

# NORTHERN ORGANIC NEWSLETTER

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March 2008

## Northern Organic Arable Seminar Review

On the 12th February I attended an exciting, vibrant event in Boroughbridge, North Yorkshire hosted by the Northern Organic Centres, in response to interest from the regions producers. There were over 30 farmers in attendance at the morning workshops, arable cropping techniques led by Stephen Briggs of Abacus Consultancy and Environmental Stewardship, led by Sue Ogilvy of Natural England.

These morning workshops were followed by an organic three course lunch where attendees could mingle and consult staff from the 7 trade stands that supported the event. This was followed by an afternoon panel discussion, where the morning speakers were joined by local organic farmers and respected businesses, as well as local support and marketing staff.

The afternoon panel took questions from the floor. The key themes seemed to be surrounding the economics and future prospects for organic arable crops. The mixed panel were unanimous in the fact that there is an optimistic future for UK grown organic cereals. It was highlighted by the farmers on the panel that you should identify your market, be it back into your own unit or for off-farm sales, and then grow for this. They discussed that growing mixed forage whole-crops may be more valuable to the farm than selling grain and then buying back compound feeds. However, both the feed millers and the grain trader present said their market would remain strong for some years to come as the shortages that occurred this year have reinforced their desire to source UK cereals as a first option. This led to debate on the opportunities to develop forward contracts for cereal growers. All agreed that this would be a useful development, but the value of these contracts remained the key.

The Northern Arable Seminar is just the start of work in this area. Each of the regions will look to host more specific events and encourage networking between the regions. If you would like delegate notes from this event, or to register your interest in being involved in the future work please contact your local regional office.

**Martin Davies, Organic South West**

### Arable questionnaire – your help is needed

The Soil Association are always looking at ways to promote organic arable production in the UK, and we are asking organic arable producers and those in conversion to complete a questionnaire (it only takes 10 minutes to complete!). It will give us a clear understanding of what is going on in the industry and what the opportunities are. This information will enable us to provide targeted support and facilitate activity that will really make a difference to your business and help us develop support for the increase of organic arable production in the UK.

To complete the arable questionnaire visit:

[http://www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/psweb.nsf/B4/notice\\_board.html](http://www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/psweb.nsf/B4/notice_board.html)

# Northwest Organic Centre News

Northwest Organic Centre

**Northwest Organic Centre**

Rural Business Centre  
Myerscough College  
Bilsborrow  
Preston  
PR3 0RY

T: 01995 642206

F: 01995 642107

[enquiries@nworganiccentre.org](mailto:enquiries@nworganiccentre.org)

## What we do:

The Northwest Organic Centre supports the development of organic food and farming in Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

We are there for producers considering organic conversion, retail owners looking for new products and for consumers looking for places to buy organic produce.



**Soil Association**



WORKING TOGETHER FOR  
**englandsnorthwest**

## Position wanted

We are an enthusiastic, hardworking couple of 27 and 28. We would relish the opportunity to work along side organic vegetable growers to further our knowledge and practical experience. We have recently returned from Canada where we worked on vegetable farms, supporting a community scheme (CSA). Ideal situation would involve a live-in position and we are willing to relocate. Please contact either Lloyd or Hayley at [lloydandhayley@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:lloydandhayley@hotmail.co.uk)

## Situation Vacant

Growing organic farm business requires a baker with some experience, full time or part time to produce a range of organic bread from our own kitchen to supply our farm shop. If you are interested please contact Janet Harrison at Abbey Leys Organic Farm Tel: 01925 753465.

## V inspired

The V Placements Scheme at Penwortham Education Centre, Preston has been going for a year. This has proved to be a great stepping stone for getting graduates and school leavers onto the environmental career ladder. So ask any V placement what's the appeal and the answers are diverse; the excitement of teaching children, working in a team, learning practical skills and the opportunity to work with lots of different projects within the Trust. Fortunately, for the Lancashire Wildlife Trust most of the first round of V placements have gone onto get jobs at the Trust. If you know anyone between 16-25 with a passion for the environment (which is more important than formal qualifications) then get them to give us a ring. There are several six month placements with guaranteed accredited qualifications. V placements are expected to put in 30 hours per week and are given up to £75 living / travel allowance. Contact Su or Jenny on 01772 751110 email [education@lancswt.org.uk](mailto:education@lancswt.org.uk)

## Cheshire Farmers Markets

True Farmers Markets are few and far between and whilst they are more popular now than they have ever been, it is still difficult to find a good one. Most are council run and rely on word of mouth for publicity; this however is starting to change. With a fortnightly full page column in local papers and considerable media advertising coupled with direct advertising 3 Cheshire markets are starting to get the reputation and the footfall they deserve. Our featured producer is interviewed and their produce is promoted to a much wider audience than any single market could ever hope to attract. (Readership 50,000+) We have teamed up with Heathcotes group of restaurants and in our regular news feature provide readers with a dish of the day. A delicious recipe for them to try at home is given to every customer and has proved very popular. The events are so successful that most producers sell out before the end and those that don't have very little stock to take home. Producers work so hard all year round, artisans of their particular craft. It feels great to be able to give them a little more than the norm for all their hard work. Monthly Cheshire markets are held in Alderley Edge, Poynton and Woodford.

