

Volume 1
Issue 9
September 2004

Organic News.

ISSN 1449-325X

www.agric.nsw.gov.au

Two Day Field Trip Highlights Paddock to Plate Organic Livestock Production

Inside this Issue

Two day field trip highlights paddock to plate organic livestock production

Leeton farming women's group visit to Junee and Cootamundra

Organic agriculture in China - a postcard

News, Publications, Commentaries and Events

Over 25 producers from three States benefited from a recent bus tour organised by NSW Department of Primary Industries Tumut-based Beef Officer, Michael Campbell, and Yanco-based Organic Farming Liaison Officer, Robyn Neeson. The aim of the tour was to increase the knowledge of organic and conventional producers to the requirements for successful organic beef and lamb production.

Held over 2 days on September 1 and 2, the tour covered 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.

Participants were treated to tours of a number of well known Riverina organic farms, their owners giving freely of their extensive knowledge and experiences in organic cropping and livestock production.

Blakeleigh Farm

The first stop of the tour was Keith and Linda Cox's property "Blakeleigh", located at Uranquinty near Wagga Wagga in southern NSW. "Blakeleigh" has been certified organic with the Biological Farmers (ACO) since 1991.



Above: Biodynamic farmer Andrew Steiner explains his management of livestock and pastures to tour participants (and other interested on-lookers) during the organic livestock tour.

Please direct correspondence to:

Robyn Neeson
NSW Department of Primary Industries
Yanco Agricultural Institute
Yanco NSW 2703

www.agric.nsw.gov.au www.agric.nsw.gov.au www.agric.nsw.gov.au

Organic News.

The farm is a 306 hectare mixed farming operation producing wool, prime lambs, beef cattle and cereal grains. Keith and Linda run 550 adult merino sheep of Merryville bloodlines. Wool from these sheep averages 18.5 micron with a 70% yield. Although not marketed as organic, the wool is keenly sought after by the local processing plant, Riverina Woolcombers. "Blakeleigh" also carries 150 dorset cross ewes which produce organic prime lambs for sale through Cleavers Organic Meats.

Keith and Linda direct market organic beef to customers in the surrounding district. Their beef herd consists of 25 cows, which are joined to a Murray Grey bull.

Animal welfare is a prime concern for Keith and Linda. Judicious attention to soil and pasture health ensures a balanced diet resulting in stock which are robust and more resistant to disease and parasites. If health problems should arise these are treated with a combination of homeopathic remedies and mineral preparations.

Cropping this year at "Blakeleigh" consisted of 65 hectares of oats which will be retained for on-farm use, and a small area (21 hectares) of wheat. In the past grain has been sold to organic millers and organic dairy farmers. A combination of Dynamic Lifter and BioAg rock phosphate fertilisers were used on these paddocks.

Bush's Abattoir, Yanco

Producing what the market wants is just as important for organic producers as it is for non-organic producers, so the next part of the tour explained to producers just how they can meet market specifications for their beef and lamb products.

A tour of AJ Bush and Sons Pty Ltd. abattoir at Yanco, which is dual certified by NASAA and ACO to process organic livestock, included presentations from manager David Blake and NSW Department of Primary Industry Livestock Officers, Jeff House and Geoff Duddy.

Geoff Duddy introduced Bush's manager Mr David Blake who gave a brief overview of the Yanco operation. Organic livestock are a small, but rapidly growing component of the operation. Stock is slaughtered on or near the day of delivery as the first run of the day. This ensures there is no potential for carcass contamination. Each carcass is individually tagged to ensure traceability, and is fully segregated from conventional livestock carcasses during processing and transportation from the abattoir. The main sheep breeds delivered to Bush's by organic farmers are Dorper, Damara, Wiltshire Polls, Poll Dorset and Merino crossbreds.

A tour of the facility followed. Geoff Duddy led the group on a tour of the holding yards, meat meal extraction plant and skin curing operations. Geoff explained skins from breeds such as Dorper and Damara are keenly sought after. Dorper skins are used by Mercedes Benz in the manufacture of their car seats. Participants were then shown how to assess lamb carcass quality.

Jeff House provided informative talks on beef carcass assessment and the Meat Standards Australia (MSA™) quality grading system.

The MSA system began as an industry program in 1996 following detailed consumer research investigating the decline in beef consumption. The MSA grading system provides a consumer guarantee of eating quality at three levels in conjunction with cooking method. The system was developed to determine the collective effects of farm management, processing, carcase evaluation, aging and cooking on the eating quality of meat.

