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# Organic News.

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NSW Agriculture

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## NSW Mid North Coast Organic Industry Grows

NSW Mid North Coast organic food producers were out in force on May 26 as part of an industry development forum convened by the Mid North Coast Regional Development Board (MNCRDB) and the Area Consultative Committee.

Fifty-five organic producers, processors, retailers and government representatives attended the forum at Wauchope, taking the opportunity to advance industry circumstances by forming producer based industry networks.

Speakers on the day included Robyn Neeson NSW Agriculture, Brian Sundin Native Flower Growers, Robert Pekin Just Foods CSA, Bernadette Denman Office of Fair Trading, Tom Hackett Kiwi Down Under and Mark Livermore, MNCRDB.

The speakers highlighted that the demand for organic produce continues to grow at an exceedingly strong rate and that there are a range of industry developments and opportunities that augur well for the industry. However, there was also a cautionary message in the increasing area of farmland coming under organic production. This creates a need for production areas to position themselves as a preferred and streamlined supplier of organic produce. This means coordinated supply and growth so that producers can meet market needs for a large and consistent quantity of high quality raw and processed organic foods, potentially delivered through one contact point, with producers supported by sound infrastructure, product branding, promotion, traceability, information and market feedback systems. This is an opportunity and vision for the Mid North Coast organic industry.



*Left: Mid North Coast organic producers attending the Regional Development Board and Area Consultative Committee Forum heard that increased production meant there was a need to position themselves as preferred & streamlined suppliers of quality organic produce.*

## **Four organic production & marketing groups formed**

Participants strongly endorsed the need for a coordinated and cohesive approach to industry development and recognised that banding together to address common industry issues can enhance the ability of the Mid North Coast region to become a prominent and successful supplier of organic produce.

During the afternoon session, industry members took the first step towards coordinated industry growth by establishing four organic production and marketing groups. These groups will enable industry to address any impediments to growth and enhance organics profitability and success on the Mid North Coast.

The four new organic networks are:

- Organic livestock
- Organic vegetables
- Organic garlic, and
- Organic fruit and nuts.

Each group identified a unique set of needs to assist the production, processing and marketing of organic produce and have put plans in place to progress these items as part of ongoing group action. Issues high on the priority list include obtaining access to value-adding and processing facilities, a market coordinator and market intelligence, aggregating product to meet volume orders and input buying efficiency.

Each group expects to meet again in the coming month or two and they are inviting more organic growers to join and make contact with the nominated group coordinator.

## **Interest in formation of a wider MNC organic body**

The establishment of these producer-based networks is an important first step towards meeting producer, processor and market need for coordinated industry growth and delivery of services.

Forum participants, however, also expressed interest in progressing quickly to the next stage and look at establishing a Mid North Coast organic body that can assist producers to brand and market organic produce from this region. This will involve the four groups nominating two representatives to work as part of a steering committee to investigate options and interest for a MNC-wide organics body.

## **Where to from here**

The Emerging Industry Development Program (EIDP) will continue to provide facilitation assistance to the organics industry through the newly established groups.

It is hoped, that in the coming months, each network would refine its industry development needs and develop a suitable plan of action to help achieve the desired outcomes. This plan of action should identify, among other things, the task, task priority, resources available and required, partners who can help, and a nominated driver.

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*This forum and the Emerging Industry Development Program is a joint project of the Mid North Coast Area Consultative Committee and the Regional Development Board. It is delivered with funding assistance from the Department of State & Regional Development and the federal Department of Transport and Regional Services.*

*Further information can be obtained from Lyndell Stone at the Mid North Coast Regional Development Board on phone(02) 6583 5647 Fax: (02) 6583 5285 Mobile: 0438 630 389 E-mail: [fip@betterbusiness.nsw.gov.au](mailto:fip@betterbusiness.nsw.gov.au)*

## Exploring the value of commercial weeders for controlling weeds pre and post crop emergence

Prior to the widespread adoption of herbicides for weed control, harrowing a week post-sowing was a common practice, and in dire circumstances, in the emerged crop as well. For the soils sake, these practices are fortunately now rare. However, the need for a greater range of tools for weed control, by conventional and organic farmers alike, required the investigation of two imported purpose built machines in our environment.