If you are interested in finding out how we can benefit you please contact Hugh Munro on 01625 251 753

## Land wanted

We are a workers co-operative in Manchester focusing on local, organic, fairlytraded and whole-some foods. Although we do currently have some good veg growers supplying us from within the North West region there are still gaps in our supply. For this reason we hope to buy up to 20 acres of suitable land within about 35 miles of Manchester for our own growing venture. If you have land to sell or any information that would be of help to us please don't hesitate to contact us by email to [veg@unicorn-grocery.co.uk](mailto:veg@unicorn-grocery.co.uk) or phone 0161 8610010 and ask for Rob or Stuart.

## Riverside Organics—now producing organic fresh herbs

If you would like to contact Simon Bennett regarding potential supply of organic fresh herbs, either cut or potted, please email [simon@riversideorganic.com](mailto:simon@riversideorganic.com)

# North West Organic Milk Producers Update

North West Organic Milk Producers recently held three member meetings across the region, where we welcomed an encouraging number of new members to NWOMP - both converted and in conversion producers. For those producers unable to attend, the main issues covered by the board and Stuart Martin were as follows: current market pricing; supply and demand issues; conversion volume figures; current NWOMP marketing activity and a supply chain study of food processors in the North West - work NWOMP are undertaking on behalf of the Northwest Organic centre. And, as always, members were very proactive in the discussion, with the following issues brought up at all three meetings - organic feed costs and availability; exploration of local markets and bull calf market potential. All members and new members should now have received a letter thanking them for their attendance, with more comprehensive notes from the meetings.

If you are considering joining NWOMP, please contact Stuart Martin or Sarah Milne for more information on [stuart@nwomp.com](mailto:stuart@nwomp.com) / [sarah@nwomp.com](mailto:sarah@nwomp.com). We will be holding our AGM in May, and all members will be invited accordingly.

As part of our work with the Year of Food and Farming, there is some money available to fund Open Days at organic dairy farms. The money would go toward facilitating transport for the children, providing refreshments and paying for any other activities you would provide on the day. A typical open day would involve children visiting and being taken on a tour round the farm of different 'stages' by their teachers. These stages could involve speakers from other agencies, e.g. the Wildlife Trust, with the aim of covering the main topics of Yoff - farming, growing and cooking.

If you are interested in either of the above projects, or have any other ideas regarding YoFF, please contact Sarah Milne on 07930 433 764, [sarah@nwomp.com](mailto:sarah@nwomp.com). We are very keen for members to get involved in such projects and would offer as much assistance as possible on any such work.

As always, if you have any questions or queries about the work of NWOMP, please do get in touch.

Sarah Milne, North West Organic Milk Producers  
[sarah@nwomp.com](mailto:sarah@nwomp.com)

## An introduction to organic certification training day

Rural Enterprise Gateway will be joining forces with the Northwest Organic Centre to offer Cheshire food and drink businesses an opportunity to learn about organic certification.

An Introduction to Organic Certification will take place from 10am to 3pm at Shipbrook Hill Farm, Whatcroft, Northwich on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> March. The day will be led by Iain Rogerson of Soil Association Certification Ltd and, with financial support from the Northwest Organic Centre, is available to businesses at less than 10% of the normal price. Further information on this event can be found at [www.nworganiccentre.org](http://www.nworganiccentre.org) or contact Lucinda Kirby on 01995 642206 to reserve a place.

# Organic Buying Group—proposed expansion through NW

The West and Wales Organic Buying Group was set up by Kite Consulting for a group of farmers in Cheshire, the West Midlands and Wales in 1999. The Group now has over 50 members. The members are predominantly live-stock farmers (dairy, beef & sheep), with a number of members also growing arable crops.

Due to the success of the group Kite Consulting are planning to expand the region supplied to cover Cumbria and Lancashire from autumn 2008. To help us calculate interest in this, if you are interested in joining or finding out more please complete the form below and return to the Northwest Organic Centre.

## OBJECTIVES

- To purchase quality products from known approved sources
- To achieve group discounts from bulk purchasing
- To monitor the quality of the products through laboratory analysis
- To create a forum to encourage trade and the sharing of information between members

## BENEFITS

- Forward buying ensures a consistent availability of organic feed at a known price
- Only quality products of known origins are sourced
- Significant savings are made from bulk buying power
- Independent monitoring of products
- Forum to meet other likeminded Organic Farmers

## PRODUCTS SOURCED (so far)

- Organic Feed: Dairy, Beef & Sheep
- Non GM in-conversion Feed: Dairy, Beef & Sheep
- Approved Fertilisers
- Grass Seed

## WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM MEMBERS ?

- Confidentiality
- Willingness to change suppliers in line with the Group's majority decision
- Sharing of information for the Group members mutual benefit

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**Name:**

**Address:**

**Postcode:**

**Telephone:**

**Mobile:**

**Number of dairy cows:**

**Number of dairy replacements:**

**Number of suckler cows:**

**Number of rearing and finishing beef:**

**Number of ewes:**

**Organic arable acres:**

**Please fax back to: 01995 642206**

**Or post to; Lucinda Kirby, NWOC, RBC, Myerscough College, Bilsborrow, Preston PR3 0RY**

# Horticulture update from the Northwest

As I sit writing this report we are enjoying some of the best weather of the year so far..... Blue skies, a hint of frost and no wind. Considering so far this year we have had a return to waterlogged fields and then very strong winds which ripped the end of a polytunnel and lifted off my glasshouse roof leaving it in a thousand pieces on the floor for us to pick up, the recent weather is a welcome respite.

