

Volume 3
Issue 3
June 2006

Organic News.

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au

ISSN 1449-325X

University of New England sets up a national centre of excellence for Organic Industry research and development

A number of activities are underway at UNE to promote and research various aspects organic farming and food. With several staff and students that are experienced and committed to organic agriculture, and with strong industry links developed over the past decade, UNE is planning to expand on it's current organic work on several fronts along the supply chain: from farming inputs and on-farm production constraints, through to consumer and marketing issues, as well as the social and environmental impacts of organics. This article profiles some of the people involved and the exciting initiatives taking place.

The New England organic management and research team

Local organic grazier **Phil Coop** is a founding director of the Armidale Food Co-operative, a recently established organic food outlet that has seen an explosion of interest in the community for organic and locally produced food. He has a background in co-operative landuse by rural land holders, landscape ecology and social issues in rural regions and is developing business networks with a renewable and sustainable focus.

Phil is a keen exponent of co-operative models of participation both at the agricultural, retail and commercial levels. Phil is working with graziers in the

region, industry players, Armidale Food Co-operative colleagues and UNE researchers to establish the New England region as a model for business, innovation and environmental excellence.



Left: The team includes, from left, Paul Kristiansen, Phil Coop, Liz Moffitt, David Pearson and Joanna Henryks.

Elizabeth Moffitt is also a founding director of the Armidale Food Co-operative. She is shop manager and heads the management committee. Liz is keen to help co-operatives work together to build local communities by encouraging local production and supply. She has constructed a solar-powered straw bale house in Armidale with her family. Her background in health prompted her interest in organic food and the success of the co-op has

Edited by:
Robyn Neeson
NSW Department of Primary
Industries
Yanco Agricultural Institute
Yanco NSW 2703

Inside this Issue:

UNE National Centre of Excellence for Organic Industry Research & Development

Balranald organic livestock conference a huge success

The Third OFA National Organic Conference & Sydney's Organic Expo

News, Publications, Commentaries & Events



NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

David Pearson is a lecturer in marketing at the New England Business School. His RIRDC funded PhD was in marketing organic food and he is also a founding director of the Armidale Food Co-operative. David has had a lifelong interest in the interactions between humankind and our natural environment. The organic food industry brings these elements together with quality food production, environmental stewardship and social impacts all being placed on the table. His passion is to expand the size of the organic food industry by exploring 'If organic food is better for the individual and better for the environment, why are sales still only 1%'.

Joanna Henryks is a new research student at UNE who is investigating consumer adoption of organic food. She has previously managed a successful organic food retail outlet on the north coast of NSW and as well as being an organic farmer growing horticultural crops such as Russian garlic and vegetables. While on the coast Joanna was also involved with bush regeneration on her property and in the local area. She has a strong background in marketing, having worked for 10 years in market research and small business management and she has completed an MBA at the Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM). Joanna taught in executive MBA program at AGSM and at the Sydney campus of Charles Sturt University and Central Queensland University.

As well as helping local biodynamic people grind their basalt, quartz and other minerals used in Prep making, **Paul Kristiansen** has been busy developing courses in organic agriculture for domestic and overseas students and participating in several projects looking at a wide range of organic issues. Paul's research activities include weed management and soil fertility in organic vegetable production, economic and agronomic issues for vineyards converting to organics, composts and soil health in broadacre farming, and farmer-consumer dialogues to improve 'clean, green and humane' sheep meat production.

Having been a member of the Organic Herb Growers Association for many years, Paul is now an Advisory Board member of the Organic Federation of Australia and an inaugural member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Organic Systems*, a soon-to-be-released journal devoted to highlighting organic research and education in the Asia Pacific region. A major achievement is the forthcoming publication *Organic Agriculture - a Global Perspective*, an international book on organic agriculture (www.publish.lesiro.au/nid/21/pid/5325.htm). As lead editor, Paul brought together a world-wide group of experienced researchers, farmers, writers and thinkers across a broad range of disciplines to produce a 24-chapter review of organic agriculture around the world.