### Materials and Methods

Two imported machines designed for in crop weed control were trialled, beginning in 1994:

a) Yetter® rotary hoe weeder; this machine is commonly used through the corn belt of the United States. It has ground driven wheels 60 cm in diameter, with spoon shaped tips. The wheels run parallel to the direction of travel - that is, with no off-set. As the point exits the soil, a mini explosion throws germinating and emerging weeds to the surface.

b) Lely® and Hatzenbichler® finger tine weeders; manufactured in Holland and Austria respectively, these machines use 40 cm x 6 mm spring tines spaced 25 mm apart over 6 rows. The tine tension is readily adjustable to suit different soil types, degrees of compaction and amount of anchorage of the crop vs. weeds. They are available in widths to 24 m, and working speeds in the 8 - 12 km/hr range.



*Yetter® rotary hoe weeder*



*Lely® finger tine weeder*



*Hatzenbichler® finger tine weeder*

The machines were assessed for their ability to control weeds including annual ryegrass (*Lolium rigidum*), barley grass (*Hordeum vulgare*), wild turnip (*Brassica tournefortii*) and wild oat (*Avena fatua*) in sown wheat (*Triticum aestivum*), faba bean (*Vicia faba*), field pea (*Pisum sativum*) and canola (*Brassica napus*) crops.

The mechanical weeder treatments were implemented post-sowing pre- and post-crop emergence, using one and two passes of each machine. A 1-3 cm surface crust of dry soil existed at each working. Selective herbicides were used to control grass and broadleaved weeds on the herbicide treatments.

## Results and Discussion

The finger tine weeder is more aggressive, and therefore works more effectively on emerged weeds. By contrast, the Yetter weeder, while being less damaging to the crop, was also less effective as a weed control implement in this environment.

In 1994, under drought conditions, dry matter production of faba bean and field peas showed significant increases over the herbicide treatment using the Lely tined weeder. Grain yields in faba beans were also significantly higher than herbicide and control treatments. In wheat and canola crops, plant numbers were significantly reduced with the Lely weeder, but yields were unaffected due to the drought conditions allowing the remaining plants to utilise the available moisture.

Follow up work in 1995 was largely unsuccessful due to the persistent wet conditions following seeding, preventing any form of effective mechanical weed control. A trial in the sandy loam mallee soils did provide a 12% yield increase over herbicide treatment where wild turnip was the principal weed. In this case, the weed did not emerge until the crop was established (1.5 leaf), providing the crop with adequate anchorage during weed removal. Another trial at Roseworthy in 1995 was again opportunistic. Ryegrass had emerged from greater than 1 cm in the profile, while canola seed sown near the surface required a rain for germination. The ryegrass was effectively killed with the weeder prior to rain, and prevented the need for a grass herbicide in the growing crop.

## Conclusion

While only preliminary, the results to date do suggest that post sowing mechanical weed control has the potential to reduce weed competition and increase crop yields in some crops in some years. They are very much dependant on the timing of application, where the weeds must be very young and the crop better anchored in the soil than the weed. Further research will be conducted to validate the efficacy of the finger tine weeder in different environments and conditions, including its potential as a low draught secondary tillage machine for pre-sowing applications.

## Acknowledgments

The financial support of the Grains Research and Development Corporation, and access to land for trials on Roseworthy Campus, Turretfield Research Centre and Mr. Henry Shorts property are gratefully acknowledged, along with the assistance given by the managers of these properties.

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*This is the final in the series of articles by Chris Penfold and MS Miyan on non-chemical alternatives to weed management during the cropping phase. For more information, contact Chris Penfold on (08) 8303 7735; fax (08) 8303 7979, e-mail: [chris.penfold@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:chris.penfold@adelaide.edu.au).*

## Mid North Coast field day highlights organic successes

A “Getting Started in Organics” field day was recently held at Lauchlan and Jan Hollis’ Koree Herb Farm. The field day was a follow-up activity to the very successful Mid North Coast Organics Forum held at Wauchope the previous day.

Coordinated by Lyndell Stone from the Mid North Coast Regional Development Board, the field day provided an opportunity for new and established organic producers to gain first hand insight into organic production techniques used at Koree Herbs. Participants at the field day came from as far afield as Coffs Harbour and Foster.

During the field day, the owner of Koree Herbs, Lauchlan Hollis, explained his organic production techniques, as well as some of the trials and tribulations of organic production. NSW Agriculture Organic Farming Liaison Officer, Robyn Neeson, and organic inspector and owner of the successful organic business ‘Kiwi Down Under’, Tom Hackett, gave presentations on organic certification, inspection and conversion.