February is the time of year when we look forward to a fruitful summer. The crop plans for the year are more or less complete, the first sowings of salad rocket, spring greens, salad leaf, salad onions, broad beans and peas are all waking up slowly in our heated propagation cabinet and the polytunnels are being power washed off and the elevated standing out areas constructed to grow the new seasons' transplants.

We are just finishing last seasons' rocket and watercress and taking the new lush growth off the curly kale that ended up in the polytunnels as it was too wet to plant out last July.

When harvested all remnants of the last crop will be removed to the compost heaps, last years compost added to the soil and cultivations ready for the new crops to be planted of the middle of March. This will give us a variety of new crops from late April onwards.

The outside land I feel will be more difficult this year due the sheer volumes of rain we have had since last June. I am afraid that all the nutrition has been washed down through the soil profile and will be difficult for the new plantings to access. We grow a lot of green manures (crops grown specifically to access nutrition deep down the soil profile then incorporated prior to planting to provide nutrition for the new plantings) here at Bradshaw Lane Nursery and these did go into good conditions last August and September and have grown well throughout the winter. I think I will be leaving them to grow on for as long as possible to access as much nutrition as possible for the coming years' crops.



Marketing wise, although not our best winter after the losses of last summer, we are managing to pick a reasonable variety of crops for our vegetable bags. The carrot crop did very well and the leeks have done likewise. Savoy cabbage have just been picked off and for the next four weeks or so we have hard white cabbage in store.

In December, I attended the second producers' conference at the Royal Agricultural college at Cirencester. About 170 organic producers got together for a couple of days to discuss all aspects of production here in the UK. Sessions on composting and plant raising dominated the horticultural seminars. It is now a year since the formation of the Organic Growers Alliance and it was time to reflect what we have achieved during our first year. We have an annual general meeting programmed for March 15<sup>th</sup> at Coleshill Organics near Swindon and are now busy planning the work load for the year ahead, of events and farmwalks. We hope to have our new website [www.newoga.org.uk](http://www.newoga.org.uk) up and running for the AGM and a full program of events will be put on the website by the end of March.

**Alan Schofield February 2008**

# Howard Wass



Howard was a man of vision and a man of faith. He needed to be, because he started growing Organic vegetables, long before it was the norm, in the mid 1980's.

Although the Soil Association had begun 40 years earlier, little progress had been made in Commercial Organic Veg growing by then. Certainly there was a group of horticultural holdings on the East Coast supplying a supermarket pack house, another group in Wales and 1 or 2 wholesalers around London specialising in Organic, but there was no infrastructure for selling vegetables locally, box schemes hadn't been thought of, and what Organic Veg you did see in wholefood shops often looked tired and old.

So this was the scene when Howard began.

Howard was fortunate in that he had a mixed farm, cattle, sheep, grass and cereals and he told me once that what made all the difference was the sheep which increased the fertility enormously and what was very important too, was that the whole farm was to be organic not just a part.

Howard had already begun a few years before converting grass and cereals to Organic but was encouraged to go into vegetables by a local smallholder—Mike Sellers—who had started growing organic veg 4 years previously and who needed a new supply of Organic carrots to satisfy the demands of customers on his market stall.

Howard, Rosemary and Mike discussed it, and it was decided that Howard could grow autumn and winter vegetables, particularly potatoes, carrots, onions and leeks and winter cabbage because it would fit into their rotation.

In his father's tradition, Howard used to over winter lambs on swedes, selling the lambs just before the next ones were due but by selling the lambs in the autumn it freed up the root acreage in their 7 year rotation, to grow veggies for human consumption. Howard and Rosemary decided to take the risk from an ethical stand point, converting gradually and living frugally.

It was for all, a time of learning with very few teachers of Organic around. The usual advisors-ADAS—either didn't know or pooh-poohed it saying Organic growing was not possible and wouldn't pay! Howard had to learn very quickly about the size and quality that the retail consumer needed. Sheep didn't care much about the size of swedes, but a consumer didn't want a huge swede that would last a month, but one that would only last a week. So then began a friendship, and trust between Howard and Mike, valued local co-operation with mutual encouragement.

In 1987 an Organic wholesaler started up in Nottingham and Mike took a van load of Howard's produce down there every Tuesday for three years.

With the ever increasing demand for Organic produce today, it is difficult to realise that in 1990 it was so different with farmers and growers trying Organic but giving it up. Supermarkets tried it too, but many of them also went out of it.

*Continued overleaf.....*

## Howard Wass—continued

The wholesaler at Nottingham, (Bloomsgorse), went bankrupt (owing growers £100K), but from it, within two weeks developed a wholesale delivery round of 20 outlets throughout Yorkshire and beyond and so Howard's produce was distributed (twice a week) and customers began to acknowledge the quality of produce that came from Fadmoor. Demand was slow to increase as there was a recession in the early 90's and people didn't have money, spare, to buy Organic.