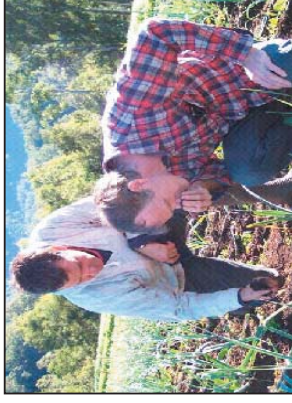
Current research and industry development activities

ORG – the Organic Research Group

This is a UNE based group that aims to achieve leadership in innovative research activities for the Australian organic industry. It provides a focus for existing and planned research activities that lead to quantifiable research output in areas such as research grants, publications and postgraduate students. Further, it offers a whole of industry perspective with its experienced and diverse management team.

The group is a network of individuals who are committed to developing research and industry development projects with organic industry. The alliance is part of the Primary Industries Innovation Centre at UNE which brings together the research and industry expertise from UNE, the NSW Department of Primary Industries and industry stakeholders such as input suppliers, grower groups and individual farmers.

Right: Biodynamic grower, Avi Danon (left) of Upper Thora NSW shows Dr Paul Kristiansen his rich soil used for growing herbs and vegetables for local and city markets.



ORG Collaborative Research Symposium

The current focus is the ORG Collaborative Research Symposium scheduled for late September 2006. The Symposium will bring these people together to highlight current work by students and staff, and to identify and pursue collaborative funding opportunities. At this stage it is anticipated that funding applications will be made to innovative organic businesses; individual organic farmers, processors and traders; and industry research and development organisations such as Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation (RIRDC), Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and Grape & Wine Research & Development Corporation (GWRDC), as well as Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery and Linkage Grants. The group is managed by David Pearson and Paul Kristiansen.

Organic Beef Network

This project involves increasing the number of certified organic beef producers in the New England region to reach a critical mass in production volume of 100 head per week. This level is required to enable local processing at the regional abattoir in Inverell. The project is managed by Phil Coop.

Connecting Organic Food Cooperatives

The Connecting Organic Food Cooperatives project, managed by Liz Moffitt, is being supported by the NSW Department of Fair Trading. They are interested in funding research around the successful formation of the Armidale Food Co-operative. This retail outlet for organic food commenced operations in December last year. It is performing well above expectations with monthly sales of \$30,000 and almost 300 members.

The current proposal is to create a network of the organic food cooperatives in NSW. This will commence by bringing the key players in these organisations to a two day conference hosted by UNE. The major outcome from this will be the creation of priorities for future activities which may include a commitment to an annual conference, a wholesale buying network, an information exchange network or assisting the formation of new cooperatives in other regions.

For further information, please contact:

Dr Paul Kristiansen
Lecturer in Agricultural Systems
School of Rural Science & Agriculture
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351
Phone: (02) 6773-2962
Email: paul.kristiansen@une.edu.au

Dr David Pearson
Lecturer in Marketing
New England Business School
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351
Phone: (02) 6773-3889
Email: dpearson@une.edu.au

Organic News.

Balranald Organic Livestock Conference a huge success

The small Lower Western NSW town of Balranald came alive on June 4-5 when an influx of up to 300 people attended a meeting to discuss the potential for organic lamb production in the Western Division.

The 'unofficial' opening of the Conference began on Sunday evening when the majority of participants enjoyed a scrumptious BBQ featuring locally produced organic food. The BBQ provided a great opportunity for networking and information gathering with industry experts and staff from NSW and Victoria's Department's of Primary Industries on-hand to answer questions.

Monday morning saw the official opening of the Conference by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Local Member for Farrer, The Hon Sussan Ley MP. In opening the Conference, Ms Ley said organics has become a preferred choice for many consumers, and has gained mainstream acceptance. "Organics is not a fad, 'organic' is now synonymous with food that is a safe, nutritious alternative." she said.

Ms Ley said that despite the consumer demand for organic product being strong and rising each year, the conversion rate from conventional to organic agricultural systems in Australia, is relatively slow.

She identified three key impediments to the adoption of organic farming in the Murray-Darling region:

- "The first is whether the financial rewards will prove greater than the costs," she said.
- "The second is whether farmers have all the material needed to make an informed decision.
- "And last - if farmers do convert to organic production - whether they will have the on-going support they will need as novice organic farmers."

The remainder of the morning's program consisted of a series of talks by organic industry specialists and representatives from Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), NSW Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD) and the Australian Government's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF).

