we have let the organic movement down and the pioneers. They understand the need for sustainability and viability. Do not allow non-practitioner to put our future in jeopardy.

Reject this motion.

Q&A Session

Are standards the same as principles?

Lawrence Woodward: All documentations relating to standards have principles incorporated in them. Standards are derived to interpret principles. Often people read the body and not the context of standards. Standards were written initially to fit what could be done. As we gain knowledge these standards are and must be improved.

Rex Humphrey: Standards and principles are one and the same. It's semantics.

Susanne Padel: Standards have to be auditable. They are a guarantee to consumers. And this is a clear differentiator of organics.

Ed Goff: There is no "hidden agenda" - it has always been the case that standards will go up with what is possible. Also, you have conflated profitability and sustainability. It is possible to be very sustainable and make no profit (we might not last long) - but it is wrong to confuse the two. Rex's pig example where the standards are interpreted in different ways in Europe surely reinforces Lawrence's point about principles and practice.

Rex Humphrey: We farm to make money. I make no apologies for that. We are the 6th generation on the farm and I hope there are more. But also we do not want to see regulation dumbed down.

John Burns: Can you give examples of what could be ramped up in the standards?

Rex Humphrey: I will think about it - come back to me.

Jan Deane: There is a supposition that production will enhance standards; it is a contradiction as there is a lack of a level playing field in the EU. We could make the EU regulation a level playing field but it would be very prescriptive.

How do you see standards development if you don't want to see them ratcheted up?

Rex Humphrey: We need to take on board new information and research. We look at new ways of cultivation for examples. I am all for this and we

need to encourage it. We need to allow organic farmers to move forward with new technology rather than sticking in the 1970s. Taking on board new technology is the same as developing standards.

Lawrence Woodward: How do we work to introduce new technologies if you do not understand our principles? For example, farmed salmon does not fit with organic principles and if standard setters referred to these it would never be accepted. There was real debate some years ago about Genetic Modification. The way it was resolved was to go back to look at our underlying principles which refer to whole systems. GM is contrary to this principle and can therefore never be part of organic. Looking at the principles needs to be done more often when looking at the development of standards.

Will Best: There is a fundamental flaw in Rex Humphrey's talk. My experience tells me that when I get closest to the principles, I get the best results from my soil and ultimately lower my costs.

Gerald Osborne: In a session this morning, we have been speaking about poultry and the use of 100% feed. There are welfare and cost issues - particularly in young birds (especially turkeys). One EU standard is on "Synthetic" methionine. Inclusion of this would be of great benefit especially in young birds. Practice may be tweaked to help address principles.

Lawrence Woodward: This is a good example – we should discuss the production profile and seasonality of the animal. What we have in organic poultry production is essentially a conventional profile. We tried to modify downwards from this to produce an organic system. It may be that a small amount of Methionine could be used but this needs more investigation and discussion. However, we need to look at the production system and profile and look at how this can be changed. The use of a small amount of methionine could be used as a stepping stone to get to a better system.

Gerald Osborne: If we go along that route, are we not going to get an elite food system?

Lawrence Woodward: I have always had the belief that there are systems that should not be certified! Originally standards for poultry/eggs were not done because they were thought to be technically too difficult (housing, ratios, etc). Sainsbury started a drive to get organic eggs on the shelf and they

commissioned a certification body to produce standards. They essentially used a conventional system and scaled down. We have been having problems ever since. There are some things that cannot be certified organic as by certifying it reflects on all of the organic industry.

Audience: Principles need to relate to practice. For example, with my beef heard we cannot feed non-organic straw to beef but we can put down as much non-organic bedding as we like. Standards are out of kilter with practice.

Should we work with Neoconventional businesses to help them improve?

Phil Stocker: What about neoconventional businesses? Should we be trying to get rid of them or working with them to improve? Lots of organisations are not wholly organic like supermarkets, abattoirs, feed compounders, national box schemes. They are trading in very conventional ways but lots of small family farms and organic enterprises are dependent upon them. If we take Lawrence's line and try to get rid of these businesses that aren't part of the movement, how do we do so without leaving a gap in the infrastructure?

Lawrence Woodward: We have talked about this for a long time but they never actually do improve. We need to get rid of these people as not all do take the journey along the route. For example, some food processing is nowhere near the principles. We have made no progress with these sorts of businesses and we have gone along with them even to the point where we have given them a lower standard symbol (Ascisco).

Audience: We need to recognise that there are multiple principles and multiple objectives. Standards are a threshold of what is theoretically possible and cannot be 100% but more like 40%. UKROFS did look at poultry standards and brought in experts to try and address finding standards that met differing aspirations. A problem is that the report did not meet the aspirations of the two main groups and was not taken forwards. Hopefully the method will be used in the future.

Lawrence Woodward: UKROFS started the discussion only after Sainsbury started to sell organic eggs.