In 1996 there was literally an explosion in demand for Organic produce with the start of the BSE crisis, which was a turning point for farming with the general public demanding to know how their food was produced and so turning their attention to, and demanding Organic, like never before.

Howard by then, had had ten years experience of growing Organic vegetables, it was almost as if he was poised waiting for it to happen.

Companies like Goosemoorganics, a grower specialising in box schemes had started up in the 1989, had stayed with and by that time was the third largest box scheme in the country. Demand increased almost overnight. Another box scheme Farmaround began in London, at this time, and began buying from Howard.

Right from the very beginning quality mattered to Howard. Quality of growing with clean weed free crops and a quality product. He worked tirelessly at it, starting early, often in the fields at 5am and finishing late. He built up and trained a loyal work force. Howard was always searching for new varieties, only a week before his death he had been to Holland looking at carrot seed and equipment. Howard searched too at new ways of doing things--using and developing old techniques like the stale seedbed technique but with pre-emergence flame weeding. Planting swedes as well as sowing them and later he experienced the value of using fleece. Howard started growing Organic seed potatoes on contract and he expanded into summer crops too—spinach, lettuce, parsley, broccoli, cauliflowers all bearing the same mark of quality.

Howard and Rosemary started their farmshop in 1994 selling just their own produce. Their intention was to keep people in touch where veg is grown, and Howard did farm walks and talks, hosted Soil Association days and seminars and in 2002 started going to a local farmers market. What Howard and Rosemary did with their farm inspired and convinced their neighbours to convert to Organic too.

In 2004 Howard became the M & S Grower of the Year, a well deserved reward for his vision.

With the very hot dry year of 2006 Howard decided to put in irrigation and drilled for water to depth of 600 feet, well that was the height of the land he farmed! The intention is to pipe it around the farm.

Howard continually broadened his and other growers horizons of what could be grown on an upland farm. Howard didn't enjoy paperwork, which as most Organic farmers will know is tremendous, he left that to Rosemary, preferring instead to work with his men and always sharing in their workload, keeping in touch with his customers through his mobile phone and he valued a great deal the conversations he had and the friendships which developed.

Howard was a big man, with a big heart and he had a great love for his animals, his men, his family and his God and his passing has left a tremendous hole wherever he has been.

Fortunately for all concerned, both employees and customers, Rosemary has said that the business will continue with the committed team Howard had trained and together they will do their best to keep up the same quality, standards and service and she looks forward, somewhat, to the daunting challenge.

People have apologised to me and said perhaps we shouldn't call it 'Howards' anymore but Howard made a tremendous mark on his farm in his 61 years and I'm sure we will continue to call it Howard's for many years to come.

**Mike Sellers, January 2008.**

# Food For Life Project—update



*The Food for Life Partnership is a five-year Lottery-funded initiative, led by the Soil Association, to transform food culture in schools and communities across England, bringing together the practical expertise of the Focus on Food Campaign, Garden Organic and the Health Education Trust.*

## **THE FOOD FOR LIFE PARTNERSHIP IS ONLINE!**

The new Food for Life Partnership website launched in October 2007. The website is an information resource and networking site for schools and communities across England committed to transforming food culture. By working together, schools meals will be revolutionised, young people will be reconnected with where their food comes from and families will be inspired to cook and grow food. The website features regional pages, so it's easy to find out what's happening in your neck of the woods, which schools and farms are involved and what events are taking place. Visit the Food for Life Partnership website at [www.foodforlife.org.uk](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk) to find out more!

All schools can now enrol with the Food for Life Partnership and join a network of schools committed to achieving Bronze, Silver and Gold Marks for good food culture by visiting the website; [www.foodforlife.org.uk](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk).

180 Flagship Schools and Communities - 20 in every English region – are being selected and will be going to go for a Gold Mark in record time, and share their learning with other schools.

Of the 20 flagship schools per region, eight will be secondary schools and at least one special school will be represented.

## ***Northern Region Update***

- **Yorkshire and Humber.** The selection procedure for the first 6 Flagship Schools and Communities is well underway. Visits to the 9 short-listed schools will take place mid- February, and 6 schools will then be selected. The schools will start working as FFLP Flagship Schools and Communities in April 2008.
- **North-West.** The first 6 Flagship Schools and Communities have been selected and have been working with the FFLP team in the North-West since the beginning of January 2008. Five of the Flagship Schools and Communities are in Greater Manchester and one school is in Southport.
- **North-East.** The first six Flagship Schools and Communities have been working on the Food for Life Partnership since September 2007. They include schools from Newcastle, Darlington and Chester-le-Street. The selection procedure for the next six Flagship Schools and Communities for the North-East is now underway.

More general information can be found on the website at [www.foodforlife.org.uk](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk).

## **Key contacts for the regions;**

Sharron Rourke, Northern Regional Manager, is your first point of contact for the Food for Life Partnership. Call; 07900683956 or e-mail; [srourke@soilassociation.org](mailto:srourke@soilassociation.org)

Paul Flynn, Regional Co-ordinator North East, call 07899902352 or e-mail; [pflynn@soilassociation.org](mailto:pflynn@soilassociation.org)

Amanda Donnelly, Regional Co-ordinator Yorkshire and Humber, call 07824635810 or e-mail; [adonnelly@soilassociation](mailto:adonnelly@soilassociation)



# Machinery Rings—what are they?

The Machinery Ring Association of England and Wales (MRA) is the umbrella body representing the interests of ten machinery rings operating across England & Wales as cooperative associations, undertaking a range of activities intended to serve the commercial interests of the farming community and their land management activities.