Koree Herb Farm is situated near Wauchope on a sweeping bend in the Hastings River and consists of 20 Ha of fertile river flats. The farm currently produces organic garlic, lucerne, essential oils and dried herbs.

Lauchlan’s soil and fertility management consists of legume (lucerne) rotations, in combination with regular compost and lime applications. Lauchlan considers a soil analysis which indicates 60% available calcium to be satisfactory. The farm’s composting site is located well away from the river on a hillside to avoid the possibility of nutrients leaching or being washed into the river.



*Above: Field day hosts Jan and Lauchlan Hollis discuss their organic management with NSW Agriculture’s Organic Farming Liaison Officer Robyn Neeson.*

Lauchlan explained that successful organic garlic production is achieved through good weed management. This, he said, is possible if sound rotations and cultivation practices are followed. Lucerne serves as an excellent rotation crop with garlic. Lucerne provides fertility for the garlic as well as a break crop against weeds. The lucerne is also in demand as hay for organic livestock feed and garden mulch.

Lauchlan and Jan plant their garlic in a single row on beds to ensure that a good-sized head of garlic is produced for market. Garlic is sold fresh, as single heads or as garlic braids.

Lauchlan gave a demonstration of post-planting weed management using tractor (front) mounted Lilliston® Rolling Cultivators® set to operate either side of the garlic row. Any weeds remaining between the garlic plants are hand-chipped and any follow-up weeding of the beds is carried out with a very efficient rotary version of the hand-pushed wheel hoe.

The farm also boasts significant plantings of *Melaleuca spp.*, rosemary and geranium which are harvested and then distilled to extract the essential oils. The essential oils are sold for aromatherapy, organic cosmetics and body-care products. Whilst weeds, particularly kikuyu, seemed to be a problem, Lauchlan assured field day participants that foreign matter from most weeds did not taint the quality of the oil that is



*Above: Lauchlan demonstrates the effectiveness of the Lilliston® Rolling Cultivators® at removing weeds either side of the garlic row.*

distilled. Some weeds (such as 'Stinking Roger' *Tagetes minuta*), however, do have volatile oils, which can taint the product, and these, Lauchlan said, must be diligently removed.

Lachlan emphasised that water management is a critical component of his farm management. Whilst overhead irrigation was used in the past, the drought of the past two years has forced him to rethink his water use efficiency. Since participating in a Water Wise on the Farm "Introduction to Irrigation Management" course, he began converting his row crops to a more water efficient sub-surface drip irrigation system. Lachie described the Water Wise on the Farm "Introduction to Irrigation Management" course as excellent and a MUST for every farmer.

Lauchlan and Jan described their journey into organic farming as rewarding. Their key message to those considering getting into organics is to go slow and let your business grow with your knowledge, experiences and skills.

For further information contact Robyn Neeson NSW Agriculture Yanco, NSW 2703, phone (02) 6951 2735. E-mail: [robyn.neeson@agric.nsw.gov.au](mailto:robyn.neeson@agric.nsw.gov.au)

***For information on "Introduction to Irrigation Management" course dates or locations, please contact a member of the Waterwise on the Farm team at the following district offices:***

Bega		02 6492 1733
Dareton		03 5027 4409
Deniliquin		03 5881 9999
Dubbo		02 6881 1270
Forbes		02 6850 2922
Grafton		02 6640 1600
Griffith		02 6960 1300
Gunnedah		02 6742 9240
Orange		02 6391 3902
Paterson (Tocal)		02 4939 8888
Tamworth		02 6763 1100
Wagga Wagga		02 6938 1999
Windsor		02 4577 0600
Wollongbar		02 6626 1200
Yanco		02 6951 2611

## Organic farmer named as finalist in NSW Farmer of the Year awards

Organic farmer Garry Hannigan 'Churinga Station' Broken Hill has been selected amongst the five outstanding finalists in NSW's inaugural "Farmer of the Year" and "Young Farmer of the Year" competition.

Initiated by the NSW Farmers' Association and the NSW Government, the awards are designed to acknowledge agricultural excellence, with a particular emphasis on farmers who combine sustainability with profitability.