Summing Up.

Lawrence Woodward: It is not only the elite or the rich that buy organic food and I still propose the motion.

Rex Humphrey: This has been a lively and passionate debate but we should not allow passion to cloud judgement. Organic farming is ever changing. We need to allow industry to evolve but be realistic. In the UK, 80% of profit is made by 20% of farmers. Let's be honest – most of us are going out of business. In Northern Ireland, several hundred a month. Organic farming is a way of slowing that up but not stopping it. The underlying principle is that if we ignore the business principles we will go out of business. We need to hold onto standards, maintain our principles but reject the motion.

The result: a good debate but overall, an honourable draw.

Plenary: Certification body question time (14:00 - 15:00)

Chair: Roger Hitchings

Panel:

Jane Ellis (SOPA), Steve Clarkson (OF&G), Jim Twine (SA), Ian Laurie (Quality Welsh Food Certification)

- Jan Deane** **Under the new European regulation, a lot of things that previously required derogations do not exist. However, most certification bodies require the use of a derogation still. Don't you trust us not to self derogate?**
- Steve Clarkson It's not that we don't trust you, but the derogation process provides an extra step in thinking about what you are doing. It focuses the mind a little more. This gives us an opportunity to assess the products in advance of your inspection, at which point we would have to decertify the land or product. However, as a group of certification bodies, we have gone through the list of allowable products and we've highlighted things that would have required derogation before but this is perhaps not an integrity issue. Copper would still require a derogation, for example.
- Jim Twine The other issue to be considered is public inspection. If you talk to consumers about how inspections are carried out, they question why you would only inspect once a year. Many consumers do not see this as enough. If people were aware that there was self-derogation, they would be even more concerned.
- Ian Laurie We know that many organic farmers are very good, and very capable but there are some that would be more confident in what they are doing if they received a derogation prior to the product's use.
- Roger Hitchings It also links back to our previous discussion of whether it would be good practice to self derogate.

- Mark Measures I wanted to compliment the certification bodies on working together. Just a word of warning – we need to make this derogation process simple and straight forward.
- Tim Deane Why do the certification bodies want to take on this extra work when the EU regulation is giving us the opportunity to make life simpler? The obvious thing to do is explain within your inspection to your inspector what you have done, rather than the person back in the office.
- To say that this is a way of catching up with people who aren't sticking to the principles is ridiculous; there is nothing to stop any producers from using anything without telling the certification body about it. The reality is that with things like slug pellets, the consensus is that you can get a derogation and then continue to use it at will. Certification bodies maintain that you need to get their permission each time.
- Michael Marriage Why can't certification bodies rate the person being certified? This happens in other food certification systems. If you are an "A" you might be inspected less.
- Jim Twine We do that already, you may not know it but we rate licensees. Especially in processing and businesses where we consider there to be greater risk. We concentrate unannounced and spot inspections on businesses where we have the greatest level of risk. This might be because they have non-dedicated lines, or if they have been involved for a short space of time, and their history.
- Jane Ellis It's not something that we do. It would be a lot of extra work. It's not that we don't trust licensees, but we try to safeguard for consumers. We have forms for farmers to fill in and can give decisions over the phone if necessary.
- Audience What do you think about the testing for non-systemic pesticides? Should we be doing more spot testing in the field for consumer confidence? There are other areas beyond derogations to look at.

- Richard Jacobs If you are talking about testing in field, there are questions about what you are testing for. There are many products that could be used fraudulently on organic crops so we have to rely upon the inspection and certification system. Testing is only part of the armoury that we use. We will test if we have suspicions. But it's difficult after the fact.
- Jane Ellis We carry out some testing, e.g. we just tested potatoes at a number of sites.
- Jim Twine We do carry out routine random testing, normally on finished products for pesticides and GM.
- Sue Fowler Do you think your certification operation actively improves the progress of licensees towards achieving organic principles or would that not compatible with your business aims?**
- Ian Laurie Yes. We require all applicants to submit a conversion plan, which is assessed for its sustainability and relevance to the standards. That is commented on at the initial inspection and further monitored. It is certainly compatible with our business aims to encourage full compliance with the standards, through to full certification.
- Jim Twine I don't think the certification / inspection process actually moves producers any closer to being a better farmer or closer to the principles. However, I think I have learned a lot from being associated with those organisations with whom I have been certified. This is in part because they are linked to educational charities (Demeter and Soil Association).
- Roger Hitchings An inspector carrying out an inspection is not allowed to give advice.
- John Burns How is imported organic feed monitored to ensure that it is monitored to ensure that it is genuine and/or not contaminated?**
- Steve Clarkson Regarding all the problems we have had recently, e.g. melamine issues, feed is tested. In terms of wheat and oats, etc produced within the EU, we have free trade within the EU, so if it has an organic certificate we are obliged to accept it.

