

Autumn 2004

Organic  
2004

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**Organic Farming (Conversion Of Animal Housing) Scheme**

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The Organic Farming (Conversion of Animal Housing) Scheme opened on 17 December 2003.

It provides applicants with the opportunity to undertake a range of conversion options, grant aided at 60-75% to an upper ceiling of £30,000.

**Progress** - By the end of August 2004 51 applications were received and 40 approvals issued to the value of approximately £1.2 m. Applicants range from those in conversion to those already dedicated to organic farming. Traditional and novel projects have been approved.

**Can I still apply?** – Some funding still remains unallocated, so organic farmers (including those thinking about converting or those in conversion) may apply. However you will have to act quickly.

**When do I claim?** - Work approved must be progressed speedily with a view to satisfactory completion and inspection at the earliest possible date. The Department wishes to make all payments by, or as close as possible to, the 31 March 2005 scheme closure date.

[www.ruralni.gov.uk/bussys/organic/](http://www.ruralni.gov.uk/bussys/organic/)

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## Mid Term Review Business Workshops

Many of you will have attended the DARD Information Events held throughout NI dealing with the Mid Term Review. More information will be available in the business workshops, which will begin in the latter part of November.

Invitation to attend these business workshops will be posted out to those who have registered their interest. It is likely that the second of the two workshops will be held after Christmas and by that time more details should be available about the Single Farm Payment Scheme, cross-compliance, the Nitrates Directive and the Farm Waste Management Scheme.

If you haven't already registered for the business workshops but want to attend please contact 028 9442 6880 immediately to book a place.

In the meantime please contact the MTR Helpline, based at Orchard House, on 028 7131 9891, for queries about the amount of your single farm payment and the effect of varying the years used in its calculation.

For queries regarding either hardship or appeals, please contact DARD on 0870 351 8292 (Regus House).

For other enquires please use the DARD Mid Term Review Helpline on 0800 085 7083.

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## Homoeopathy 'at Wellie Level'

Exciting new training on homoeopathy is being offered for the first time in Northern Ireland at Greenmount Campus, CAFRE. The trainers are qualified homoeopathic veterinary surgeons and professional homoeopaths from England, all with extensive farm experience.

They aim to make the content straight forward, useful and fun. It runs as a three day course spread over about three months, to allow time to put into practice what has been taught.

**Day One** looks at prevention and early action

**Day Two** looks at acute illness and nipping problems in the bud

**Day Three** introduces year-round and long term health programmes.

Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis.

For further details about the course content contact Charlotte Moore on 028 9442 6752.

Details of charges and booking forms are available from Susan Cassley on 028 9442 6873.

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## Establishment of Organic Lead Group

Work continues on the establishment of the Organic Lead Group, as recommended in the strategic action plan contained in Organic Farming in Northern Ireland: A Development Strategy (The 'Stopes Report'). The Lead Group will work alongside DARD to implement the organic farming development strategy, and to co-ordinate the development of the organic sector.

To download details of the strategy, visit [www.dardni.gov.uk/pr2001/pr010397c.htm](http://www.dardni.gov.uk/pr2001/pr010397c.htm)

An advertisement for the position of Chair of the Lead Group appeared in the local and GB press on 2 September 2004.

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## Using the organic seed 'Organic X Seeds web site'

The Organic X Seeds website [www.organicxseeds.co.uk](http://www.organicxseeds.co.uk) is managed by the Soil Association and is the recognised source of information on organic seed availability. It can be used when sourcing seed or requesting derogations, and as such should be your first 'port of call' if you have internet access.

Seed companies are required to maintain their information on the database as up to date as possible.

When sourcing seed, certification bodies are recommending that you consult this web site, particularly before requesting a derogation for non-organic seed.

If you request a derogation, certification bodies will themselves consult the site to see if your request is valid, and may turn down your request if there is suitable seed available.