Producers, as the first link in the chain, were told the importance of ensuring a rising plane of livestock nutrition on farm and high levels of glycogen at slaughter, as the foundation of successful eating quality. Registering as an MSA producer allows producers to market a product of known eating quality and to create a reputation for consistency, as well as providing the additional incentive of a price premium.

As many of the standards recommended by the MSA system are already encompassed in organic livestock standards, most organic producers should readily meet MSA standards.

Organic News.

Mixed farming at 'Warilba'

Third stop for the day was at Andrew and Meica Steiner's property 'Warilba' near Narrandera. 'Warilba' is a 1,900 hectare mixed biodynamic livestock and cropping enterprise. The farm has been biodynamic since 1984 and is currently certified with ACO.

Tour participants were taken to view some of Andrew's 350 head beef herd. The breeders consist mainly of Angus and Murray Grey. These are mated with Angus / Charolais cross bulls and some calves are retained and crossed with pure Angus.

The cattle are currently being rotationally grazed for a few hours each day on an excellent pivot irrigated lucerne and oats pasture, and rotated onto lightly grassed woodland each evening. Supplementary hay to provide a balanced feed ration is being fed daily.

The cattle are managed in small mobs, rotationally grazed in paddocks which average 32 hectares in size. The stocking rate is around 60 cows with calves. Paddocks are generally grazed for 3 weeks; however this can vary to 2 weeks if cows have calves or longer if cows are calving. To optimise feed quality and minimise the impact of internal parasites, the more susceptible weaners get first pick of a paddock, these are then followed in the rotation by older stock. Throughout the year each paddock would receive approximately 40 weeks growing and 10 weeks grazing. Andrew aims to have his cows calving throughout the year, although more recently drought has impacted on management and mobs have been consolidated to two – one mob calving in summer and the other from May to October.

Cropping at 'Warilba' is undertaken on a 6 year plus rotation. 160-200 hectares are generally cropped with barley and oats, and rotated with lucerne and clover pasture. Around 400 tonnes of hay is produced annually (pasture, oats, barley, lucerne, clover). Crops and pastures receive applications of the biodynamic preparations 500, 501 and Cow Pat Pit sprays. These are the only inputs used in production.

Andrew markets his weaners at around 400-420kg live weight. The livestock are slaughtered at Bush's abattoir. Andrew aims to achieve a fixed price for his product throughout the year.

Returning to the cattle yards, tour participants then gained first hand experience in how to assess livestock for market. NSW DPI Beef Officer Michael Campbell gave a demonstration on how to undertake a live animal assessment, which included fat and muscle scoring and weight estimation.

Cleavers Organic Meats and a fantastic organic dinner

Wednesday evening saw tour participants and local organic producers get together for a fantastic organic dinner at Halls Cottage Café in Narrandera. Diners were treated to a choice of organic lamb or chicken mains, coupled with a selection of excellent organic wines from Rosnay. Networking was the order of the evening with many old acquaintances being renewed and some new ones being made.

Guest speaker during the dinner was Ken Taylor from Cleavers Organic Meats, a successful organic meat wholesaling business. Many of the Riverina producers present at the dinner sell livestock to Cleavers and welcomed the opportunity to have an in-person discussion with Ken. Cleavers market a range of organic meats including beef, lamb, duck, pork and chicken.

Organic News.

Day 2

'Green Grove'

Day 2 of the tour began with a visit to 'Green Grove', the property of well known Ardlethan organic producers Alan and Jesse Druce. 'Green Grove' is a 1,100 hectare property which has been owned by the Druce family since 1918. Alan has been farming organically at 'Green Grove' since 1962.

Now in its 4th Druce family generation, 'Green Grove' utilises an ecological approach to farming. This is achieved using mineral fertilisers and sheet composting, livestock to recycle nutrients and facilitate weed management, long legume based rotations consisting of 5 years of pasture followed by 2 years cropping (wheat followed by oats or rye), and strategic cultivations to manage weeds and conserve moisture.

Alan and 'Green Grove' have a long association with organic farming research. Since 1987, the Australian National University (ANU) has monitored organic practices at 'Green Grove' and compared these with conventional farms in the district. This long history of organic farming and research was recognised internationally when, in 1998, 'Green Grove' was presented at the 7th International Conference of Ecology in Florence, Italy, as a significant organic research site.

The tour focussed on livestock production at 'Green Grove', however, participants did have the opportunity to view an impressive crop of spelt wheat. Spelt is an 'ancient' (around 6,000 years old) cereal grain belonging to the same family as wheat and oats. Spelt is making a comeback in popularity, particularly for the health food market, due to its lower gluten content and suitability for organic production. Alan's son Neil, purchases the wheat and spelt produced at 'Green Grove' for processing at his award winning organic liquorice factory and flour mill at Junee (see story this issue).

