Organic **Bulletin**

cafre
College of Agriculture
Food & Rural Enterprise

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» Organic Farming Support 2007-2013

Whilst the DARD Organic Farming Scheme has now closed to new entrants, proposals to seek the continuation of support to the organic production sector have recently been forwarded to Brussels.

These proposals, which are contained in the draft Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) 2007-2013, will be subject to negotiations with European Commission officials over coming months. They include a revised Organic Farming Scheme as well as an option within the Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme to recognise the environmental benefits of organic farming.

New Organic Development Adviser

Kenny White, Dairy Development Adviser based in Downpatrick has joined the CAFRE Organic Team.

Kenny White, Downpatrick,
Tel: (028) 4461 8077

Animal Housing Scheme draws to a close

Final claims under DARD's Organic Farming (Conversion of Animal Housing) Scheme, which came to an end on 31 March 2007, are being processed.

The Scheme's £2 million budget has supported capital grants – up to a maximum of £30,000 – to more than 70 organic cattle, sheep and poultry producers, to help the organic livestock sector meet the exacting standards of organic husbandry.

The Scheme will be subject to evaluation during 2007/08.

Organic farmers should, however, be able to access other forms of grant aid following European Commission approval of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007-2013.

The Nitrates Action Programme and Phosphorus (Use in Agriculture) Regulations from an organic perspective

The Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (NAP Regulations) and the Phosphorus (Use in Agriculture) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (Phosphorus Regulations) came into effect on 1 January 2007 to improve the use of nutrients on farms and as a result improve water quality in Northern Ireland.

The Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) of the Department for the Environment (DOE) is responsible for implementing and enforcing the regulations, and farmers are concerned about what to do.

The following information is not comprehensive, and only highlights a number of points particularly relevant to organic production.

CAFRE Organic Development Advisers recommend that you read carefully the Guidance booklet for the Regulations.

Storing, composting and using imported organic poultry manure

There are a number of implications for organic producers who intend to import, store, compost and use organic poultry manure. It is particularly relevant to market gardeners who may not have had much contact with these regulations up until now.

Where can I store poultry manure?

Until 31 December 2008, when it will be reviewed, poultry manure may be stored:

- in a midden with an effluent collection facility and other design specifications;
- in the field where application will take place for up to180 days. It must be covered with an impermeable membrane within 24 hours of placement in the field, and must not be stored in the same location of the field year after year.

Where can I site poultry manure heaps in relation to waterways?

The guidance booklet gives specific requirements for siting poultry manure heaps near to water courses, springs, boreholes, wells and lakes.

This has real, practical implications in that you need to be very careful where you off load and store poultry manure in a field. You need to be particularly careful that you do not store it close to a ditch or sheugh. Remember that the ditch may be the other side of the fence in a neighbour's field.

Closed Spreading Periods

You must not apply poultry manure to land from 15 October to 31 January.

This does not apply to other manures.

How close can I apply poultry manure to waterways?

The guidance booklet gives specific restrictions on spreading poultry manure near to water courses, backfilled drains, springs, boreholes, wells and lakes.

Application rates for poultry manures

- Maximum of 50 tonnes/ha (20 tons/acre) at each application with a minimum of three weeks between applications.

However, the amount of total nitrogen in all manures applied to the land, including by any grazing livestock or poultry, shall not exceed 170 kg N per hectare per year.

Calculating N content in poultry manures under the Nitrates Action Programme

Some organic standards documents contain figures showing the nitrogen (N) content of manures. However, the Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) uses different figures and these should be used for estimating the N use to fill in your records sheets for the NAP.

The NAP Regulations take precedence over organic standards, and as a result, the NAP N figures should now be used for both sets of records.

As the NAP N figures are higher, this has implications for how much imported organic manure you can apply up to the total N limit of 170 kg/ha (averaged over your total land area). You must also estimate N application for all manures and slurries.

You can apply more N, up to the crop needs as determined from ANNEXES H and I of the Guidance Booklet, but you must estimate N applications from all sources.

Implications of the Phosphorus Regulations for organic producers

Note: EHS class rock phosphate as a chemical fertiliser

Anyone wishing to apply phosphorus (P) fertiliser to organic land must now take heed of the Phosphorus Regulations.