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## Cattle House Ventilation

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One of the most critical factors contributing to the successful housing of cattle, whether in new or existing buildings, is good ventilation. If proper attention is given to providing a good environment (that is, air quality) within the building then this together with good management should mean thriving, healthy cattle. Where ventilation is inadequate cattle will be less healthy and performance will suffer.

The aim of any cattle house ventilation system is to control the environment inside the house.

Ventilating air can remove:

- Airborne viruses
- Bacteria
- Carbon dioxide and ammonia
- Water vapour

Ventilation therefore removes pathogens as well as controlling the temperature within the cattle house. The correct design of the ventilation system is very important as over-ventilation can be as damaging as under ventilation.

### Natural ventilation

Most cattle houses rely on natural ventilation and for this to be effective depends on:

- the siting of the cattle house
- correctly positioned and sized inlets and outlets
- a stack effect created by the correct stocking density and cubic air capacity within the building

### What is a stack effect?

Heat given off by cattle warms the air inside the building. This warm air rises towards the outlets, due to convection and cooler fresh air is drawn in through the inlets. The warm air leaving the cattle house carries with it airborne viruses, bacteria, carbon dioxide and water vapour.

This warm air is replaced by cooler fresh air entering via the inlets. If the warm air cools too much as it rises there may come a point where the stack effect will breakdown. When this happens health problems usually occur. In providing adequate ventilation, care needs to be taken to ensure that draughts are not created around the housed animals.

The effect of a draught is to draw heat away from the animal and consequently lower its temperature. Fluctuating temperatures cause stress to animals and this can lead to health problems.

### Summary

A good ventilation system should provide:

- Draught free conditions;
- Cool fresh air coming in via the inlets, moving over the housed stock and mixing with the warm air that is rising from the stock;
- Adequate ventilation in still weather conditions.

Poor ventilation gives rise to respiratory problems, especially at housing and on still, calm days. Where a ventilation problem is suspected, it is possible to find out the direction of air movement within a cattle house by releasing non toxic smoke pellets. When this has been done remedial action can be taken if necessary to improve the situation.

### Suggested general design data for naturally ventilated cattle housing

	Beef Cattle Units	Suckler Cow Units
Cubic air capacity within the building.	18 cubic metres / animal	28 cubic metres / cow and calf
Air <u>inlet</u> area around walls etc.	0.075sq. metres / animal	0.12 sq. metres / cow and calf.
Air <u>outlet</u> area in roof	0.045 sq. metres / animal	0.085 sq. metres / cow and calf

**Air outlets should be 1.5 to 2.5 metres above the air inlets**

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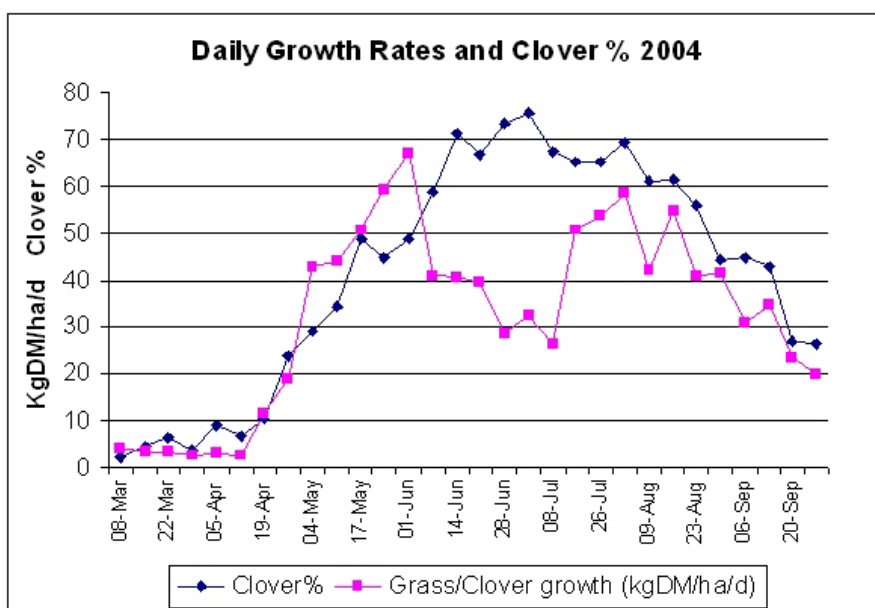
## Clover growth in 2004

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You may be familiar with the Agrisearch Grass Check, which measures grass growth during the season at a number of sites and is published each week in the farming press. At the NI Plant Testing Station, Crossnacreevy, measurements have been taken this season from a grass clover sward receiving no nitrogen. Daily growth rates and percentage clover in the sward are presented in the graph.

