

An introduction to the Organic Research Centre

The future of food and farming

Mr. Rowan Dumper-Pollard and Dr. Lindsay Whistance

Who we are

- The UK's leading independent organic research organisation
 - Founded 44 years ago as a research and advisory board for UK organic farmers
 - 20 staff (researchers, communicators and administrative staff)
 - £1.6 million annual turnover predominantly funded through EU and UK research projects



Organic Farming in the UK

- 498,000 hectares were farmed organically in the UK.*
- There were a total of 5,230 organic operators in the UK (3,193 of which were producers and the rest producer-processors/processors).*
- Organic conversion and maintenance grants:

Authority:	Grants available:	No. of producers:
England	Countryside Stewardship	2133
Wales	Organic Support 2024	535
Scotland	Agri-Environment Climate Scheme	379
Northern Ireland	Environmental Farming Scheme	146

- 2.9% of UK agricultural land is farmed organically. The total area of organically farmed land dropped by 2.1% in 2023.



What we do



Participatory Research

Deliver and co-innovate practical sustainable land management and food production solutions

Identify and drive our own research agenda.

Produce peer reviewed and published science.



Sharing our Knowledge

Provide access to robust, applicable research findings.

Disseminate past, present and future research outputs via a range of media and tools.

Direct engagement with organic industry partners



Influencing Policy

Create an evidence base from which needs and mechanics of change can be advocated.

Develop strategic collaborations to influence policy rather than acting in isolation.



Matt Smee
Farm Engagement Officer



Janie Caldbeck
Agricology Content Editor



Philippa Hall
Impact Delivery Officer

Our Main Research Themes



Crop Diversity & Agronomy



We need healthy soil and crops which are well adapted to their environment and capable of resisting harmful pests and diseases

Animal Husbandry



Keeping livestock is a key part of many organic farming systems. Our work covers cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and poultry

Food Systems



Developing sustainable food systems with a focus on nutrition, health and welfare in a whole farm context

Business & Markets



Assessing the contribution of specialist markets, certification and policies to supporting financial, economic and sustainability

Agroforestry



Integrating trees with agriculture to increase productivity, biodiversity and other mutual benefits

Crop Diversity & Agronomy

Key elements of the theme

Functional biodiversity, plant breeding, crop rotation, intercropping, soil fertility, crop diversification, weed control, pest control.



Julia Cooper
Head Of Research



Charlotte Bickler
Principal Researcher And
Knowledge Exchange
Manager – Crop
Diversification



Isabel Mackintosh
Research And Field
Assistant

Crop Diversity & Agronomy –Projects

LIVESEEDING (HE, Oct 22-Sep 26)

Delivering high quality organic seed of diverse cultivars adjusted to organic farming for a wide range of crops.

OPER8 (HE, Oct 22 – Sep 25)

Share guidance and advice on effective alternative methods of weed control to herbicides.

Living Mulches (Jan 2022 – Dec 2023)

Explores the potential of direct drilling cash crops into established stands of clover.

Rapid Evidence Assessment On Regen Ag. (Oct 23-Mar 24)

Mapping the actors working within the Regenerative Agriculture community in the UK.



Animal Husbandry: key elements:

Land-based livestock; animal systems, incl. feeding and housing with current focus on silvopasture; **welfare**; human-animal-relationships



Lindsay Whistance
Senior Livestock
Researcher



Nicola Noble
Livestock And
Sustainability Researcher

Animal Husbandry – Current projects incl.

Re-Livestock (HE, Sep 22 – Aug 26)

Promoting best practice and resilience in the face of climate change.

Devon Silvopastoral Network (UK, 2021-2033)

Livestock benefits in different silvopastoral systems.

Plants not Plastic (UK, 2025 -)

Nursery trees/shrubs, enriching landscapes, promoting tree-animal interactions.



Agroforestry

Integrating trees with agriculture to encourage positive interactions in order to improve farm resilience, lead to an overall increase in productivity, biodiversity and other mutual benefits

- How do you most effectively integrate trees into productive farmland?
- How do you balance agricultural productivity with environmental protection including mitigating climate change?
- How do you design an on-farm agroforestry system to promote successful establishment and optimal benefits to the producer?