By cooperative use of time and resources each ring acts as a management broker to its members, in order that their capital intensive plant and equipment may be utilised in the most cost effective manner.

Current ring membership covers all sectors of agriculture and all holding sizes from commercial smallholder to institutional farming companies. Additionally ring membership covers all businesses and trades-people involved in agriculture including:

- Farmers / Farming Contractors
- Machinery Hire Companies
- Commodity Suppliers
- Self Employed Labour
- Labour Agencies and many others

The effectiveness of the rings relies heavily on this healthy and varied membership profile, capable of effectively providing machinery, skills and labour.

## Q. Who can join a Ring?

Rings are open to all farmers, contractors; self employed workers, mechanics, advisers, hire firms and any business offering or demanding services broadly related to agriculture.

## Q. How do Rings operate?

The Ring office holds a central database listing all members and what machines and services they have. They also hold a database of labour members. When a member makes contact requesting a service or machine their requirements are matched with the nearest and most suitable supplier. The price for the job is agreed between demander and supplier and a job sheet sent to the office.

## Q. How can it can it work in practice if everyone wants machines at the same time?

The Ring is able to search for a supplier amongst a lot of members over a large area. There will always be a strong seasonal demand for certain machines and services but even in the most difficult of seasons there are always some people who have finished long before others and are looking for extra work. The Ring is there to co-ordinate and make sure that suppliers and demanders can immediately be put in touch with one another.

Q. I have spare machines at certain times of the year but I am reluctant to let anyone else use them. What do I do?

Most machinery today is highly sophisticated and needs skilled operation. That is why for most jobs both machine and operator will be supplied. There will be some items of machinery that will be hired without an operator if the supplier and demander wish. Remember, the Ring is only there to match supply and demand, it is left entirely up to members as to which of their machines they offer, and when and how they are to be offered.

## Q. What other services can Machinery Rings offer?

As well as machinery and labour, many Rings also offer a wide range of additional services such as commodity and fuel supplies, group purchasing, business services and training.

Rings operating in the North of England are

The Borders Machinery Ring	Ridings Machinery Ring Ltd	NDRM
Galamoor House	Hall Moor Farm	The Old Coal Stocking Ground
Netherdale	Shipton Road	Westerton
Galashiels	Wigginton	Bishop Auckland
TD1 3EY	York YO32 2RQ	Co. Durham
Tel: 01896 758091	Tel; 01904 471419	DL14 8AH
Fax: 01896 757036	Fax; 01904 471423	Tel; 07970 627585
	<a href="http://www.ridingsmachineryring.co.uk">www.ridingsmachineryring.co.uk</a>	
Email:	Email; <a href="mailto:info@ridingsmachineryring.co.uk">info@ridingsmachineryring.co.uk</a>	Email; <a href="mailto:office@ndmr.co.uk">office@ndmr.co.uk</a>

# Producer Groups—Why Bother?

Imagine, if you will, a fantasy industry, where a few thousand small manufacturers are scattered across the country, and rarely communicate with one another; where they have little control over their costs of production – indeed most don't even know what their costs are; they have a production cycle of many months, and when they start a production run, they do not know the price they will receive for their finished goods. They have even lost the ability to influence that final price. Their idea of successful marketing is to receive a few pence more than their neighbours; marketing consists of calling one of the oligarchy of buyers to say that they've finished making their product, and could they buy it please? They may do so, or they may say no, in which case the manufacturer has to wait, and allow their product to deteriorate which means the price is even lower.

Surely such an archaic structure for an industry cannot possibly operate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Does it ring any bells? Well, if you're an organic beef or sheep farmer, it should be familiar to you. Unless of course you belong to one of the three main independent Producer Marketing Groups in the UK –Caledonian Organics, Graig Producers or OLMC.

Some farmers take the view “*Why should I pay, albeit a very small amount, for one of these groups, when I can save that commission by selling direct to the processor, and anyway, I'm a big farmer, and the processor likes me and always helps me!*”

Producer Groups are the alternative to the fantasy, but how do they unravel the problems, and how do they benefit their members? Why, indeed, should anyone join them?

