



# Organic delivers

OCW has reviewed the evidence that organic farming delivers biodiversity benefits. It does. But the agenda has moved on: we are now more

concerned with balancing food production with agriculture's effects on climate change.

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## Easy Care sheep

A recent Farming Connect event presented Easy Care sheep to Welsh farmers. The Easy Care breed are known mainly for their ability to shed wool, so that they do not need to be shorn, but they also have better milk yields, heavier lambs at younger ages, and stronger hooves which resist foot rot. On organic farms, these sheep seem to have a greater ability to resist internal parasites which means that they require fewer worm drenches. There is also no need to dock lambs' tails, or for many other tasks related to the fleece.

Easy Care sheep are a breed well suited to organic farming because they are hardy, prolific, require the use of fewer drugs and have been selectively bred to lamb with minimal assistance. Says Philip Jones of OCW, "If the only negative aspects of keeping Easy Care sheep are that you will miss shearing day and use more paint for sheep identification, it would appear that the breed has a lot going for it!"

## Dairy farming

Scientists at Aberystwyth are heading an international project to support organic and low input dairy farming. The main aim of the project, that includes cows and goats, is to improve breeds and feeding methods to maintain productivity and to improve animal health and welfare, while meeting market demand for high quality milk. Farmers and small companies in the UK and Europe will be working closely with scientists to find new ways of doing this.

One of those companies involved is co-operative organic milk business Calon Wen. Roger Kerr, Managing Director, said: "Calon Wen is delighted to be involved in the project. Understanding and developing sustainable farming systems is going to be critical over the coming years as we ensure equity within the supply chain as the pressures for energy, water and land grow. Anything that aids our understanding of this and allows us to build a robust food system for the future has to be a priority."



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Agriculture affects climate through soil management, by locking up or releasing carbon dioxide in the soil, and by releasing greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide from fossil fuels, oxides of nitrogen, and methane. Fossil fuels are used in making farm inputs, including agrochemicals such as fertilisers, feeds, and fuels for tractors, and then in distributing food through the food chain.

Food security is about yields, and their sustainability. High yields may look good, but it is vital to look at the inputs needed to generate them, the long term impacts on soil quality and increasing needs for agrochemicals. In the UK, organic arable systems generally have lower yields than their conventional counterparts, and livestock growth rates may be slower, but they use fewer inputs.

It seems likely that a system such as organic farming which is designed to work with natural systems, and within the system's capacities, will be the most sustainable in the long term. However, productive organic farming requires a high level of knowledge, and inefficient organic farms will have higher carbon footprints than conventional ones. Currently farmers in Wales have great opportunities to gather information on best practice through the Farming Connect programme, and then, whichever approach is chosen, the optimum use of resources and farm productivity lies with the individual farmers.

For more information on two reports examining the evidence of organic farming impacts on biodiversity and on soil carbon, see [www.organiccentrewales.org.uk/publications.php](http://www.organiccentrewales.org.uk/publications.php).

## Royal Welsh Show 2011

Organic Centre Wales has secured a new and more prominent site in the Countryside Care Area for this year's Show, wide open to the general public and close to the new Welsh Government site. It will have new publicity material and displays to attract both farmers and consumers. The organic certification bodies will be present, as well as Farming Connect programme staff, who will be able to offer technical support and help. Farmers will also be able to register for the Organic Conversion Information Service and to discuss the change from the Organic Farming Scheme to Glastir. We look forward to seeing you there.



## Connecting to the public



A number of organic farmers have attended training courses as part of the Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS) delivered by FACE Cymru in recent years. The course prepares farmers for welcoming school visits, and farmers are supported to attend it under the Farming Connect Skills Development Programme. One such farmer is Jim Bowen, who went on to attend a new CEVAS course on 'care farming', or using farm activities to benefit people with special needs. Jim is opening a social and therapeutic horticultural unit at his farm, Clynyf, in Pembrokeshire. In addition to this, some organic farms will be receiving visits from schools and the public as part of the BOBL project, in conjunction with the Soil Association.

## New factsheets from OCW

Here is a list of factsheets published in recent months. They are all available from the website or by calling OCW.