In order to apply inorganic P you must, in simple terms:

- carry out a soil analysis to estimate the P index of the soil;
- if the soil index is not over the limit for the crop, estimate the amount of P being applied, or to be applied, in manures and slurries;
- make any additional inorganic P applications required up to the limits for the crop as determined using ANNEX K of the Guidance Booklet.

Whilst many organic producers will not be aiming to apply specific amounts of P for a crop, it does mean that you must go through this exercise if you wish to apply any supplementary P such as rock phosphate.

You cannot now simply apply a blanket dressing without assessing soil P status and the crop's needs. You must keep detailed records of all this in case you are inspected for NAP purposes by EHS.

Record Keeping

Records of your imported organic poultry and other manures, phosphate applications and all N in all manures applied to the land, including by any grazing livestock or poultry, must be kept on an annual basis for the period 1 January to 31 December. These annual records must be prepared by 30 June of the following year and retained for a period of 5 years.

If you do not apply any N or P, it is recommended that you maintain 'zero' records for them.

Further information

CAFRE advisers strongly recommend that you carefully read the document:

Guidance Booklet
For Northern Ireland Farmers on the Requirements of the Nitrates Action Programme (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2006 and the Phosphorus (Use in Agriculture) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2006

If you do not have a copy, please contact your local DARD office or your organic adviser.

Armagh/Down Organic Beef and Sheep Development Group – Autumn Meeting

At the end of October, the Armagh/Down Beef and Sheep Organic Development Group held an autumn meeting on the farm of John and Dale Orr at Strangford, Co Down.

The Orr's farm totals 214 ha (530 acres) with 130 suckler cows and 200 ewes. Approximately 20 ha (50 acres) of oats are grown, some for Speedicook at Tandragee, while the remainder is used for stock feed.

Red Clover Swards

Both John and Dale are firm believers in the potential of Red Clover/hybrid swards to produce high yields of good quality silage on organic farms. The farm has a total of 57 ha (140 acres) under this mixture, however, the very mild, wet weather during September and October resulted in very heavy covers on these swards.

A useful discussion ensued on how best to graze this off without causing too much damage. By

using New Zealand grazing techniques, that is, 'block' grazing using temporary electric fencing, the very heavy covers were successfully grazed off.

The red clover swards are ploughed up after a three year period and subsequently sown down to oats. John and Dale find that there is a tremendous release of nitrogen to the next crop once the Red Clover swards are ploughed down.

Suckler Herd

The preferred type of suckler cow on the Orr farm is the Red Devon cross. John told the Group that Red Devon cows are docile, easily maintained and very fertile. The herd is crossed with Red Devon, Aberdeen Angus and Shorthorn bulls.

Heifers not required as replacements are marketed through the farm's organic shop, while the steers are sold to ABP (Newry).

The Group were particularly impressed with a batch of very good quality in-calf heifers which generated a good discussion on the merits of the breed.

Lleyn Ewes

The ewe flock is out-wintered on grass and stubble turnips before lambing commences in early March. The Lleyn ewes are bred pure with some of the lambs also sold through the farm shop.

Reducing Production Costs

John's and Dale's continuous drive to reduce production costs, by utilising Red Clover swards to extend the grazing season, produced much useful discussion among the Group and gave plenty of 'food for thought' for those in attendance.

New potatoes with a lighter footprint – Dr David Shaw

Late blight has been a problem ever since the disease arrived in the British Isles in 1845 when it proceeded to cause the devastating Potato Famine.

Early attempts to breed varieties resistant to the disease have been only partially successful.

The pathogen, *Phytophthora infestans* (*P. infestans*) continues to become ever more aggressive and European legislation and customer preference is beginning to limit the use of fungicides, for example, copper sprays on organic crops are being phased out.

It is therefore essential that high resistance to the new strains of blight are developed as soon as possible.

The Sárvári family near Lake Balaton in Hungary have been breeding for high blight resistance for over 40 years and have selected some very promising varieties which produce heavy crops even under the highest blight pressures.

The Sárvári Research Trust was set up to research late-blight disease and to assess potential new varieties for growing in UK. They are based at Henfaes Research Centre near Bangor, Wales where they assess the latest breeding material from Hungary.

It is essential that any new variety shows good resistance to modern strains of blight and accordingly they organise trials at the Research Centre and on sites in various parts of UK.