Whilst cropping has always been the main emphasis at 'Green Grove' more recently the livestock enterprises have been under the spotlight. Alan is in the process of shifting the emphasis of his sheep enterprise away from wool production and towards meat production.

Using both White Suffolk and White Dorper genetics, a maternal line of sheep is being developed at 'Green Grove' that offer the outstanding characteristics of both breeds.

White Dorpers, a breed originating in South Africa, are renowned for their easy care characteristics which minimal treatment for lice, flies and in most cases, no shearing. They are also gaining a reputation for a high resistance to internal parasites. They have one of the highest feed conversion ratios of all sheep breeds and display high muscling and an ability to survive extreme conditions. Lambs are small and robust and the ewes make great mothers and are non seasonal breeders. Cleavers indicated a preference for Dorpers, reflected by a premium of 20 cents/Kg over Merino crossbreds.

The White Suffolk is itself a composite breed and has been developed to suit Australian conditions. There are many attributes of the White Suffolk that are similar to the White Dorper. Clean face and points, easy lambing, high feed conversion ratio and hardy fertile rams are just a few. However there are some attributes that when bred into a composite, improve the advantages of the White Dorper. Carcase length and leanness are two of the greatest assets of the White Suffolk and it is these that, when selectively combined with the White Dorper, result in an outstanding terminal sire.



Above: Tour organiser Michael Campbell (left) and NSW DPI Livestock Officer Geoff Duddy explain live animal assessment at Alan Druce's (center) farm "Green Grove".

Organic News.

At “Green Grove” a maternal line that originated from a White Suffolk/Merino cross has been developed. The White Suffolk is not a wool sheep and many display shedding characteristics such as clean bellies and no wool on the upper legs and neck. These 1st cross lambs were then joined to either pure White Dorper or 75% White Dorper composites and the ewe portion has been selected favouring those that displayed a high percentage of the White Dorper characteristics. With the high potency of White Dorper genetics, most ewes displayed these characteristics.

The next step is to cross these ewes with composite rams that have even greater length and slightly lower White Dorper percentage in an attempt to improve even further the carcase quality and reduce the risk of fibre contamination of the carcase in the killing room.

David and Mary Booth, “Buronga”

The next stop for the tour was a visit to the farm of David and Mary Booth at Bethungra. David and Mary made the move to Bethungra from Cobar in the central west of NSW a few years ago, and recently received A-grade organic certification for their 1,600 hectare farm. Mixed cropping and live-stock (goats, sheep and cattle) are the focus of their farming activities.

Currently “Buronga” carries 1,300 South African Boer cross breeding does, the majority of which were sourced from a largely feral flock at their former rangeland operation. The Boer cross grows quicker and is better suited to farming in the ‘wetter’ districts and is stronger genetically for meat quality and production.

The goats have provided an excellent ‘organic’ weed management tool. As browsers, goats are basically pasture toppers so they eat the seeds off plants lowering the seed burden of problem weeds such as thistles, Patterson’s curse and some grasses, and by using them in rotation with the farm’s sheep and cattle and cropping can substantially reduce weed populations. David and Mary stress that good fencing is essential for effective goat management. The goat meat, or chevon, is processed by a local butcher into gourmet sausages and meat pies. Tour participants tasted these during a BBQ lunch provided by our hosts - and can vouch that they are indeed excellent products. The Booth’s currently market these locally and at farmer’s markets in Wagga Wagga.

Other livestock run at ‘Buronga’ include 1300 White Dorper, Dorper and Wiltshire cross ewes - organic lamb is marketed directly to Eco Meat Belconnen Markets in Canberra; and 150 pure Angus beef cattle, 130 of which are currently on agistment on an organic certified property at Merriwa.

Despite below average seasonal rainfall, pastures and crops at “Buronga” looked excellent. Pastures consisted of oats, vetch and clovers. David pointed out the importance of achieving accurate sowing to manage weeds. David showed us one area in a wheat crop where he had failed to get good sowing coverage into the corner of a field. This area had a significant weed population, whilst in other areas that had received good sowing coverage (no gaps) there was no evidence of weeds. Other crops included wheat, rye and spelt. The certified organic grain is sold to Green Grove Organics where it is processed into flour. Inputs used include the organic fertilisers Maglime, Emfert and Granulated Guano.

Griffith Butchery, Canberra

The final stage of the tour saw a long haul to Canberra to visit Griffith Butchery. This stage of the tour really brought home to producers the importance of following their product all the way through the production and supply chain to the retail and consumer levels.