- Disease prevention and veterinary treatment in organic farming
- Measuring grass
- Organic paper work
- Cell counts and mastitis
- Non-organic seed derogation
- Managing weeds in organic cereals
- Getting the best from organic fruit and vegetables: Growing for quality
- Getting the best from organic fruit and vegetables: Post harvest
- Getting the best from organic fruit and vegetables: Retailing and presenting fresh produce
- Growing cereals for human consumption

## Cutting supply chain costs

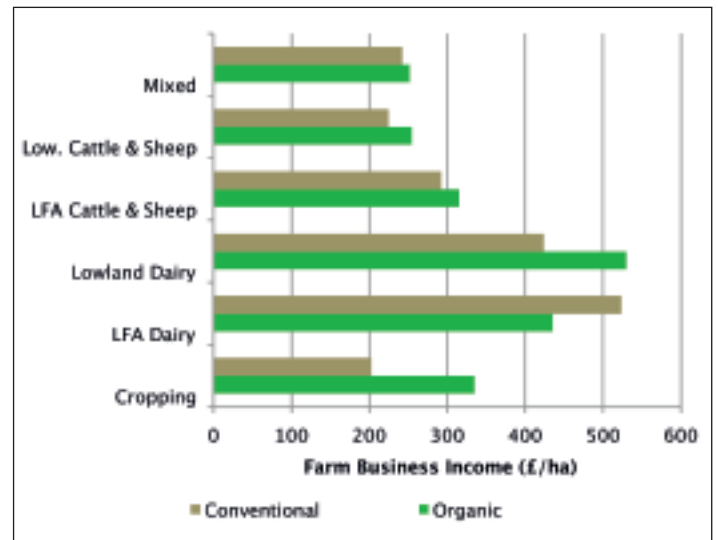
Organic businesses have an opportunity to take part in a programme to enhance their sustainability. Participants will receive free help and business consultancy from sustainability experts Weir Total Supply Chain Sustainability. The project will examine participants' supply chains, identify opportunities for improvement and develop sustainability action plans that could result in up to 25% reduction in supply chain costs.

The project analyses a wide range of sustainability issues including the environmental factors energy, waste, water, land stewardship and food miles. It also covers ethical and social factors such as working practices, commercial relationships and community development. "This work is funded through the Better Organic Business Links and was an idea suggested by businesses when the project was planned," said Lucy Watkins of OCW, "so if you would like to take part, let us know soon".

Please contact **Lucy Watkins** or your Field Officer for more details.



## Organic farm incomes remain slightly ahead of conventional systems



A comparative study of farm incomes on 185 organic and 785 conventional farms in England and Wales found that organic farm incomes remained higher than conventional farms for most farm types for 2009/10. Organic lowland dairy, cropping, cattle and sheep and mixed farm types were more profitable than their conventional counterparts. The Defra-funded study, carried out by Aberystwyth University and the Organic Research Centre, suggested that organic LFA dairy did not perform as well as conventional systems mainly as a result of high feed and other livestock costs.

Both organic and conventional cattle and sheep farms were highly dependent on support payments: agri-environment payments made up between 15 and 20% of total farm income for organic LFA and lowland cattle and sheep holdings, with conventional farms lower at 5 to 10%.

For further information contact OCW.

## Oversowing pasture for quality and yield



Farmers are increasingly looking at improving pasture quality and yield without ploughing. Renovating pastures by oversowing seed is quicker and cheaper and doesn't take land out of production for as long, and as the soil is largely undisturbed, there are fewer chances for new weeds to grow.

Before oversowing it's important to find out why the grassland isn't very productive. Is it because the soil is compacted, so that roots cannot access nutrients, or is it because the soil does not contain many nutrients in the first place? It's a good idea to dig a hole to find out more about the soil: are there earthworms, is it clay or sand and would

aeration help? It's important to test for pH and the key nutrients, phosphorus and potassium, which will affect the growth of the new seeds. Keeping soils fertile and healthy is key to organic farming. This is achieved by good management of farmyard manures and slurries, including composting, making the most of clovers to 'fix' nitrogen from the air to the soil, and making conditions right for an active earthworm population.

Next, it's vital that seeds have the right conditions to germinate and establish. Careful management is needed to create an open sward, and this is often best done following a silage or hay cut. The existing sward can then be grazed until the seedlings emerge, using light on/off grazing to stop the new seedlings being smothered or eaten. Mid July to August is the best time to oversow in order that the clover can become established before the winter, and there is also less competition from grass growth at this time of year.

The risk of failure is higher with oversowing, but ploughing is more expensive, so it is important to assess the situation on the farm. If you need more information please contact the Grassland Development Centre on 01970 823026.

### Welsh organic bread

Last year, organic wheat was grown at one of the Aberystwyth University farms for milling at Felinganol, Llanrhystud. Mixed with white flour, or used to make a sourdough, it produces an acceptable loaf with a great flavour. As interest grows in local food, this could be a good opportunity for farmers who already grow cereals for livestock and are interested in trying something new. OCV recently held a farm event to explore the subject, and a factsheet is available. If you are interested, please contact Phil Jones at OCV.

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Organic Centre Wales produces two free monthly e-bulletins: go to our website.

The Organic Development Programme is delivered by Organic Centre Wales on behalf of Farming Connect



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