- **Scattered, isolated producers** – Farming is a naturally lonely business, but when you're part of a marketing group you have plenty of access to information – newsletters, websites, etc., as well as local meetings – technical, or just plain and simple social. ***Groups are about joining producers together.***
- **Costs of production** – a group will save you the cost of membership immediately by giving you access to cheap inputs (feeds, seeds, ear tags, etc.); it will enable you to carry out Benchmarking (in Wales at present, but coming to the rest of the UK soon). Graig Producers have even developed a software package to help you keep your records, produce your accounts and all the forms for your organic inspection. The aggregated Cost of Production information enables the Groups to negotiate with supermarkets and their processors from a position of knowledge. ***Group members have the ability to know and reduce costs, as well as strengthen their negotiating hand in the market place.***
- **Prices** – Groups work, often quietly and behind the scenes, all along the food chain – they talk and negotiate not only with your local processor, but also the supermarket which they supply. The Groups have been developing a structured approach to the marketing of organic livestock, and have already achieved a seasonal floor in the lamb market, and steady, increased, beef prices. ***Groups have already achieved much in improving prices for the organic beef and sheep sector. That achievement can only be improved further by maximising membership.***
- **Independence** – a true Producer Group must be independent of any supermarket and processor, although they must have a good working relationship with all. ***An independent Producer Group can work on your behalf in finding your best market, so you don't have to.***
- **A Structured Market** – Are we heading for oversupply, or is there still room for more producers to “go organic”? - at present nobody knows for sure the numbers of organic beef and sheep in the pipeline of organic conversion. The Groups are in the process of answering that very question, by working with all the certifiers, as well as the marketplace. Only in this way can we avoid the feast and famine of supply and demand which has plagued us over the years. A structured market has to be in everyone's interest – from farmer, to processor, to supermarket to consumer. ***Producer Groups are leading the way in achieving a structured market.***
- **Groups have to benefit the whole food chain.** Groups have no God-given right to exist, and have to be of tangible benefit to every stage in the chain, but their primary concern has to be the economic well-being of their members – to keep them on their land and farming organically.

*Continued overleaf.....*

# Producer Groups—Why Bother?

*Continued.....*

The organic beef and sheep sector was crying out for a strategic view on marketing, and that is what the Groups are developing with other parts of the supply chain. Indeed, there is a unique opportunity with organic beef and lamb to offer a radical alternative to the standard meat market— for the producer to regain some influence in the market, and to remove old-fashioned and negative attitudes. Groups can only deliver their many benefits if as many farmers as possible join. It is a fact that the price benefits gained by Groups are applied to everyone, so there is no immediate price benefit to joining (although there are many other financial benefits). However, one thing is sure, if you want the fantasy industry to continue to be reality, then don't join a group – be a Yeoman farmer and take on the world!

## EVENTS

### **Permaculture design course**

Mar 7-9, Apr 4-6, May 9-11, June 13-15. Friday 10am to Sunday 5pm

Middlewood Ecological Trust, Lancaster

An exploration of all aspects of sustainable systems and design. From growing food to sustainable housing and communities, alternative energy, money systems and much more. Please bring food to share.

For more details or to book contact Nicola on 015242 21880 or email [studycentre@middlewood.org.uk](mailto:studycentre@middlewood.org.uk)

### **Woodland Management**

Wednesday, 12 March 2008 10:45am-3pm

Yarrangall Green Farm, Simmonds Hill, Manley, Frodsham, Cheshire, WA6 9DP

A half day workshop covering management of existing woodland, new planting techniques, species selection, woodland management for wildlife, opportunities for grant funding, bracken control and legislation for woodland. Sponsored by Natural England

Booking essential, to book your place at this FREE event, please contact Helen Broughton tel: 01270 627938 or email: [helen.broughton@fwag.org.uk](mailto:helen.broughton@fwag.org.uk)

### **Introduction to Organic Farming**

Thursday 13 March 2008

Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens, Burford, Oxfordshire OX18 4JW

A one day course for agricultural and rural consultants, providing an introduction to organic farming including an overview of production methods and farming systems, financial performance, organic standards, conversion strategies, markets, grant schemes and interface with agri-environment schemes. The day will be run by two experienced organic advisers and will include a hot two course organic lunch and refreshments.

Please contact Sarah Jameson at IOTA on 01547 528546, or email [iota@organicadvice.org.uk](mailto:iota@organicadvice.org.uk) for more information and a booking form.

### **Homoeopathy at Wellie Level**

Thursday 13 March 2008, Thursday 10th April 2008, Thursday 1st May 2008

Broadfield Farm, Tetbury, Gloucestershire

A course designed to teach farmers and stock people how to use Homoeopathy effectively on their own animals and as part of the farm management strategy. The course runs across three dates.

Call 01666 841213 or visit [www.hawl.co.uk](http://www.hawl.co.uk) for further details.

### **Food and Drink Expo**

Sunday 6 April 2008- Wednesday 9 April 2008

NEC Birmingham

The UK exhibition for sourcing food and drink products and services from around the world. Co-located with 4 other leading trade shows. Contact Jack Halliday on 01293 867 618 or email [jack.halliday@william-reed.co.uk](mailto:jack.halliday@william-reed.co.uk) [www.foodanddrinkexpo.co.uk](http://www.foodanddrinkexpo.co.uk)

## EVENTS—continued

### **Biodynamic Introductory Workshop**

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2008, 10.00-17.30

Sheffield

Introductory workshop for farmers and gardeners who are interested in developing their organic system and enhancing the health and vitality of their crops and livestock. Topics include biodynamic concept of the farm, soil and compost treatment, the use of biodynamic sprays, the planting calendar, quality and Demeter standards.

Participants should bring suitable outdoor clothing and a packed lunch. Cost for the day is £30 / £25 conc.

Contact: 01453 759501 or email [office@biodynamic.org.uk](mailto:office@biodynamic.org.uk)

### **Natural & Organic Products Europe**

Sunday 13 April 2008- Monday 14 April 2008

Olympia, London

The UK's biggest organic and natural products trade show, incorporating the Soil Association organic business seminars. Discounted stand space is available in the Soil Association Organic Marketplace for small businesses.