An overview of the potential markets for organic livestock products, the requirements of organic livestock production and what is required to become certified was provided by a range of industry speakers including, organic consultant Tim Marshall; Simone Tully, CEO of OBE Beef and organic beef exporters; Katrina Hobbs from Country Heritage Feeds; Rod May and Latarnie McDonald from NASAA; David Hardwick from BFA; and Dr Bryce Douglas of the Australian Organic Red Meat Association.

MLA representatives David Jones and Gerald Martin presented an overall perspective on the potential for Australian export lamb and stressed that livestock produced in the Western Division will most likely require

Organic News.

supplementary grain feeding to finish livestock to market specifications.

The increased cost and sometimes reduced availability of organic grain was raised as an issue for producers investigating organic production.

NSW Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD) and the Australian Government's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) outlined areas where their Departments could provide assistance to producers wishing to develop markets around organic livestock products.

The afternoon session of the conference was set aside for group workshops. The workshops provided participants with an opportunity to have specific questions answered by industry specialists and DPI staff. The sessions attracting the most attention were those relating to converting to organics and the requirements for organic production. One group investigated the opportunity for forming an organic livestock production alliance for the Murray Darling Region. The group agreed to have a follow up meeting in July to clarify their production capabilities and to further discuss the proposal.

The Conference Planning Committee are to be congratulated on a well run and informative event. It was evident from the information presented that a significant opportunity exists for Western Division producers. With few pest and disease problems, conversion to organic production could be a relatively simple procedure for those committed to its principals. However, with many Western Division producers currently still focused on wool rather than sheep meat production, perhaps the biggest decision will be whether to stay committed to wool or to restructure their enterprises around meat.

For further information contact: Robyn Neeson Organic Farming Liaison Officer, NSW DPI, Yanco. Phone: (02) 6951 2735; Email: robyn.neeson@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Coming in July: 'Organics - Solutions to Climate Change'. The Third OFA National Organic Conference and Sydney's Organic Expo

The Organic Federation of Australia is hosting The Third OFA National Organic Conference at Darling Harbour, Sydney, Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd July 2006 in conjunction with Organic Expo 2006. The conference will look at ways of reducing the 25% of Australia's greenhouse gases created by Agriculture.

Climate change is one of the major issues affecting all of us on our planet. For the first time in recorded history the glacier on Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro is melting and the ice at the North Pole had melted. Another first was recorded in North America - Lake Erie did not freeze over this winter. 2005 recorded the hottest average temperatures on record and produced the most destructive hurricane season ever. In Greenland the ice is melting three times faster than the early 1990s. Experts from NASA are predicting that the intensity of major storms will increase even more as a result of rising ocean temperatures.

Experts expect that climate change will have a negative effect on our food supply due to more frequent adverse weather events leading to increasing crop failures. The security of our food supply concerns all of us.

So what has organic agriculture to do with climate change? Published studies show that organic farming systems are more resilient to the predicted weather extremes. Organic systems have higher yields than conventional farming systems in weather extremes such as floods and droughts.

Very importantly organic agriculture can help reverse climate change. Published peer review scientific studies in North America and Europe show that best practice organic agriculture, not only emits less greenhouse gases than conventional agriculture, the carbon sequestration from increasing soil organic matter leads to a net reduction in greenhouse gases.

According to the Rodale Institute "U.S. agriculture as currently practiced emits a total of 1.5 trillion pounds of CO₂ annually into the atmosphere. Converting all U.S. cropland to organic would not only wipe out agriculture's massive emission problem, by eliminating energy-costly chemical fertilizers, it would actually give us a net increase in soil carbon of 734 billion pounds." On a worldwide scale, if we had hundreds of millions of hectares of organic farming it would equate to removing billions of tonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere.

In order to increase the knowledge and debate around the benefits of organic agriculture for reducing greenhouse gases, the topic has been selected as the theme of the Third National Organic Conference, to be hosted by the OFA at Darling Harbour, Sydney, Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd July 2006 in conjunction with the Organic Expo.