- Jane Ellis We don't have any feed companies importing. If producers are importing and they have a certificate then we trust that.
- Ian Laurie Most of our imports are from England!
- Nic Lampkin You joke at this, but actually we shouldn't be complacent about produce that is sourced more locally. It is just as likely that there are problems with "local" sourcing as produce that is imported. Examples do exist – just knowing your neighbours is not enough.
- Catherine Fookes** **Are there any products that the certification bodies would refuse to certify as organic, e.g. Pot Noodles, cigarettes, etc.**
- Jim Twine This question is at the heart of recent discussions. Are we interested in products or systems? We are equally interested in both. However, I don't think that we should be involved in certifying products that does or could kill you!
- Ian Laurie It is difficult to know where to draw the line. What is healthy and not healthy food? The line will actually draw itself, but I can't see any reason why a Pot Noodle could not be certified as organic, assuming it meets all the required standards.
- Steve Clarkson From a standards point of view, there is no reason not to certify a Pot Noodle.
- Jane Ellis We would look at the product and the principles and decide where to draw the line.
- Catherine Fookes Certification of these kinds of products brings the name of organic into disrepute. We *must* draw the line.
- Mark Measures I would like to withdraw my compliments to the certification bodies. I can't believe there is a difficulty in whether to certify these products. The principles of health and environment dictate that they should not be certified.
- Deborah Schofield I am absolutely mortified! A number of years ago, the world "product" was introduced to include wood products in Soil Association guidelines, but I am mortified that in agreeing to the use of this word, we have let everything in.

- Ed Goff We do need to remember that it is just as possible to construct an unhealthy diet from health food. For example, by consuming too much alcohol.
- Richard Jacobs It is unfair to let certification bodies decide what should and should not be certified. Where the line should be drawn is for ACOS, the Soil Association charity and this conference. We are here to enforce the rules. If you are not happy with those rules, you need to push for the line to be drawn.
- Sue Fowler We do have unrealistic demands of certification bodies. We need to get certification bodies to get closer to the principles but this is not possible through inspections alone. We need another forum.
- Jan Deane We have actually had the debate now, so how do we actually progress this issue and draw the line?
- Roger Hitchings Should there be a union for organic farmers?
- Dominic Watts** **Is it possible for a certification body's officer to get to know the farmer? We see a trail of different people on the farm and speak to different people on the telephone.**
- Jane Ellis We have two certification officers and we do try to go out onto farms with inspectors sometimes. It is a good idea to see what is going on.
- Steve Clarkson All our licensees have an allocated certification officer. When they telephone us, they speak to their own officer. We try to get on farm as much as possible and get to know producers. However, we do have to work to the standards and show integrity.
- Ian Laurie We have just one certification officer and that's Marilyn. She has a close relationship with all our licensees.
- Jim Twine We have allocated certification officers for producers and many are also trained to be inspectors in order to broaden their knowledge. I do like to remind producers that they can also visit us. It's not always easy for you to get to us in Bristol, but it can be a useful experience. We do rotate inspectors regularly to stop any partiality.

Plenary: A strategic vision and direction for proper organic farming (15:45 - 16:15)

Lawrence Woodward, Director of The Organic Research Centre - Elm Farm

I like these conferences, I feel rejuvenated by coming to them and being part of them. Collette Haynes and others spoke of a movement – is this a movement to change? Many of the sessions have concluded that we need to speak with one voice, but what is that voice? Are certification bodies part of the organic movement or are they simply technical support? Michael Marriage thought that organic farming was a great industry to be in; Jan Deane was thoughtful, not depressed.

With all these different thoughts and views, there is one thing that we need to face up to and be clear about. We need to be a movement, with all the faith and hope and clarity that goes with that movement.

With the end of oil and all its associated products, we can't just carry on as we are. However, in this industry, we are in a good position. Organic is still the best way forward in these times, especially in the future.

We also have to look at what is happening in other movements. I like to look at transition towns and look at how things have to change. This is part of the solution to a world of finite and diminishing resources.

Ian Price gave us very clear guidance on the criteria banks use, for example, resilience, cutting costs, specialisation and cash flow. However, this does pose some problems for us. Labour is a big problem – we brag about organic farming employing more people than the conventional sector but now need to look at controlling labour costs. If we start to specialise more, this is not in keeping with organic's diverse systems.

How did people cope in the past without the financial economy? They relied upon co-operatives and bartering. We have to generate our own financial system and we need to do it quickly.

There is a role for producers, groups like the Organic Growers' Alliance and others in the movement. We do have a movement that can speak for themselves. We are simply here to help where we can and facilitate. But we need people to speak up as they did in the certification body session earlier. It needs to be *your* dynamic.

I hope that these conferences help you. Let's not focus on predicting the future, but upon changing it!



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