They currently have a contract with the British Potato Council to study the variation in the pathogen *P. infestans* and to learn about its aggressiveness and its ability to reproduce sexually.

Knowledge of how the populations of blight are evolving is essential to an understanding of how to control them.

Although it is a great advantage if a variety is bomb-proof when blight is around, it also needs to yield a decent crop of even-sized tubers with good taste and cooking quality.

The work therefore involves selecting varieties which have good commercial potential.

Two of the selections, Sárpo Mira and Axona, have been accepted on the UK National List. These have many characteristics suiting them to low-input and organic growing systems: high yield; weed-suppressing vigour; and long dormancy with some slug and wireworm resistance.

Sárpo Mira has now been adopted as a European standard for varieties showing the highest blight resistance. Both of these varieties are red skinned and both are maincrop varieties with a high dry-matter content and processing potential.

They are continuing to develop new varieties with a range of characteristics to suit different end-uses and have recently identified an early variety with excellent blight resistance; this is a real breakthrough.

They are now partly supported by the European Regional Development Fund, Objective 1 and by the Welsh Assembly Government.

They aim to develop a new seed-potato industry for North Wales to grow seed of hardy Sárpo varieties for both the home and overseas markets.

Dr David Shaw is Director of Research for the Sárvári Research Trust, shaw@sarvari-trust.org, telephone: 01248 364260.

Livestock on the Greenmount Organic Unit

Suckler Enterprise

The herd of 25 Angus X Limousin cows has been housed since mid-October and fed on a diet of red clover silage supplemented with minerals at 100g/cow/day.

In December the calves were weaned and the cows were due to calve from mid-March onwards to both Limousin and Angus bulls.

After being fed on a diet consisting of red clover silage and 4kg/day of home grown cereals, the finished cattle will be sold to ABP(Newry).

The current price of finished cattle is £3.15/kg for U3 grade animals.

This year a Shorthorn bull will run with the cows and suitable heifer calves will be retained as replacements.

Sheep

The flock of 60 Lleyn ewes started lambing at the start of April to both Lleyn and Texel tups.

The ewes were scanned at 185% and were housed four weeks prior to lambing, with concentrates introduced two weeks before lambing at 0.5 kg/day.

The sheep ration is a mixture of oats and peas grown on the unit and mixed with an approved non-organic protein balancer to provide an 18% protein ration.

Crops on the Greenmount Organic Unit in 2007

No more feed derogations!

A big problem is looming for organic livestock producers.

From 1 January 2008, current information from Defra is that there will be no more derogations for non-organic agricultural ingredients used in feeding herbivores.

Also, any existing stocks of feed with a non-organic agricultural component for ruminants must be used before then.

The design of the Greenmount Unit has always assumed that derogations for non-organic feed ingredients would cease at some point. The simple decision was taken right at the start of conversion to grow sufficient cereals to support the livestock on the Unit, with cash crops also a possibility.

The need to grow grain legumes was recognised in an attempt to provide a home-grown, higher protein feed rather than trying to source expensive GM-free soya or alternatives. Loss of derogations for non-organic GM-free protein sources makes this more important.

Cereals

Triticale

As an alternative to spring barley, which has frequently suffered from weed infestations at Greenmount, winter triticale variety Lamberto was sown in October 2006, receiving no slurry or manure. In mid-August it yielded an excellent 7.24 tonnes of grain and 9 tonnes of straw per hectare. The crop was very clean, with very little weed.

Spring triticale was not considered as it is generally taller and later harvested than winter varieties. Winter triticale is itself fairly tall at around 115cm (chest height).

After the encouraging result from the 2006 crop triticale was again sown in autumn 2006, to be combined for use as cattle feed.

Winter variety Bellac, was sown at 180 kg/ha, as a second cereal, on 17 October 2006. It was well established going into the winter with little weed growth and is now growing away strongly.

Oats

We still require oats for sheep, and wish to increase the protein content of their ration.

Oats have generally proved a reliable crop at Greenmount with yields ranging from 5.1 to 6.1 t/ha.

We have found that weeds in oats are much less of a problem. The crop is taller, and oats exhibit ‘alleleopathy’, in which it is believed that oat roots give off chemicals which suppress weed seed germination.

For the 2007 harvest oats, variety Firth, were sown on 2 April at 225 kg/ha following a dressing of 12 t/ha of manure on 26 March for all the spring crops.