Conference Program and Registration

The Conference will feature keynote speakers who will show how best practice organic systems reduce greenhouse gases and can reverse some of the causes of climate change. It will focus on two main areas:

- 1. Organic Soil Carbon**
How to sequester greenhouse gases to increase humus and other soil organic compounds, soil health, organic soil nutrition, water retention, disease suppression and the quality and quantity of farm yields.
- 2. Efficient and low input farming systems**
How to reduce greenhouse gas outputs through efficient and low input farming systems. This is a critical section as these systems and techniques will also result in substantial savings in farmers' production costs.
- 3. Surviving Climate Change**
Research showing how organic farming systems are more resilient to the predicted weather extremes will help producers plan, implement and adapt so they can continue to produce quality produce.

Dr Elaine Ingham keynote speaker.

Dr Elaine Ingham is one of the world's leading experts on using composts and compost teas to improve soil fertility and food quality. She will hold a workshop on the morning of July 23 showing how to composting can sequester carbon into the soil and reverse the 25% of Australia's greenhouse gases created by Agriculture

Best Practice Soil Health Workshops

A significant feature will be **workshops on Day 2** facilitated by experts in organic and biodynamic farming systems on the best methods to **increase soil organic matter** to achieve better soil structure, steady nutrient release, better water retention, superior soil drainage, aeration and reverse soil loss. These soils have high levels of beneficial micro organisms that suppress diseases. 'unlock' the insoluble forms of phosphorus, nitrogen and other nutrients making them available to crop on an ongoing basis. This conference will help farmers and gardeners reduce their production costs, increase their profitability and yields as well as ensure a positive contribution to one of the world's major problems.

The conference will be essential to consumers, farmers, researchers, scientists and policy makers concerned about climate change.

Early Bird Registration

Registration Fees - Early Bird and discounts for OFA members

- I. Full Conference Fee \$400
- II. OFA members \$350
- III. Early Bird \$300 – before May 30 2006 (Note deadline for early bird registration has been extended)
- IV. Early Bird OFA Members \$250 – before May 30 2006 (Note deadline for early bird registration has been extended)

For More Information about the conference go to: <http://www.ofa.org.au/conference/3rd%20OFA%20National%20Organic%20Conference%20Flyer%20html.htm>

For Registration Contact: Mary Hackett. Ph: 02 9319 1228 Fax: 02 9453 3499 Mob: 0414 306 689
Email: mah@shevents.com.au

Source: OFA Website: <http://www.ofa.org.au/conference/3rd%20OFA%20National%20Organic%20Conference%20Flyer%20html.htm>

Sydney's Organic Expo

With 120 stands already sold for this year's show, the Organic Expo held on 21 to 23 July at Sydney Exhibition Centre will live up to the claim of being Australia's leading and largest ever organic and environmental lifestyle show.

140 exhibitors and over 8,000 attendees are expected to attend this year's Organic Expo which has the full support of industry and government bodies.

A strong theme running through this years Expo is 'nourishing our children in the 21st century'. Seminars and panel discussions will focus on creating a sustainable future for our children through our food, homes and gardens, with Catriona Macmillan of The Organics Directory and OTACnet driving the program.

The Organisers Smeaton Hackett Events have added some exciting new features to satisfy everyone's interests:

Renowned chefs Kylie Kwong and Holly Davis will be cooking up some delicious organic fare and visitors can pose their questions in the panel discussions with seasoned journalist & SBS Food Lovers Guide to Australia' host, Joanna Savill, Australia's much awarded food writer, Cherry Ripe, author and biodynamic farmer, Patrice Newell and third generation organic farmer John Priestley.

Garden lovers will enjoy the Organic Garden, created by show award winners Permaculture North, and will host some great gardening presentations by ABC 'Gardening Australia' presenters Jerry Coleby-Williams & Andrew O'Sullivan, as well as permaculture expert Peter Rutherford. The Farmers Market Display will boast an array of fruit and veggies grown on Australian organic farms and give visitors the opportunity to taste the produce and talk directly with the farmers. An Organic Café will offer a full range of delicious organic fare.

Organic News.

The 2006 Australia / New Zealand Organic Wine Show will have a fantastic display of award winning organic wines, selected by a commendable panel of judges; Ron Georgiriu (MW), Jon Osbstein, Clive Hartley and this year we also welcome on board Max Allen.
The Organic Federation of Australia's annual conference 'Organics - Solutions to Climate Change' is also being held alongside the Organic Expo this year.

