

# **PARTICIPATORY CONSULTATIONS WITH FARMERS AT TWO OPEN MEETINGS ON ORGANIC FARMING**

**Meetings report: 23<sup>rd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> January 2001, Plumpton College, Plumpton, near Lewes, East Sussex**

## **Introduction**

### **Aims**

- To help increase conversion to organic status
- To provide farmers and producers with increased opportunity to ask experts questions about conversion and running a farm/holding as organic status.
- To determine the common concerns about conversion to organic status

### **Structure**

Two duplicate open meetings were held at Plumpton Agricultural College, one in the morning and one in the evening to accommodate farmers' various commitments. Guest speakers were invited from the Soil Association, and local organic farming community to give short presentations and to answer questions. There was also a facilitated discussion time to explore their concerns in more detail when farmers were split into groups to discuss issues in more detail.

### **Summary of findings**

- Facilitated discussion process proved very beneficial
- A number of issues were highlighted that OATES could address
- Most of the various existing forms of advice and information had their strengths.
- Much of the farmers' concerns centred around marketing.
- Widespread interest in more training sessions
- Widespread interest in developing co-operative marketing
- Interest in setting up farmer groups
- Interest in a regional Organic Centre with local information and experts
- Generally wanted increased access to low cost, local advice and information
- 36 farmers attended

# **1. Outcomes**

## **1.1. Areas where more advice needed**

- Farm Visits in the region
- Local Farm networks including existing organic farmers and those converting. Need to co-ordinate this to ensure remains focused and not too general
- Marketing ideas to help conversion and after.
- Form completion for conversion/ application of funding
- Suitability of farm for conversion
- Specific advice relating to farm type and situation- rotation, feed planning
- Problem avoidance, ie. Weed control, worm and disease control and avoidance
- Information on support services for organic farmers, abattoirs, vets, seed source, markets
- Long term crop rotations
- Financial advice

## **1.2. Other concerns about conversion**

### **a. structural**

- lack of available small pockets of land for small holdings
- shortage of labour supply

### **b. funding**

- funding for conversion is erratic and acts as obstacle to conversion
- can be difficult to time application for conversion with production cycle
- lack of recognition for role of organic farming on environment
- conversion grant may cover only part of the costs.

### **c. information**

- lack of knowledge of pest and disease resistant varieties

### **d. marketing**

- a need for labelling for 'food in conversion' / local
- need marketing web-site
- local marketing organisation/ initiative supporting local links for supply
- information on market demands and trends for developments
- advice for on-farm processing and added value
- cash-flow planning
- local marketing groups for info and increased efficiency
- links with consumers and retailers

### **1.3 Organic Centre**

Went through the role of Organic Centre's in other parts of the UK and how one in the South East could address some of the concerns listed throughout the meeting. The farmers present were interested and requested that the Centre should provide advice over an above that offered by OCIS, provide locally specific information and training and support for local marketing initiatives. The farmers were interested in somewhere that they could call in to receive information and where there were facilities for soil analysis.

### **1.4 Other Comments**

- Should farmers have responsibility for their product once it leaves the farm to reflect the requirement for whole farm responsibility?
- Conversion process cost one farmer £43,000 after receiving the grant.
- The Triodos bank is supportive and can provide loans to help farmers cover costs of conversion.
- Conversion to organic status has taken farmers from bankruptcy to stable financial situation and stimulated many opportunities that they had not predicted.
- Customers and general public's attitude to farmers is much more positive once registered organic.
- The importing of organic produce produced at lower standard is having a negative effect on the market for local producers.
- Farmers were advised to deal with soil analysis, NPK levels, and weed control before they begin conversion process
- Productivity levels are reduced to  $\frac{2}{3}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$  once converted to organic status for vegetables and need 0.25 area again for livestock to regain same production levels.
- Experience of advice received from Elm Farm Research Centre, Soil Association and consultants varied amongst the farmers from not very useful to very helpful, but paid advice was generally considered expensive.

### **1.5 Follow up queries**

- Abattoirs: Barbara Crawford, Sreams Farm, Ansty, Haywards Heath, RH15 5AL; Sheila Dray, 'Greenleigh' Sicklehatch Lane, Maynards Green, Heathfield.
- Co-opertaive marketing: Sian Griffiths, The Barn, Chapel Cross, Heathfield, TN21 9BD  
Find out more about information and services provided by the Scottish Colleges.

## **2. Potential for development of OATES project**

### **2.1 short term development**

- Financially support and organise local/ regional Farm visits
- Provide information on support services
- Organise co-operative marketing seminars
- Set up local farm networks
- Set up a web site
- Add to lobby on abattoirs
- Run training sessions locally that may duplicate Soil Association seminars, which are too far away for most farmers.

### **2.2 long term development**

- Develop an Organic Centre
- Co-ordinate farmer groups
- Manage a web site
- Support provision of specific on farm advice for conversion and on-going organic production
- Set up consumer, retailer and producer links
- Maintain information provision on support services, market outlets.
- Run courses on specific farm skills.
- Explore potential for Local Labelling for marketing

### **2.3. Other projects working in this area to co-ordinate with**

- R.O.S.E. Regional Organic South East. Set up by Soil Association to support networks of farmers in Kent and East Sussex. Mainly active in Kent. Lack funding, interested in working together. See report on meeting with Keith Obbard of ROSE.
- High Weald Unit, Land management Initiative- Diana Lock and the AONB Sally Marsh.
- English Nature and the South Downs Conservation Board, looking at local produce labelling and marketing.