Protein crops

Oats and peas

To overcome the weed problems experienced with barley grown with peas, an oat/pea mix was sown on 24 April 2006. Firth oats were sown at 120 kg/ha along with Rose peas at 100 kg/ha.

After a cold spring and late planting, growth was stunted. However, it yielded 3.75 t/ha on 9 September. Protein content was 13.2%, with oats alone estimated at around 10% protein.

For this year, Firth oats and Rose peas were again sown on 2 April at 2 seed rates in order to see the effect on protein content, yield and lodging:

- 125 kg oats + 100 kg peas /ha;
- 225 kg oats + 100 kg peas /ha.

Harvesting and storage

Whilst dry harvesting and storage are desirable, if weather conditions are unfavourable, crimping is a valuable technique, particularly if grain drying is not an option.

Drying grain is permitted (subject to the type of dryer being used) and is preferred to crimping. One difficulty is finding a dryer suitable for small batches, and crimping is then the only option.

Preservation of whole grain with propionic acid (Propcorn) is only allowed in very poor weather conditions, requiring derogation.

In a very difficult season whole-cropping into big bales at an earlier stage might also be an option.

Organic vegetable business focus

This article (slightly edited) is reproduced from the Organic Market Wales Bulletin No. 49, 14 February 2007, with kind permission of the editor.

Each month, Organic Market Wales showcases a specialist organic business in Wales. In February, the spotlight was on **Organics to Go**.

In 1999, Roger Hallam set up **Organics to Go** with the aim to:

- provide a market for growers so that they can avoid selling to supermarkets;
- be a source of direct supply for consumers;
- show that there is a sustainable alternative - growing quality organic vegetables on small and medium sized farms and delivering direct to the customer's doorstep within 24 hours of them being cropped;
- compete on freshness and taste and from the knowledge that the produce comes direct from the farm.

In the beginning, vegetables were grown on 2 acres of land. Now 20-25 acres of land are used and in addition organic vegetables are sourced from other growers; mainly from South West Wales. Currently **Organics to Go** supplies to 2,000 customers and has a turnover of £1m.

The range of produce they grow themselves has reduced, "We grow what we are good at, about 15 different products (lines), the rest we buy in", says Roger Hallam.

Every season Roger Hallam discusses with all producers what to grow to co-ordinate the supply. He says that more growers should grow vegetables, as there is a good market.

According to him, there is lack of local organic vegetables as there are a limited number of people with experience. Also people that are interested find that land is very expensive to buy.

There have been no new entrants for the last five years. At the moment there is one new grower in Carmarthenshire. **Organics to Go** is giving him all the support they can and have agreed to sell his produce.

Roger Hallam sees good opportunities in marketing and hopes that the good market situation will convince growers.

Organics to Go has developed a strong relationship with a number of growers in Wales and the UK. They also exchange some produce with growers in France. He ensures that there is no middleman or wholesalers involved.

Organic vegetables are currently sold to the North and South of Wales, London and Bristol. Supplying to the public sector might be an opportunity in the future.

"The amount of organic vegetables grown and sold in Wales should increase", Roger Hallam says. **Organics to Go** invites all growers who are interested in supplying to them, to contact them.

Furthermore, people interested to franchise, further develop the business in different regions, are also welcome.

A few people have already shown interest in developing ideas but there cannot be enough.

Involvement of more people can help the local vegetable market grow.

For more details, contact Roger Hallam on freephone: 0800 4582524 or look at www.organicstogo.info

The UK Market for Organic Beef

Organic beef – a real market opportunity for some beef producers is the bold message in a new report published by the Red Meat Industry Forum called 'The UK Market for Organic Beef'.

Sales of organic beef rose by a staggering 57% between 2004 and 2006, compared to 32% growth for all organic products.

However, organic beef accounts for only 1% of total fresh beef purchases, a smaller share of sales than most other food categories.

Demand for organic beef is growing in the UK, creating market opportunities estimated to give scope for an additional 15,000 to 20,000 cattle per year to supply the market by 2010.

Examples of production costs for dairy and beef bred stock are presented and it would be useful for producers to compare their own benchmarked figures with the results presented.

The report contains a wealth of facts and figures and copies are available free of charge to organic or potential organic cattle producers.

To request a copy please contact
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