

RESEARCH REPORT

Visit to Organic Centre Wales

30th-31st October 2000

Introduction

Aims

- To research the activities and partnerships set up in Wales to support organic agriculture and sustainable rural development.
- To determine what lessons could be brought back to support organic agriculture and sustainable rural development in Sussex as a part of the OATES project.

Issues of interest

- Organic Centre Wales (OCW) activities
- The role of the Welsh Development Agency, (WDA) and ADAS
- Targets
- Other regional initiatives
- Why the activities were established
- The mechanisms for delivery
- Project findings
- Lessons to bring back to the OATES project

Meetings held with

- Caroline Wachter (manager) and Jane Burnham (Information Officer) at Organic Centre Wales (OCW)
- Gwawr Price, marketing advisor of WDA
- Kevin Thomas, Food Directorate, WDA
- Richard Collier, project manager, ADAS

Summary of findings

The research highlighted the:

- Role of a successful regional organic producer/processor to act as a catalyst
- Demand for increased distribution of information and training
- Demand for more support in marketing from organic farmers
- Benefits of a networked support structure
- Role of ADAS and Cumbrian Organic Group in co-ordinating farmer networks.
- Role of farmer groups in encouraging local schemes.
- Role of farmer groups and OCW to act as a focus for information distribution
- High level of interest in direct marketing in and out of Wales
- Role of supporting links between producers, retailers and marketing groups

1. Organic Centre Wales

1.1 Why the Centre was set up

- For the dissemination of information about organic agriculture.
- As a combination of interest to support organic agriculture and the rural economy
- Influential interested parties: Gareth Rowlands, (Rachel's Dairy), Chair of Organic Strategy Group was very influential, also people in organic farming were influential in local and regional politics, eg. Patrick Holden of the Soil Association farms in Wales,
- To reach the target 10% organic farms by 2005.

1.2 Activities

- A Website aims to answer frequently-asked-questions eg: how to convert in Wales, lists of abattoirs, lists of where to buy seeds, etc.
- Organic Open Sessions
- Road Show
- Organic Information Day
- From Jan 1st 2001 OCW takes over Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) from Soil Association
- Training courses - 50 courses put on in 18 months, eg grassland management, dairy herds, etc. on-farm courses eg for vets. Training needs have been assessed informally through talking to farms, Soil association, etc. - no time for skills audit.
- Aberystwyth University offers Agriculture with organic agriculture Bsc honours.
- Everything the Soil Association will do in Wales will be done under the OCW.

1.3 Findings

- On target to reach 10% organic by 2005, to date there are around 390 organic farms
- Mostly lowland farms convert
- Upland farmers more reluctant as feel that their farms are already organic.
- The National Assembly very supportive, increasing Organic Farming Scheme overall to £4m, ie. to more farmers.
- Importance of the presence of a successful organic dairy producer and processor (Rachel's Dairy) to raise profile of Welsh products, provide role model and demand support for organic production.
- National Assembly has a commitment to increase organic horticulture production
- Organic Farm Foods, Lampeter, advisor, Woeter Woerts - works with horticultural producers in Wales and the UK.

2. Welsh Development Agency,

Gwawr Price, Organic Marketing Officer for 5b area of Wales,

Aim

Support organic farming in Wales.

Area

5b, all Wales apart from industrial area of South.

Support activities offered

- marketing advice
- financial health check
- give away copy of N. Lampkin and M. Measures 'Organic Farm Management Handbook'
- 50% grant scheme to pay for consultant to look at packaging, labelling etc.
- Grants for training and setting up Web site for internet marketing

Target Farmers through

- local newspapers
- respond to farmer details fed through from OCIS.

Issues

- Problems of maintaining a high standard of produce in face of huge demand and lack of supply
- Farmers mainly want advice on direct marketing to keep ownership of produce
- Farmers seeking markets outside of Wales as concern that the consumer base in Wales is not big enough, won't pay enough.
- Soil association talking about increasing the consumer base in Wales.
- Veg boxes in decline because of availability of organic veg in supermarkets.
- Will price premium fall as supply increases?

Richard Collyer ADAS, Pwllpeiran

Job title

Project co-ordinator of Cambrian Organic Group (COG), sponsored by ADAS, National Assembly for Wales, Soil Association and European Union Objective 5b funding .

Aims

Developing infrastructure for organic farming in Wales by increasing information and training provision and co-operation. COG does not actively promote organic food, sets up infrastructure to assist farmers to convert/be organic. Aims are finally to support rural economy and farmers rather than environmental as such. Funding finishes December 2001, when move to Objective 1, and 2.

Activities

- Pays for two full time co-ordinators Jenny Lampard and Colin Porter for the 6 farmer committees
- Conversion planning.
- Events organised by the 6 farmer committees.

Committee Role and Structure

- Six farmer committees, running autonomously across Wales.
- act as a voice/ platform for distribution of info and as a focus.
- Produce a newsletter
- Inaugural meetings invited farmers to be on committees
- organise events, courses, demonstration farm network
- Meet 6 times/year.
- Issues raised feed into ADAS and OCW

How fits in with other UK initiatives

Complements and fed by OCIS.