Grass clover growth did not get underway until mid April. Herbage growth followed a characteristic pattern, reaching a peak towards the end of May and increasing again in early August following a mid season depression.

The clover content of the sward was low in the spring but reached an exceptionally high level for the majority of the summer period, remaining at over 60% from early June until mid August. This clover content is well above the target sward content of 30 - 35% clover in the dry matter mid season. It is believed that a clover content of about 30% in the dry matter results in the best compromise between the quantity of herbage produced per hectare and the nutritional value of the herbage. If the clover content is very high, overall yield decreases, as there is not enough grass to utilise the nitrogen fixed by the clover. However, too little clover will lead to poor production.



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## Featured Farm – Camowen Green Organic Farm

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Camowen Green Organic Farm is a 72 hectare mixed arable farm near Omagh, run by Hamilton Kee and his son Simon. About 46 hectares are farmed, with the remainder buffer grazing, commercial woodland, bog, river, natural woodland and conservation areas.

Until 1993 the arable land on the farm was continuous barley with potatoes once every five years. After attending the Introduction to Organic Production course at Greenmount in 1993, Hamilton made the crucial decision to convert to organic production with the Soil Association. The conversion was in several phases, with conventional cereals and

potatoes grown until all the land was progressively converted.

There were no stock on the farm at that time and a lot of work was put in reseeding to grass-clover swards by utilising set-aside options. "I also took the opportunity at the time to fence the whole farm in readiness for livestock", says Hamilton.

Once this was completed, in 1998, a batch of Aberdeen Angus cross heifers was bought in as the basis for the suckler herd.

During the conversion, Hamilton and Simon also planted a lot of deciduous trees, fenced off river banks and protected a substantial species rich dry grassland gorse bank, with support from the Countryside management Scheme.

All this effort was rewarded recently with the presentation at the Sheepdrove Organic Centre, Berkshire, by Joan Lorraine, of a 'Lorraine Award for Conservation 2003'. This award, presented by the Joan Lorraine Trust in memory of Joan Lorraine's mother, is for 'combining the needs of wildlife with productive organic farming'. Hamilton is duly proud of their substantial achievements.

There are 2 rotations on the farm. On the better, arable land 3 years of red clover-Italian ryegrass is followed by 2 grain crops, then potatoes and vegetables, and back into red clover based swards.

The rest of the farm is white clover-perennial ryegrass for 5 years or more, followed by 2 grain crops undersown back into grass-clover. In 2004 peas and oats were introduced for whole-cropping at 11-12 weeks after sowing. "It was very successful and will be repeated, though I was surprised by the height of the Magnum peas" says Hamilton. "At 6 feet high, I couldn't see over them, and they didn't lodge either".

The suckler herd is now established and consists of 24 cows and 1 Aberdeen Angus bull, plus replacements and 48 followers. The breeding policy in the closed herd is to maintain a balance in the cows of between one-half and three-quarters Aberdeen Angus.

To make management easier, old cattle housing is being replaced by a new house with support from the DARD Organic Farming (Conversion of Animal Housing) Scheme grant. Building is well on, and consists of a general purpose straw-bedded cattle house with a large midden into which manure can be periodically scrapped. There are no slats.

The manure handling policy on the farm is to turn and compost the raw manure for a year. As Hamilton says, "this reduces the volume by half and gives a friable product which is much easier to spread". This is an advantage when growing vegetables, one of the key enterprises on the farm.