### **2.4 Other**

- Two customers, *Jean and Geoff Harris, 25 Friar Road Brighton*, attended who bought all their produce direct from farms. Peter Mundy was interested in contacting them for a study on food consumption habits.

## 4. Details of Farmers who attended and speakers

### 4.1 Farm types and organic status

<b>Farm type</b>	<b>No. farmers attended</b>
Vegetable production	3
livestock	12
Mixed	14
Fruit	2
arable	2
unspecified	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Organic Status</b>	
Thinking about converting	1
Converting already	2
Organic status	1
Not stated	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>

### 4.2 Details of speakers

<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Peter Haynes</b>	Ashurst Farm, Plumpton	local organic vegetable producer with box scheme
<b>Martin Tebbutt</b>	Boathouse farm, Isfield, Nr Uckfield, East Sussex	Local organic mixed farm, farm shop
<b>Peter Mason</b>	Highlands Farm, Horam, Heathfield, East Sussex	Organic Beef, Sheep and Poultry farm.
<b>Matthew Wilson</b>	Oakwood farm, Robertsbridge, TN32 5BZ	Organic Top Fruit, potatoes,
<b>Charlie Troussel</b>	35 Ditchling Crescent, Brighton, BN1 8GD	Organic Composting
<b>Peter Mundy</b>	Soil Association	Producer Services
<b>Tamsin Brown</b>	Soil Association	Producer Services

## 5. Address list of farmers attended Open Meetings

No.	Name	Address	Farm Type
1, 2	Pledger	21 The Spinney, Burgess Hill, West Sussex	Veg production
3	RG Burf	Peke's Farm, Nash Street, Chiddingly, East Sussex	Beef, Corn
4	RJ Reading	Westwood trolliloes, Cowbeech, Nr Hailsham	Suckler Herd and Chickens
5	Mark Stroude	Culver Farm, Barcombe, Lewes, East Sussex	Veg, Arable, some livestock; (corn, potatoes)
6	PD. Chatterway	Highcross Farm, Little Horsted, Eastbourne Rd, Uckfield	Beef/arable
7	Martin Tebbutt	The Orchards, Clayhill	Mixed Organic
8	Richard Padfield	Great Danegate Farm, Eridge, Tunbridge Wells	Sheep/Bef/Cereals
9	Michael Fordham	Bradfords Farm, Little Horsted, Uckfield	Beef/cereals
10	Russell Thomas	Kennetts Bank Farm Witersham Rd, Peasmarsh, East Sussex, TN31 6TD	Arable
11	Nicholas Harvey	Woodbine farm, Cross in Hand, Near Heathfield	Beef/Sheep
12	David Prysley	Greenway fruit Farm	Apples and Pears
13	Mike Martin	Coombe Place farm, Offham, Lewes	Beef, Sheep, Arable
14	Matthew Martin	As above	As above
15	Miles Denyer	Barcombe Nurseries, Mill Lane, Barcombe	Organic vegetables for box scheme
16	Paul Crawley	Crouch farm, Barlavington, Petworth	Dairy, Beef, Arable
17	Gary Smallwood	Warren valley farm, Shoreham by Sea	Sheep and Beef
18	K. Uridge	Townings farm, North Chailey, Lewes	Mixed
19	Graham Love	Greenway Fruit farm, Herstmonceux	Apples and Pears
20	Robert Hall	Laurnece Gould, 28 Church Road, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 9AE	Farm Consultant/Farmer
21	Keith Langmead	Manor Farm, Poling, Arundel	Arable in conversion
22	Shelia Dy	226 Brodwick Road, Hampden park, Eastbourne, East Sussex	Organic interests
23	Peter Tolhurst	'Greenleigh', Sicklehatch Lane, Maynards Green, TN21 0BX	Beef/Polytunnel
24- 26	L. Preece/J. Skitt/H. Reeves	Fairfields Farm, Eastbourne Road, Westham, Pevensey, BN24 5NG	Sheep/ Suckler cows

27	A. F. R/Drell ?	Pound Cottage, Mayfield	Sheep/beef
28	G. Brickell	Froghole Farm, Mayfield	Mixed
29	Barbara Crawford	Streams farm, Ansty, Haywards Heath, RH17 5AL	Sheep, interested in trees/veg
30	Sian Griffiths	The Barn, Chapel Cross, Heathfield, TN21 9DB	In conversion, laying hens
31	Sue Poland	14 Hillbury Gardens, Ticehurst, East Sussex, TN5 7AT	Mixed
32	Emma Odgen	30 Thennden, Cowfold, West Sussex, RH13 8DU	Mixed farming and Farm Shop
33	Phillip Fermour	Owlsbury Farm, Jarvis Brook, Crowborough, TN6 3NL	Mixed
34-35	Edwina & Richard Moore	Herries, Canscun Lane, Ashurst Wood, West Sussex	Sheep and Poultry
36	Christine Dillinger	Kidsbrooke farm, Forest Row, East Sussex	Sheep and Poultry