For further details contact Cat Murray T: 01273 645124 [cmurray@divcom.co.uk](mailto:cmurray@divcom.co.uk)

### **Organic Agriculture and Climate Change**

April 17th and 18th 2008

Clermont Ferrand, central France

Organised by ENITA, this is the first scientific European meeting devoted to the impact of agricultural techniques (organic and otherwise) and food consumption on climate change.

This international scientific and professional conference will gather experts, to evaluate the state of current knowledge; to debate verified results based on contemporary research; to shed light on possible strategies for real action at the level of decision-makers, farmers, food-processing industries and consumers.

Organisers say the conference will help make people aware of the consequences of their choices and of their way of life, on a local scale as well as on the global scale. It will deliver a tangible link between the research results and the people likely to put this new knowledge into practice.

Contact and details – [www.enitac.fr](http://www.enitac.fr) e-mail - [colloquebio08@enitac.fr](mailto:colloquebio08@enitac.fr)

### **The Real Food Festival**

April 24th to 27th 2008

Earls Court Exhibition Centre, London

This is a new four-day food festival, the first of its kind in the UK. It is designed along Slow Food lines to give focus to high food standards and particularly to provenance and sustainability in the UK and around the world.

The aim of the Real Food Festival is to bring producers and consumers together to celebrate good, clean, sustainable food.

Contact Festival Director Philip Lowery Tel 020 7471 1080 [philipl@brandevents.co.uk](mailto:philipl@brandevents.co.uk)

### **Biodynamic Introductory Workshop**

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2008, 10.00-17.30

N. Yorkshire

Introductory workshop for farmers and gardeners who are interested in developing their organic system and enhancing the health and vitality of their crops and livestock.

Topics include biodynamic concept of the farm, soil and compost treatment, the use of biodynamic sprays, the planting calendar, quality and Demeter standards.

Participants should bring suitable outdoor clothing and a packed lunch.

Cost for the day is £30 / £25 conc.

Contact: 01453 759501 or email [office@biodynamic.org.uk](mailto:office@biodynamic.org.uk)

# MARKET REPORT

Spring is coming and hopefully this heralds a more stable future on the feed front. The pre Christmas announcement regarding soya derogations have caused an upset as little consultation took place before announcing it. The slow boat of Chinese soya is supposedly due in April although I understand much of it is already spoken for. Let's hope lessons have been learnt from this and it is all sorted out before too long. If you're having problems on the feed front please let me know.

Good news – lamb price is improving. For the week commencing 11 February prices varied between £2.85-£3.10. Supply is becoming more in line with demand and it is reported that the lambs going through Graig Farm are being directed to the abattoirs who are paying the most and starving the ones that are dragging their feet. Please check current prices to ensure you get the best deal before agreeing to sell. It has been reported that by not agreeing to a price of £2.85 within the hour the price had risen to £3! I've also had reports that some producers have had a better deal in the conventional auctions.

Beef prices have remained firm at £2.95-£3.10.

Susan Woof—livestock and cereals co-ordinator 01539 621343 bandswoof@btinternet.com

**Stop Press..... Stop Press..... Stop Press.....**

**ABP have announced an increase in beef price to £3.40 immediately until 31st July 2008 and then offer minimum prices.**

**ABP Blackburn contact David Lightfoot**

**ABP Perth Malcolm MacDairmid 01738 624242.**

## MARKET PRICES

ARABLE	HORTICULTURE	LIVESTOCK
Feed wheat    £300/tonne	Beetroot           65p/kilo	Beef               300+/kg dw
Milling wheat £310/tonne	Brussel sprouts   155/kilo	Beef stores       140-160p/kg lw
Feed barley    £285/tonne	Cabbage           75p/kilo	Lamb               290p+/kg dw
Feed oats       £285/tonne	Cabbage (Savoy) 65p/kilo	Pork               230p+/kg dw
Beans           £310/tonne	Carrots           65p/kilo	Chicken (contract) 170p/bird
Feed peas       £320/tonne	Caiflower         65p/head	Chicken (direct) 690-750p/kg dw
Triticale       £285/tonne	Kale               £1.60/kilo	SA eggs (direct) 280p-350p/doz
	Leeks             £1.50/kilo	SA eggs (contract) 170p+/doz
	Parsnips          £1.00/kilo	
	Potatoes          50p/kilo	
	Swede             60p/kilo	

# FOR SALE & WANTED

## FOR SALE – LIVESTOCK

- Mule Ewe Hogs—North of England type - Otterburn, J. Elder - Tel: 01830 520042–
- Store Cattle available - Contact Stan Atkinson - Milnthorpe, Tel - 015395 63664
- 15  $\frac{3}{4}$  Tamworth  $\frac{1}{4}$  Wild Boar - pork would be ready July or sold as weaners late March - Contact Charlie Parker Brampton - 07788 594466
- 10 store cattle available - Workington, Contact Birkett Gate Tel: 01900 602428
- 15 Store X lambs - Burnsall, Contact Richard Hirst - 07808 613026
- 50 Store Cattle Charolais X and Aberdeen Angus X - 6 - 10 months old Contact David Neave, Rochdale - Tel: 07967 209987
- 100 Store Lambs Suffolk and Texel X - Contact David Neave, Rochdale - Tel: 07967 209987