Established by Richard Odell, the butchery specialises in biodynamic lamb, beef and pork, as well as certified organic chickens. The butchery is certified by the Biodynamic Research Institute (BDRI) and with HACCP



Above: Excellent legume and oat pastures at “Buronga”

Organic News.

accreditation, has embraced a Quality Assurance (QA) framework as a platform for delivering its specialised products. The formal biodynamic certification has been a powerful marketing tool for the business and has provided discerning customers with confidence in the integrity of production, manufacturing and retail processes, and in particular, that they satisfy the strict Demeter biodynamic standards. Preparation of the HACCP plan formalised processes such as the treatment of animals in the abattoir and the transport of meat. These requirements have been incorporated in the QA documentation along with tracking procedures to enhance the integrity of the Butchery's supply chain and hence its products.

Conclusion

Exhausted but enthusiastic - perhaps the best description for our organic livestock journey.

The Riverina organic farmers who so generously shared their knowledge and experiences with us should be commended for their pioneering spirit and foresight. In many instances organic farmers are often isolated by conventional agriculture, criticised as luddites or 'just being different'.

On the contrary, the farmers and farms we visited during the tour demonstrated how receptive they are to innovation, how attuned they are to their farming environment and to meeting the needs of their livestock,

and to providing consumers with products that have been produced with pride and integrity. Whilst organic farming is undoubtedly a challenge, these farmers are embracing that challenge.

However, integrity for organic products extends beyond the farm gate. In today's marketplace it is not sufficient to rely on the 'organic' label as the sole selling point. Overwhelmingly the message from this tour is that farmers, processors, wholesalers and retailers must now work together and focus on developing a consistent supply of quality organic livestock products. The first stage is for producers to define their production and supply pathways, followed by establishing effective supply chain management. Market specifications, codes of practice, and quality assurance need to be developed. Credibility with the product in the marketplace needs to be gained. Marketing alliances however, will only be effective if producers work together to develop the market pathway, become involved and be aware of the program. Communication is a key ingredient throughout all of the supply chain.

Acknowledgements: The tour organizers would like to thank the following people who kindly donated their time, knowledge and experiences during the tour: Keith and Linda Cox, Andrew and Mieca Steiner, Alan and Jesse Druce, David and Mary Booth, David Blake Manager, Bush's Abattoir, Ken Taylor Managing Director, Cleavers Organic Meats, Griffith Butchery, Geoff Duddy Livestock Officer (Sheep) NSW DPI, Yanco, and Jeff House Livestock Officer (Beef) Forbes. Thanks also to Rosnay Organic Wines who kindly donated wine gift packs for the tour.

For further information contact:

Robyn Neeson Organic Farming Liaison Officer
NSW DPI Yanco on (02) 6951 2735; email:
robyn.neeson@agric.nsw.gov.au

Michael Campbell Livestock Officer (Beef)



Right: Organic Boer goat crosses at David and Mary Booth's property "Buronga"

Leeton Farming Women's Group Visit to Junee and Cootamundra

Leeton Farming Women's Group has been operating for the last two years, with a core group of about 15 members. The objective of the group is to increase the level of knowledge, skills and confidence of women living on farms, so that they can participate more fully in their farming business. The group is coordinated by Mary-Anne Lattimore, District Agronomist NSW DPI Yanco and supported by the Murrumbidgee CWA who have provided catering and childcare for the meetings.

Recently the Leeton Group paid a visit to the Junee and Cootamundra area, to gain a perspective of dryland farming. The trip was organised by Phil Bowden, District Agronomist NSW DPI Cootamundra, and the Junee and Marrar Ag'n'chat groups.

The visit, sponsored by Riverina Agricultural Women (RAW) and NSW DPI, included a wheat and canola farm, the Junee Licorice and Chocolate factory and Cootamundra Oilseeds.

The bus trip gave the ladies the opportunity to discuss a wide range of topics related to farming and rural communities, and allowed them to discuss the problems and common interests of farming women in a different area.

Highlights of the trip included:

The Junee Licorice and Chocolate Factory & Green Grove Organics

Founded in the 1850s, the factory was originally a flour mill. In recent years it has been renovated and set up as a certified mill for organic processing and manufacturing of chocolate and licorice for both niche and larger scale markets (eg supermarkets). Some products are exported to South Africa.

Licorice is an ancient medicinal herb which boosts the immune system, aids digestion and strengthens endurance. The licorice is made using local flours of different types including an ancient grain called spelt and licorice root powder grown in Finley NSW. The organic chocolate is a Belgian style chocolate which is also reputed to have health benefits.