Garry runs a certified organic farm on 50,000 hectares in the Western Division, with Merino ewes for wool and Damara/Wiltshire cross sheep for organic lamb production. The property is also used for opportunistic harvesting of goats and yearling cattle production. It's one of eight properties in the Western Division licensed to supply native timber, under extremely strict guidelines to ensure sustainability. It is presently supplying small amounts into the domestic craft market, which reduces the reliance on grazing and provides more flexibility during a drought. Garry is also involved in a pilot conservation project which involves fencing off, destocking, monitoring and managing 5,000 hectares in return for conservation payments over 5 years.

Other "Farmer of the Year" finalists include Malcolm Holm and Jenny Wheeler of Finley, whilst David Bardon of Corindi, Andrew Watson of Boggabri, and Andrew Mosely of Cobar are finalists in the "Young Farmer of the Year".

The "Farmer of the Year" will be awarded \$10,000 and the "Young Farmer of the Year" will receive \$5,000 to further develop and improve their farming enterprise. The runners-up will receive a \$1,000 consolation prize.

The winners will be announced at the NSW Farmers' Association annual conference dinner, on Wednesday July 21, 2004.

*More information can be obtained from Kaaren Latham (NSW Farmers' Association) phone (02) 8251 1827.*

### *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:

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Note: Editorial copy to be received by first Tuesday each month. Electronic preferable, Word format, Times New Roman, 11 point.

## New Publications, Papers, Commentaries and Events

### Weeding the Garden Organically

Following the philosophy that “understanding the biology of weeds is critical to organic weed management,” staff of the Crop and Soil Science Dept. at Cornell Univ. (USA) have organised “The Organic Weed Management Website” at <http://www.css.cornell.edu/weedeco>. The site aims to provide organic gardeners with useful weed background and management information. The heart of the site is a weed database containing information on many plants that are considered common garden weeds and includes identification with a photo, management suggestions, and other information. There are other ancillary features, all offered as aids to effectively managing unwanted plants.

### A Review: Alternative Methods of Controlling Ruminant Internal Parasites

Internal parasites are one of the major threats to livestock production. With parasites developing resistance to most of the de-wormers and more farmers producing livestock by natural methods, there is renewed interest in alternative methods of managing parasite problems. There are a number of different ways for managing parasite control in ruminants. This review by University of Aberdeen discusses means of controlling internal parasites in ruminants other than allopathic. Although somewhat inconclusive, the report provides information on the factors affecting internal parasite control, and reviews literature on a range of alternative botanical dewormers. The paper can be found at: [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/organic/organic\\_14a.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/organic/organic_14a.php)

### Dates set for organic livestock tour

Organic producers in the State's south are set to benefit from a two day bus tour scheduled for September 1 and 2, 2004. Organised by NSW Agriculture's Tumut-based Beef Officer, Michael Campbell and Organic Farming Liaison Officer, Robyn Neeson, the tour will cover all aspects of organic meat production and supply chain management including principals of organic livestock production, transportation, slaughter, market specifications, and wholesaler and retailer requirements.

The tour will visit successful organic farms at Holbrook, Narrandera and Bethungra, a visit to Bush's abattoir at Yanco which is certified to process organic livestock, an organic dinner which includes a presentation from organic meat wholesaler Cleavers Meats, and a visit to well known Canberra organic meat retailer, Griffith Butchery and Delicatessen.

*For further details contact Michael Campbell on (02) 6947 4188 or 0429 036 864.*

### Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture to run 2-day Organic Course in September

'Organics for Interest and Profit' is a 2-day course on organic agriculture to be run by Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture, Yanco NSW, on Tuesday September 28 and Wednesday September 29, 2004.

Day 1 covers the **Principles and Practices of Organic Farming**, it surveys the current rapid growth in organic practices, considers soil fertility and pest/weed management and provides practical advice for those considering converting to organics for interest or for certification. Several case studies of organic farming systems will be presented, including organic citrus (Jan Denham), and vegetables and soybeans (Gina and Neil Wiseman). The day will also include presentations from NSW Agriculture Horticulturists who specialise in organic farming practices and pest management systems.

Day 2 will cover **Marketing and Certification**. Industry experts will provide information and advice about marketing and packaging/labelling of organically certified produce. Discussion will centre on the industry, paths to certification, national standards and include representation from several organic certification bodies. The course will offer plenty of opportunity for participants to ask questions of all presenters that are relevant to their situation.

*For further details contact Simone Fuller, Education Officer, phone (02) 6951 2544, fax: (02) 6951 2616, E-mail: [simone.fuller@agric.nsw.gov.au](mailto:simone.fuller@agric.nsw.gov.au)*