The farm has grown vegetables for many years to support a number of retail markets. The intention now is to support the farm shop and also supply local organic box scheme retailers with crops they find more difficult to grow themselves.

"It is important to present customers with a good range", says Hamilton, and field crops include early and maincrop potatoes, carrots,

parsnips, cauliflower, calabrese, year round cabbage, leeks and beetroot.

Potatoes have always been a part of the farm, and Hamilton is very interested in trying out the new blight resistant varieties which are appearing. They must, however, meet the exacting demands of his customers in an area where Kerr's Pink is still very popular.

An important crop on the farm is broad beans. Half a tonne per week are sold for a 6-7 week period, though picking is an effort. Broad beans have been popular in the immediate area ever since they were grown by an enlightened landlord and his tenants to avoid starvation and eviction during the potato famine.

Field crops are supplemented by those grown in a polythene tunnel, and Hamilton would like to expand the area and range of protected crops. The single tunnel already produces climbing French beans, tomatoes, courgettes, lettuce, early spring cabbage and carrots during spring and summer, with parsley and celery during the winter.

As the farm consolidates its production, Hamilton plans to centre marketing on the farm and farm shop. Development never stands still, and keeping sight of customer focus has not ruled out table poultry and eggs as a further option to add to the home-produced frozen meat, potatoes and vegetables sold.

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### **Orgfarmnet**

Orgfarmnet is an email discussion list aimed primarily at organic producers in Northern Ireland.

Its main aim is to provide a forum for discussing organic ideas and topics,

At the same time, it can provide a useful means of letting other local organic producers know of your 'sales and wants', for example, of, stock etc for sale and requirements for feed.

The service is not for use by commercial companies, but to allow farmer to farmer trading.

For further information, and for instructions as to how to join the list, contact Charlotte Moore on 028 9442 6752 or email [charlotte.moore@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:charlotte.moore@dardni.gov.uk)

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## Greenmount Unit update

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As cattle are housed and winter feeding gets underway it is useful to reflect on the successes and challenges of the past season.

### Cropping

One of the major successes on the unit was the excellent yield of potatoes. The early variety Orla achieved a yield of 37.83 t/ha. Quality and tuber size distribution are both very good making the crop very suitable for pre-packing. As far as cooking quality is concerned, dry matter content was just over 20%, and general opinion of those who have sampled it is that it is very acceptable.

Of course, one reason for planting this variety is its very good blight resistance. This appears to have been a good choice as only just before harvest were a tiny number of blight spots found on the foliage, most of those inactive.

Blight risk was monitored using the DARD Blight-Net system along with careful prediction of weather patterns and as a result, only two applications of Copper oxychloride were made.

Early in the season weeds were not really evident in the potatoes, except for Fumitory and Fat Hen which were removed at an early stage by mechanical weeding.

Barley, peas and lupins established well this year, but the dry weather in April and May held back growth, and the reduced crop height, along with the rain in June, contributed to weed problems. The lupins and barley suffered from a substantial infestation of redshank which could not be removed as the ground was too damp. The peas were, however, better able to compete with weeds.

The barley yielded 4.34 t/ha @14% moisture content off combine, and the lupins and peas produced 29.6 and 16.6 t/ha respectively.

Our experience over the last three years has led to the conclusion that lupins are marginal at Greenmount and we will probably not sow them again, growing peas in preference, and considering other crops to provide protein.

Forage rye was sown following the potatoes, peas and lupins both to retain nutrients over the winter, and to provide early grazing for ewes prior to lambing. The cereal area has

been left as stubble to provide feeding for farmland birds.

### Livestock

The sheep annual cycle has started once again. Cull ewes were sold in September and the flock was made up to 63 ewes with homebred replacements.

Treatments carried out in early to mid October, included a fluke drench, foot paring, foot bathing with zinc sulphate and tail clipping.

Trace element boluses were also administered to ewes to help correct iodine and selenium deficiencies – an inherent problem on the farm.