The factory also mills organic flours which are marketed as Green Grove Organic flours. By-products are sold to local stockfeed companies. The business includes a restaurant and tearooms and sells products direct to the public. They also conduct tours of the factory which helps to generate income and sales. There are also plans for the development of a function centre and B&B.

This visit highlighted the benefits of value adding and is a good example of an enterprising small business which is generating jobs and income for rural communities.

Cootamundra Oilseeds, Geoff Black, Managing Director

Cootamundra Oilseeds is the largest cold pressed crushing plant in Australia. It was set up about 12 years ago by a group of local canola growers in an effort to get greater returns for their produce.

Two existing plants currently crush about 16,000 tonnes canola/year (30 t/day) and employ 23 people. They are presently building their third plant which will increase capacity to 235, 000 t/year and create 38 new jobs. The cold crushing process means that none of the goodness is lost from the oil through heat or chemicals. The oil is filtered and refined to obtain a clear, quality product.

Organic News.

The business sources grain from throughout the region, including organic grain from the Hay area and will be looking for more in the future. Other oils crushed by Coota' Oilseeds include safflower, sunflower, soybeans, linola, monola and jojoba. Products are packaged in small glass bottles, special metal Japanese gift packs, 20 L drums, 10 L plastic bladders in a box and large plastic vats which go to feedlots.

Oils are marketed to small niche markets including export. They also supply Woolworths with some specialty products in innovative packaging (eg. "bag-in-a-box"). Canola meal is sold to feedlots, pig and poultry farms. Other future by-products may include margarine, soap and biofuels.

Canola normally contains about 35% oil. The drought has reduced oil production by about 20%, whilst increasing the cost of production by 15% and also increased maintenance costs markedly, so the company is hoping for a better season so that it can better compete with its large scale competitors.

Geoff highlighted the value of cold pressing and of canola oil, a mono-unsaturated oil with good human health benefits (high in Omega 3). Other "good oils" include safflower, sunflower, corn and extra virgin (cold pressed) olive oil; whilst palm, coconut and cotton seed oil which are great for frying, are highly saturated (ie. "unhealthy").

Once again, this was a good example of an innovative business in a rural community and a possible market for their grain in the future.

Contact: Mary-Anne Lattimore, District Agronomist NSW DPI, Yanco .



Above: The Old Flour Mill Junee. The mill, now the home of Green Grove Organics, is owned and operated by Neil Druce and produces a range of organic licorice and flour products.

Organic agriculture in China – a postcard

The following story written by Sam Statham and Simone Le Mesurier of Rosnay Organic Farms at Canowindra chronicles yet another organic adventure — their recent trip to China.

This month's edition of Organic News features Part 1 of their epic journey.

“No GMOs” said the customs and quarantine video, played on our Air China flight as we descended for landing. Behind the words, an image of millions of small, pea size seeds – soy beans... and behind the image, a message to the world – China is protecting its heritage and security by protecting its seed bank and farmland. As organic farmers, we had nothing to fear, as our budget flight was arriving at midnight in Beijing, capital of China.

The purpose of our trip – to shatter our preconceptions, to broaden our horizons, to connect with like minded people from distant cultures. In particular, we wanted to see for ourselves what level the organic industry has reached in modern China, remembering that the years of severe famine that from 1959 to 1976 probably killed about 30 million people. How can such a huge country of 1.3 billion people, possibly follow the organic foods movement in the West, where according to the USDA, the certified organic cropland doubled from 1992 to 1997 to reach 1.3 million acres?

We looked into it. In 1990, China officially announced its plans to commence the development of Green Food, in what was called the Green Food Project. Green Food included organically grown foods and foods that were free of chemical contamination. By the end of 2000, green food certification was granted to 1,831 kinds of food products with the total output of 15 million tons and cultivated area of 1.35 million hectares (Dharmananda, 2004).

However, organic food goes beyond Green food, which is more focused on having food free of detectable contaminants. Organic food is certified with a focus on the sustainable methods by which the food is produced without needing chemicals, and with minimal risk of contamination, and always ends up free of contaminants. Since 1994, the Organic Food Development Center (OFDC) has been the main organic certifying body in China, beginning as an organization within the Nanjing Institute of Environmental Science (NIES) under the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) of China. It is accredited by the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM), placing it on a par with the ACO and NASAA, in Australia. OFDC has branches in 11 provinces and regions, there are 35 qualified inspectors, and there are rigorous standards for organic food production and processing, and for regulating the use of the OFDC organic logo, which is registered and protected by law in China.

Meanwhile, there are several overseas certifiers active in the export oriented sectors, including ECOCERT International and Bio Control Systems (BCS) in Germany; Institute for Marketecology in Switzerland and Germany; the Soil Association in England; and the Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) from the U.S.