For more information about the show or to enquire about exhibiting, contact Smeaton Hackett Events on 02 9451 4747, mary@shevents.com.au or visit www.organicexpo.com.au

News, Publications, Commentaries & Events

Publication reviews:

Pest Management for Organic Growers

A 2005 publication from Cornell University (USA) is directed toward organic production of a handful of specific crops (brassicas, cucurbits, lettuce, solanaceous crops, and sweet corn) though its title, RESOURCE GUIDE FOR ORGANIC INSECT AND DISEASE MANAGEMENT, implies a far broader scope. The work's sections are: crop management practices (by crop); a group of full colour photos; and useful material fact sheets for 13 products approved for organic production such as *Bacillus thuringiensis*, kaolin clay, neem, rotenone, and pyrethrum. B. Caldwell heads a listing of eminent authors who prepared the 175-page publication. Notably missing is any apparent information about weeds and the key interactive role they play in pest management applied to organic crop production. An online version is found at: <http://www.nyssaes.cornell.edu/pp/resourceguide/>

Soil Websites (thanks to Justine Cox NSW DPI Soil Scientist at Alstonville)

Soils are Alive

Assoc. Prof. Lyn Abbott and the soil group from WA have upgraded their Website the details of her new book coming out this year are here. Navigate around this excellent information resource: <http://www.soilhealth.com>

Soil Quality Research at Wageningen University, The Netherlands

http://www.dow.wau.nl/soil_quality/mieuw/index.htm

Basic expertise of the department is on chemical substances and organisms in soil. Present research focuses on four, interrelated, topics:

- Research on reactive transport of chemical substances
- Research on surface chemistry and reactivity of geocolloids
- Research on the ecology of soil organisms
- Research on rhizosphere ecology, including the bioavailability of chemical substances to (soil) organisms

Events:

'Organics - Solutions to Climate Change': The Third OFA National Organic Conference July 22-23 2006
The OFA is hosting the Third National Organic Conference at Darling Harbour, Sydney, Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd July 2006 in conjunction with the Organic Expo. See Feature story this issue.

Organic News.

For More Information Contact:

Mary Hackett
Smeaton Hackett Events
PO Box 498 Frenchs Forest NSW 1640
Ph: 02 9319 1228 Fx: 02 9453 3499 Mob: 0414 306 689
mary@shevents.com.au
www.ofa.org.au

Organic Expo 21 - 23 July, 2006

Following the huge success of the inaugural Organic Expo, **Organic Expo 2006** is shaping up to be even bigger and better - cementing it's place as '*Australia's leading organic & environmental lifestyle show*' for consumers and trade. More than 8,000 visitors and 120 exhibitors are expected to attend this year's show, held from 21 - 23 July, at the premier location of Sydney Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour. See Feature story this issue.

Biodynamic Education Centre Workshops

The Biodynamic Education centre is conducting the following workshops over the coming months:

One-day workshop, QLD, Sunshine Coast, Kandanga, July 12.

Six-day workshop, QLD, Sunshine Coast, Cooran, July 8-9, 15-16, 22-23.

For workshop information and bookings contact: Yvonne Best, phone: (02) 6161 7639; e-mail: yvonne.best@netspeed.com.au

Hunter Valley biodynamic workshops in spring 2006 - contact coordinators Margaret Bruval, (02) 4938 5435 or John Ellis (02) 4996 4560.

Do you have any Organic News?

Do you have any research results, field day reports or other information that may be of relevance to organic agriculture? If so, let us hear about it! Send your contributions to:

Robyn Meeson
Editor Organic News
NSW Department of Primary Industries
Yanco Agricultural Institute
YANCO NSW 2703

Email: robyn.meeson@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Note: Electronic format is preferred. Text - Times New Roman 11 point.

Organic News.

DISCLAIMERS

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

Recognising that some of the information in this document is provided by third parties, the State of New South Wales, the author and the publisher take no responsibility for the accuracy, currency, reliability and correctness of any information included in the document provided by third parties.

Mention of any product or company does not imply endorsement. Nor does this reference claim to be a complete directory of products, companies, services offered, or organisations.