Findings

- Farmers interested are in difficult financial situations
- Mainly lowland farmers responded.
- Key themes are marketing, but situation is so dire, grateful for something to help them.
- The dominant place of Rachel's Dairy as a role model and as an outlet. When opened, 10 dairy farms converted. Now they are going to expand they expect more farms to convert to supply demand. Biggest stumbling block to growth in organic dairy farming has been lack of fresh milk buyer. But there now is and the demand is bigger than supply
- Useful activity is to bring marketing company to farmer committee meeting to discuss options, qu. & ans. session, hold a mini trade fair for farmers to display their produce

3. Other large organisations/projects working in Wales

3.1 Soil Association

- Objective I funding has been applied for to fund projects with schools in conjunction with the Soil Association (who are geared up for working with school children, consumer education, etc).
- Small Producer Scheme, joint certification very good in Wales. **Contact: Mike Carpenter in Wales or Cathy Wilson in Certification dept. at Soil Association to find out if any schemes in Sussex**
- Patrick Holden at a conference gave the following advice for organic agriculture in Wales:
 - Increase public awareness
 - maintain high standard of produce and resist downward pressure from NFU
 - Policy Makers keep up pressure with money going to information and marketing advice
 - fair price to producer from supermarkets
 - co-operation between producers not to push prices down.
 - maintain product authenticity - indigenous breeds, local varieties, etc.
 - have a Wales First food policy - buy local buy Wales eg in institutions such as schools and hospitals.
 - build consumer producer links.
 - make links with wider aspects of society and culture - language, arts, etc, eg Organic Farm Foods sponsored an arts programme.

3.2 Food Centre Wales

- Provides technical support for the Welsh food industry
- Knows the trends in the market
- Work with the WDA
- Has a Soil Association licence to process organic food.
- Provides training in organic processing
- Report: Jo Banks 1998, Organic Food Supply Chains in Wales. Cardiff Food Group, Food Centre Wales

4. Smaller-scale projects in Wales promoting organic agriculture

- **Powys Food Futures**

Links between local producers and consumers, own branding with farmers inspecting each others farms.

- **Organic Livestock Marketing Co-op**

Markets meat in England and Wales.

- **Meat co-operative in Aberystwyth, Bob Kennard, Graig farm**

Bob Kennard, Graig farm buys local, and now from further a-field sells all over UK by mail order. Producer loses identity on produce.

- **Lampeter Food Festival**

Run every year, lots of small producers, cookery stalls, etc. Opened this year by Prince Charles, sponsored by Organic Farm Foods, Chamber of Commerce, etc.

- **School Food**

Organic Farm Food, Lampeter sponsored a healthy eating day in a secondary school in Lampeter 3 years ago to undertake a study on cost effectiveness of rural health care delivery in Ceredigion

5. Table of contacts to follow up

| Contact name | Contact no. | Area of activity |
|---|---------------------|--|
| Richard Collyier | 01974 282 229 | Co-ordinator Cambrian Organic Group |
| Jenny Lampard | 01974 282229 | Co-ordinator for north and east Wales Organic Farmer Groups |
| Colin Porter | 01437 765238 | Co-ordinator for south and mid Wales Organic Farmer Groups |
| Hazel Thomas | | Lampeter Food festival |
| Paul Benham | | Selling to hotels direct, in WOOF newsletter |
| Dot James. | 01994 240237 | Direct marketing with box scheme and wholesaler |
| Resi Tomas | 01248 490578 | Direct marketing set up farmers' markets |
| Leslie Langstall, Inst. Rural Studies | Tel: 621529 | Linking public food service and local/organic food |
| Richard Pitts, | 01597 827573 | Powys Food Futures |
| Phil Stoker (Soil Association Producer Services) | 0117 929 0661 | Marketing of Welsh meat in England and Wales |
| Dai Miles | | Welsh milk farmers' group aiming to sell in Wales, sell mostly to Rachel's Dairy |
| Mary Western. | | Organic Livestock Marketing Group |
| Contact Mercia Hammond | Gwawr for tel. no.) | done a lot with the WDA on meat marketing |
| Anna Bohan and Law Boningdon (?), Soil Association Producer Services. | 0117 929 0661 | Role of OCW delivering Soil Association services |
| Colin Parker. | | Group in Aber. Set up meat co-operative |

6. Research Findings and Recommendations

6.1 Findings useful to OATES

- Key role of the Organic Centre Wales
- High demand for increased dissemination of information about conversion, local organic agriculture support services, and training
- High demand for training, support and co-ordination about marketing
- Demand for a Web site from farmers
- Farmers expressed high level of interest in more help with conversion planning
- Approach is multi –pronged tackling all aspects of organic production from completing conversion forms and extra business planning help to providing courses for vets and educating children.
- There is a whole network of multi-agency delivery. This means that there is support across the board for farmers converting and in organic status, but there is scope for confusion as to which agency to contact.
- The farmer groups provide a useful network and means of support, delivering appropriate training and marketing events. It is reliant upon farmers leading each group successfully.
- The co-ordinator helps to ensure the farmer groups are led successfully and not dominated by few individuals.
- There are a variety of links made between producers, marketing groups, retailers and consumers which prove very successful.