Thanks to OFDC and the foreign certifiers, by the year 2000, more than 100 kinds of products were grown organically and certified, valued at more than US\$20 million. The products include tea, honey, soybean, buckwheat, wheat, sunflower seeds, pine nuts, pumpkin seeds, walnuts, condiments, milk powder, and some traditional Chinese medicines. These products were mainly exported to Great Britain, Japan, America, Holland, Canada, Germany, France, and Australia. By 2000, there were 9 research groups that carried out research on organic food; nearly 30 companies undertook trade in organic foods; more than 50 bases of organic food production; 5 organic fertilizer factories; and more than 30 processing factories that handled organic foods and herbs. (Dharmananda, 2004).

Our first stop on our China trip was OFDC. We had made contact well in advance, looking for farms to go “WWOOFing”. We also put together a slide show of organic farming in Australia, with the help of Tim Marshall, Paul Kristiansen, Robyn Neeson and others.

Organic News.



Left: Sam and Simone with some of their Chinese hosts during their recent trip to China

After a few days seeing the usual Beijing sights of the Forbidden City and the Great Wall, our organic farming tour of China began. Mr Xi, director of the Nanjing Global Organic Food Research and Consultation Centre (consultancy arm of OFDC), arrived at our backpacker hostel, and we boarded our first train. Destination – Panjing,

“If you follow the seasons and make proper use of the land, you will not have to put in much effort and will still get good results. If you do as you please and go against Nature, your labour will be in vain”.
From the Qi Min Yao Shu, by Jia Sixie, 544AD

Mr Xi is great company, his round face and big smile, simple and honest character, good English and knowledge of agriculture was a pleasure to be with. We chatted as northern China flew by our window, and it wasn't all picturesque. Some pretty devastated scenes of construction and quarrying, with little farm plots squeezed in wherever possible.

Preconceptions began to melt away and merge with realism as we entered China...A land of ancient civilization, empires and dynasties – now one of state controlled capitalism courting eager foreign capital. A land of fine art, Ming porcelain, and cheap plastic consumer goods, now equipped with mobile phones, bullet trains and the 2008 Olympics. A land of simple food and ancient farming traditions, now resisting the genetically modified revolution and pursuing its own Green and Organic Agriculture. A land of the Tao, Buddhism and traditional medicine, and now the new religions of money and western medicine. And for all that we heard about China's huge population, it was manifest only in the train stations and cities, not in the countryside.

By midnight we were in our hotel room in central Panjing, and next morning we met Mr Li, the director of OFDC, Dr Yin from the Panjing local government's environment department, and his two off-siders. After a big brekky we all piled into a van for a day visiting the organic farms and other sights of the region. It was quite an honour, and funny, being in this group of seven people.

As we drove through the city, Dr Yin told us that Panjing is actually one of the largest producers in China of petroleum, with Liaohe Oilfield boasting 10% of the country's reserves. Located at the northern extremity of the Liaodong Gulf in Lianing province (former Manchuria). It is a very new city, whose GDP ranks first in the whole of China. It is also a model “Ecological City”, designed with lots of trees, wide avenues with gardens, and new parks. We found this a funny contradiction – a petrochemical capital earmarked as a model green city!

However, the dedication of Dr Yin to his cause is serious. The Panjing government's support of organic farming shows in the strong relationships he had with all of the people who we met on our tour. The first was an organic pig farm, which was a winner of the Top 500 environmental projects by the United Nations in 1999. The OFDC certified farm runs about 6000 pigs with 120 staff on about 20 hectares. Whilst not truly “free range” (ie having constant free access to outside pasture) the pigs have plenty of room to move and good concrete pens, like two storey terrace apartments.

Organic News.

There are large “play pens” where they are periodically let out to run around, and the whole “pig village” is surrounded by beautiful gardens and flower beds, walkways covered in trellised grape vines, canals and ponds of water where the “salad” is grown for the pigs to eat. Some of the ponds contained greenhouses for the winter salad production, others had fish. Not a bit of space wasted, fruit trees even on the pond walls. The pig waste goes into the municipal waste system, though some of the water is reused in the ponds. The manure end of the business was the subject of our next destination.

After the usual round of farewells and photo parades we piled back into the van and wove through some pretty disastrous outlying towns, with new concrete roads contrasting with the potholed sections. Whizzing past more rice paddies and south facing greenhouses we entered a large yard with an apparently converted factory building now producing a Dynamic Lifter-type product from pig and poultry manure.

Whilst not looking like a huge scale composting unit and with the concrete homogenization and composting unit still quite new looking, the drying equipment in the adjacent ex-factory building looked old. It appeared to be mostly conveyors and ovens to produce the finished bagged product.