The ewes were then put on good grass clover swards for two weeks prior to the rams being introduced. The flock was then allocated to two groups with 32 ewes going to the Texel ram and the rest to the Lleyn on 1<sup>st</sup> November. Hopefully no further disturbances will be necessary and nature will be allowed to take its course.

Now that all lambs have been slaughtered or transferred out as replacements with purebred ewe lambs being retained on the organic unit, and Texel X lambs going to another flock on the College farm, we can look back at performance of the last year.

### Animal performance

Lambing %	174 %
Classification	E 4
	U 36
	R 60
Average deadweight	22 kg
Average price per head	£50.05

### Cattle house

The cattle house which many folks saw at the Unit Open day in July is now in use.

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## **Web watch**

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A selection of recently discovered web sites or sites with new content

**Note:** DARD accepts no responsibility or otherwise for the content of non-DARD sites.

### **Organic X Seeds – organic seed database**

The recognised source of information on organic seed availability for use when sourcing seed or requesting derogations.

[www.organicxseeds.co.uk](http://www.organicxseeds.co.uk)

Also available from the Centre for Organic Seed Information web site [www.cosi.org.uk](http://www.cosi.org.uk)

### **Market garden planning**

Meeting the demands of your market and your soil was the theme of a demonstration farm event held on 15th September at Penpont Estate near Brecon. Roger Hitchings from the Organic Advisory Service led a workshop session, which looked at how to develop a cropping plan for a box scheme or a market stall that will deliver the right produce at the right time, while at the same time including fertility building phases in the rotation.

For a copy of the presentation and worksheets go to:  
[www.organic.aber.ac.uk/demofarms/penpont/index.shtml](http://www.organic.aber.ac.uk/demofarms/penpont/index.shtml).

### **McDonald's Organic Milk Success.**

McDonald's has reported a 26 per cent increase in milk sales since changing its milk supply to organic less than a year ago. This signals an interesting sales opportunity for other retailers. OMSCo Marketing Director, David Whiting, commented, "We are delighted that McDonald's switch to organic milk has been so popular with the consumer. Our own research has shown that six million Britons would buy organic milk if it was more widely available, and the McDonald's sales figures prove that this is correct."

The organic milk is available in McDonald's 1,235 restaurants across the UK and replaces their previous non-organic line. The 250ml bottles retail at 50p.

Full story at: [www.organicmonitor.com/](http://www.organicmonitor.com/)

### **Newcastle leads organic food quality project.**

Newcastle University is leading a new £12 million project which is investigating why the taste and nutritional value of our food is decreasing and how and why organic farming can be a solution to these problems. The project called Quality Low Input Food includes 31 partners across Europe and is funded by the European Union. See [www.soilassociation.org/shop](http://www.soilassociation.org/shop)

### **Organic Weed Control**

This website aims to be a primary resource on weed management for organic farms, reporting on the latest weed research and techniques and acting as a focal point for farmers and researchers to share their experiences.

[www.organicweeds.org.uk](http://www.organicweeds.org.uk)

### **Newcastle University Centre for Organic Agriculture**

[www.ncl.ac/tcoa/](http://www.ncl.ac/tcoa/)

### **University of Aberdeen Organic Website**

[www.abdn.ac.uk/organic/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/organic/)

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## What's on ?

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### Study tour – Thursday 18 November

Visit Newcastle University Nafferton Farm and ADAS Redesdale hill farm. For more information contact David Alexander on 028 9442 4614

### Homoeopathy at Wellie Level

A three day training programme on homoeopathy starting early December.

Booking forms and details of costs are available from Susan Cassley on 028 9442 6873.

### Introduction to Organic Production - 2 day short course (CAFRE)

**1<sup>st</sup> Day –** Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> February at Enniskillen Campus *or*  
Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February at Loughry Campus, Cookstown

**2<sup>nd</sup> Day -** Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March at Greenmount Campus, Antrim

To book a place contact Charlene Graffin on 028 9442 6704

For information on course content ring Adrian Saunders on 028 9442 6765



## Organic Bulletin

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- Stuart Beeson
- Ronnie Burns
- Rosalind Dempsey
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