## FOR SALE - FEED & FORAGE

- 100 large bales red clover hay - Contact Mr Barmby, Bridlington area Tel: 07900 114689
- 40 large round bales organic oat straw - Contact Mr Barmby, Bridlington area Tel: 07900 114689
- 60 large square bales organic wrapped silage - Contact Gill Ward, Boroughbridge Tel: 07834 955959
- 10 t whole feed beans - Contact Richard Frank, Carleton-in-Cleveland, Tel: 07815 021925 / 01642 714034
- 4 - 5 t whole oats - Contact Richard Frank, Carleton-in-Cleveland, Tel: 07815 021925 / 01642 714034
- 40 - 50 bales large round bales clover haylage - Contact Richard Frank, Carleton-in-Cleveland, Tel: 07815 021925 / 01642 714034
- 40 large bales organic oat straw - Contact Richard Frank, Carleton-in-Cleveland, Tel: 07815 021925 / 01642 714034
- Fodder beet available for next season - if interested contact S. Metcalf, Boroughbridge area Tel; 07714 454880
- 100 large round bales of haylage from species rich meadows - Contact Martin Stone, Bingley area, Tel: 07821 205620
- 400 square bales red clover, white clover and some arable silage - Contact Mr Oliver, Maften, Newcastle area, Tel: 07792 879 552
- Available for collection or delivery, Organic Blends from 14 - 20 % protein for cattle and sheep. A blend of wheat, barley, oats, peas, beans, lucerne & soya. Or a 6mm pellet at 17% protein available to be fed on the ground or through a snacker type feeder - Tel Robin Scott, Northumbrian Organic Feeds - Tel: 01668 213400 / 07816 213801
- 60 t Pearl Barley - malting quality Contact St Helens Farm, Nr York, Tel: 01430 861400
- Forage for sale - Sedbergh area - contact Sue Woof Tel: 01539 621343

# FOR SALE & WANTED

## **WANTED—FEED & FORAGE**

Good quality pit silage or good quality silage bales (Lancs. area) Contact Sue Woof Tel: 015396 21343

Any cereals / beans - Contact Sue Woof Tel: 015396 21343

10 acres kale available - Contact Jon Perkin, Roweltown, Carlisle Tel: 016977 48058

## **GRAZING AVAILABLE**

Summer grazing for cattle May to September—Contact Richard Hirst Tel 07808 613026, Burnsall, Skipton, SACL Certified.

## **FOR SALE—MACHINERY**

Redrock 8cum Diet Mixer R.H. Discharge. Relined 2007, Good condition Contact Brian Woof Tel: 07968 089645

1 Alko PTO Cement Mixer, Good working order - Contact Brian Woof Tel: 07968 089645

OPICO spring tine weeder, 12m in very good condition, £4000 ONO - Contact St Helens Farm, Nr York Tel: 01430 861400

Howard Dragon Rotovator, Self Propelled, Serviced 2008, would suit large garden or grower, very good condition £750 ONO Tel David & Elaine Newham, 01723 870048

## **FOR SALE—MEAT**

Fully Organic Pedigree Middle White Pork meat for sale - Contact Marian Rogers - Nr Northallerton Tel: 01642 700646

**While every effort is made to ensure that the information listed is accurate and up to date, it is the sole responsibility of the individual producer to check the organic status of all livestock, forage and grazing when ordering, and upon delivery to the farm, as appropriate.**

**When buying forage or utilising grazing, producers should be fully aware of the potential differences between the organic feed standard requirements of the different certification bodies, and should always confirm the status of feeds and grazing to ensure compliance with organic standards. If you are in any doubt contact your certification body.**

**Always ensure that all vendors' organic certificates are current. All organic certificates must also list the appropriate livestock type, forage and grazing. Please note that you are required to hold copies of organic certificates for all brought-in livestock and feed materials for your organic inspection**

**organic marketplace online**

A free website for buying or selling organic livestock, grazing and forage

search online today at [www.soilassociation.org/organicmarketplace](http://www.soilassociation.org/organicmarketplace)



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**Peter Kindersley,  
Sheepdrove Organic Farm**

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## Apprenticeship scheme

In collaboration with the Organic Growers Alliance, and support from Garden Organic and the Organic Research Centre, the Soil Association launched an organic grower's apprenticeship pilot scheme last September in the Thames Valley region.

We currently have 5 apprentices on the scheme, working on 3 farms. In addition to learning their trade on the job from an experienced organic grower, apprentices attend a series of weekend courses from other "master growers" which compliments this with some theoretical knowledge.

We are currently assessing the implications of extending the scheme to include both the rest of the UK and to encompass other farming enterprises. If you are interested either in being an apprentice or in employing one, or if you just want to find out more about the scheme then do please get in touch with the food and farming department on 0117 914 2400.

## Wanted—Organic and Biodynamic Grains for Milling

Cumbrian Watermill milling specialist flours from organic and bio-dynamic grains—stoneground by waterpower the traditional way. We mill wheat, rye, barley and spelt. We are always interested in hearing from farmers in the north who might be interested in supplying or growing for us—large or small batches. Please contact Ana or Nick Jones on 01768 881047 [organicflour@aol.com](mailto:organicflour@aol.com), [www.organicmill.co.uk](http://www.organicmill.co.uk)



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