With somewhat less ceremony we piled back into the van and drove a few km to the next link in our organic supply chain tour – an organic rice farm. Or, more accurately, a group of rice farms. Whilst surrounded by conventional rice paddies we guessed there were buffer zones, and the irrigation water was direct from the river. The irrigation channels were full of water reeds and frogs, unlike others we had seen, and there were many types of frogs in the rice paddies, a good sign. A key element in the pest management was the use of crabs in the paddies, of which we saw several small ones and a big breeding pond, sufficient for the organic and conventional farms. Weed control, we guess, is by hand weeding and flooding.

Apparently the varieties planted are not the modern hybrids, as the organic farmers prefer the old strains for their superior flavour. As one of the northernmost rice producing regions in China, due to its maritime climate, Panjing is known as a source of high quality rice. Unfortunately, we met none of the farmers themselves, but there was a supervisor/certification manager there. It seems that the growers are individual peasant farmers, who are receiving a premium of around 30%. Conventional rice prices are historically low, though. When compared to the conventional rice paddies, the environmental advantages of organics were very obvious, and form a key part of the Panjing local government’s drive to be a model “Ecological City”.

Piling back into the van we went to an OFDC certified rice processing and packaging plant. On display in their large show room was a great range of packaged rice, both conventional, “green”, and organic. Excessive use of heavy duty plastic but apparently the thick paper bags used on some of the organic rice are the company’s best seller.

All in all it was a great day tour, in which we witnessed the huge potential for organic production, both for the economy and the environment. The potential is limited only by the size of the market, as consumers remain too cost conscious. But the day was not over!

We went back to the hotel where a sumptuous banquet lunch was waiting for us. We then had an afternoon of relaxed sight seeing. A long drive through the oil fields and rice paddies, huge canals, ponds and contour banks, construction site towns and bad roads took us eventually to Panjing’s famous World Heritage wetlands, over 80,000 hectares of potential rice paddies remain in their natural state of reeds and water, home to many local and migratory birds. After that we drove to the equally famous “red sea”, a small bay full of strange floating red plants, and surrounded by shallow water oil wells.

Back in Panjing, the finale of the day was a banquet dinner at the new looking “Pan Jing Ecological Restaurant”. We didn’t get to meet the owner, quite a respected elderly man, who also owns the organic pig farm and who was apparently a member of the national assembly at one stage. As the guests of the pig farm manager, a very lively man fond of rice wine and “gambe” (toasts and skulling of rice wine) we had a splendid meal of seafood, organic pig (Mao’s favourite recipe apparently), and a few other surprises (such as Simone inadvertently enjoying some ducks blood soup!). The restaurant’s most impressive aspect was the main interior hall, fully landscaped with gardens, ponds, waterfalls, mini rainforest, sculptures, cloistered eating areas, and a larger than usual display of fish tanks and strange creatures waiting for their moment to come.

Organic News.

The restaurant was hugely popular, full of people, with heaps of expensive black sedans parked outside. We hoped that this, and the rest of our day tour, was a sign of things to come in China...

“The most important thing is to allow the people to live in peace. They cannot be taught until there is abundance.” [Preface from the Qi Min Yao Shu, by Jia Sixie, 544AD]

The next day we had the pleasure of giving something back for the local hospitality. We went to Dr Yin’s office, where there was quite a good crowd of bureaucrats from his environmental office, farm advisors, and farmers. Mr Xi and Mr Li translated my talk and slide show, of which there were about 60 slide photos, taking about 2 hours. I talked about the different types of broadacre organic farms, organic horticulture operations, about the marketing of organic produce, and about our own farm. Quite a few questions were fired at us at the end, which was encouraging, and we hope that this will help to encourage the development of more organic farming in the Panjing region, and that we can continue to develop partnerships between Oz and China in this area.

Another banquet lunch, this time with some of Dr Yin’s juniors in the department, and we jumped back in the van for the 2 hour drive to Shenyang, the provincial capital, from where we were taking a plane to Nanjing. After crawling through the traffic in an otherwise uninteresting, chaotic city, we reached the airport, much better organized, modern and efficient, being just 2 years old. At 6pm we boarded for the 4 hour flight to Nanjing, where we were dropped off at the sumptuous Metropole Hotel.

End of Part 1. Next month’s Organic News sees Sam and Simone touring the farming regions of Nanjing and a visit to PLANK Organic Farm.