Will Simonson
Principal Researcher,
Agroforestry



Colin Tosh
Senior Agroforestry
Researcher



Lindsay Whistance
Senior Livestock
Researcher



Christian Gossel
Farm Sustainability
Researcher

Agroforestry - Projects

AGROMIX (HE, Nov 20 – Nov 24)

The project investigates the opportunities given by mixed farming and agroforestry systems for carbon balance and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

ReForest (HE, Jul 22 – Jun 26)

The project will focus on supporting agroforestry in Europe and removing the barriers preventing its wider use.



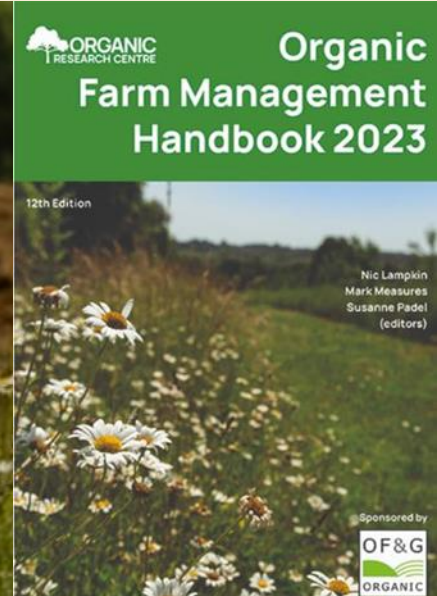
Agroforestry - Projects

Also....

- Aiming High for Hedgerows
(Sep 23 – Dec 23)
- Hedgerows as Wildlife Corridors (Jun 23 – Jun 25)
- Agroforestry ELMS test on advice & guidance (Sep 23 – May 25)
- Whole farm carbon framework
(Oct 23 – Mar 24)



Business & Markets



Key research areas

- Fair food supply chain
- Market opportunities for the organic sector.
- Informed decision-making metrics

Marketing of Organics (Apr 2022 – Mar 2025)

The Organic Farm Management Handbook
(1994 - 12 editions – latest 2023)



Rowan Dumper-Pollard

Organic Business And Markets Researcher

Healthy & Sustainable Food Systems

Healthy & Sustainable Food Systems

Developing healthy and sustainable food systems with a focus on holistic management within a whole farm context.

Key elements of the theme

Participatory, interdisciplinary, collaborative, multi-actor networks; Decision support; Sustainable food systems; Environment and ecosystems; Farmers and Growers; Practical soil health assessment; Regional markets and value chains; Consumers and civil society.



Charlotte Bickler
Principal Researcher And
Knowledge Exchange
Manager – Crop
Diversification



**Rowan Dumper-
Pollard**
Organic Business And
Markets Researcher



Katie Bliss
Knowledge Exchange And
Agroecologist



Nicola Noble
Livestock And
Sustainability Researcher



Christian Gossel
Farm Sustainability
Researcher

Healthy & Sustainable Food Systems – Projects

Public Goods Tool (ongoing since 2011)

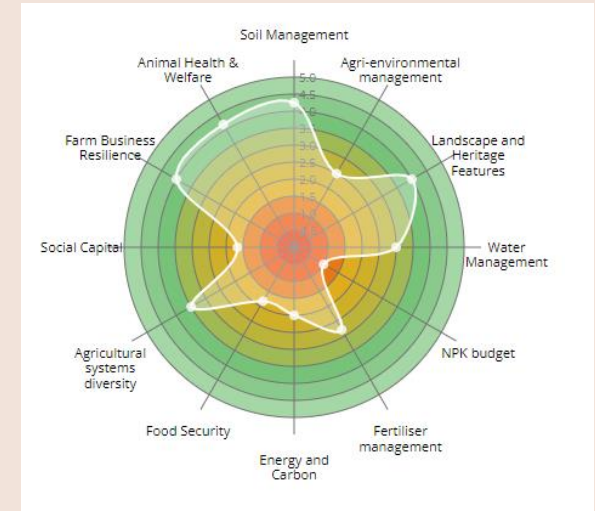
Designed to capture data about farm practices and represent the sustainability and produce of public goods

Organic at the Heart (Jul 2021 – Dec 2023)

Follows a participatory action research (PAR) approach which aims to support individuals and organisations that are fostering the Organic Principles of Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care.

Joining the Dots (Dec 2023 – March 2024)

Provides the groundwork to develop a collaborative distribution network to catalyse growth of an agroecological food system in Cornwall.



Thank you