References:

Subhuti Dharmananda (2004) THE MOVEMENT TOWARD ORGANIC HERB CULTIVATION IN CHINA <http://www.itmonline.org/arts/organics.htm>

S.Z. Zhong (1984) Ancient China’s Scientists, Commercial Press, China

Organic Food Development Centre, www.ofdc.org.cn

Sam Statham works at Rosnay Organic Farms, a mixed cooperative farming project in the Central West of NSW, currently producing ACO certified organic grains, vegetables, olives and wines.

Organic News.

News, Publications, Commentaries and Events

Organic Foods Report 2003

This comprehensive report examines the entire organic value chain from growers and processors to manufacturers, distributors, retailers and consumers.

The 600-page report covers product categories, distribution trends, the supply chain, price premiums, market growth, consumer usage, the leading hundred companies and more indispensable information for business planning in this growing market.

Specifically featuring:

- Market Quantification: Size breakdowns and growth forecasts by eight food categories and 35 product types company rankings and market share.
- Strategic Analysis: Business strategies of independent manufacturers and multinational corporations including pricing trends.
- 60+ Company Profiles: Detailed coverage of leading manufacturers including sales, products and distribution strategies

Hundreds of interviews were conducted with company executives, consultants, analysts, government agencies, certification groups, associations and other industry sources in the course of compiling this report.

For a complete index of this report click on <http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/c5468>

New Crops Handbook

Australian landholders interested in diversifying now have access to production details for almost 70 potential new crops with the release of the New Crop Industries Handbook. The Handbook is divided into nine major sections: Asian Vegetables; Essential Oils; Fruits & Berries; Grains & Legumes; Herbs & Spices; Native Foods; Nuts; Wildflowers and Miscellaneous crops. It also includes an introductory chapter about the nature of new crops and the key factors to consider before making a decision about them. The Handbook is available for \$50 (inc GST & Postage). Copies can be purchased online at the [RIRDC eShop](http://www.rirdc.gov.au/eShop) or by phone (02) 6272 4819. (RIRDC On-line, 2004).

Organic Crops and Diseases

"The New Agriculture Network" (NAN) on-line newsletter, a periodic cooperative effort between a grower group and three U.S. universities with funding from the American Farmland Trust and area 5 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, carries seasonal advice for field crop and vegetable growers interested in organic agriculture. In a recent issue (vol. 1, no. 10, August 26, 2004) on the web at: <http://www.ipm.msu.edu/new-ag/issues04/08-26.htm> two plant pathologists discuss important aspects of organic crop disease management.

Free electronic subscriptions to NAN are available by e-mailing the message: subscribe organic_ag_news, to: <mailto:majordomo@listserv.msue.msu.edu>

15th IFOAM Organic World Congress in Adelaide in September 2005

Call for submissions

Submissions to the 15th IFOAM Organic World Congress are invited from all sectors: researchers, farmers, processors, traders, certifiers, policy makers, advisers and consumers.

Submissions are sought for:

- Oral presentations (15 minutes)
- Interactive workshops (5 minutes)
- Poster presentations
- Innovative/alternative presentations

Closing date for submission: 15 December 2004. More information can be found at: www.nasaa.com.au/ifoam2005

Organic News.

15th IFOAM World Congress Bulletin

The first IFOAM 2005 Bulletin has been published. These Bulletins will be published on a regular basis with the aim of keeping everyone in the organic movement up to date with the IFOAM Congress planning and associated activities.

For further details contact: Jan Denham, Conference Co-ordinator. Phone: (03) 5027 9249

E-mail: karra2@iinet.net.au

Sapphire Coast Field Days

The Sapphire Coast Producers Association (SCPA) is planning a small farms field days (the Sapphire Coast Field Days) at Bega on the weekend of 30-31 October. The theme is “Sustainable Living, Sustainable Farming, and Sustainable Production in the 21st Century”.

The target audience is small landholders looking for alternative types of crops and animal enterprises such as bush foods, native flowers and other types of cut flowers, organically grown vegetables, rabbits, goats, ducks, alpacas, olives, wine grapes, etc. and organic systems of farming.

Contact: Graham Savage. Phone: (02) 6493 2169; E-mail: ellwood.savage@bigpond.com

Annual Rutherglen Field Day, Thursday October 21st

Theme for the day is: Perennials for Profit and Preservation. Rutherglen’s Organic Prime Lamb experiment will be one component of the day and we will be talking about the perennial species mix that has been established on the in-conversion experimental site.

Contact: Viv Burnett, Rutherglen.. Phone: (02) 6030 4500

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 Neeson

NSW Department of Primary Industries

Yanco Agricultural Institute

YANCO NSW 2703 Email: robyn.neeson@agric.nsw.gov.au

DISCLAIMER

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.