

### Organic farming: ammunition against climate change

Mariann Fischer Boel outlines the progress, challenges and benefits of organic farming at Biofach. At the event, Ms Fischer Boel, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, spoke of the need for good legislation to support organic farming. She believes that the new Council Regulation and implementing rules give the industry a firm structure.

This firm structure does not protect the sector from challenges but Ms Fischer Boel stated that these difficulties should not lead to hasty policy decisions. It is not the time for a new Organic Action Plan, she stated, but a "mid-term evaluation" was not out of the question.

### Growers Needed to Help Stop Plants Going to Seed

Vegetable growers are needed to trace traditional and unusual vegetable varieties that are still grown with a view to preservation for future generations.

Researchers at the Universities of Birmingham and Warwick are involved in the Defra funded project to safeguard vegetable varieties for future generations. This is the first stage of the project – the next stage will be to find growers of traditional fruit and other crop varieties to carry out a similar study.

There are many diverse traditional crop varieties still being grown in the UK which are culturally and historically important. They are also a rich source of genes needed to improve future crops to combat climate change and feed future generations. Researchers already know a lot about traditional grain and forage crops, such as wheat, barley, oats, clovers and ryegrass, but they need more information about traditional vegetables, including broccoli, cabbage, onion and pea.

Growers who would like to get involved in conserving these types of crops are urged to take part in this research project by contacting Shelagh Kell on 01297 678117 or email: [s.p.kell@bham.ac.uk](mailto:s.p.kell@bham.ac.uk)

Read the full story at [Organic Inform](#)

Speaking on climate change, Ms Fischer Boel suggested that organic farming had climate change challenges to face but could also provide a solution:

"Let's keep using organic techniques as ammunition against the problem of climate change. Because let's be clear: if we want to hit our greenhouse gas targets, we need all the ammunition we can get. Again research and development will be of huge importance."

Read the full story at [Organic Inform](#)

### Pirbright redevelopment scaled back

Defra has backed out of its plan to fund a major redevelopment of the Institute for Animal Health (IAH) lab at Pirbright, describing the investment as too expensive. A leaky drain at the facility was identified as the source of the last foot and mouth outbreak in the UK. This leaves concerns about the UK's ability to react to any future outbreaks.

Defra initially agreed to contribute £60 million to the new facilities, but will now be contributing £5 million to the estimated costs of a £10 million temporary laboratory.

Read the full story on [Organic Inform](#)

### Win a copy of *Organic Places to Stay*

The third edition of *Organic Places to Stay - UK and Ireland*, by Linda Moss has been completely revised and updated, with over 175 new entries. It now includes a selection of organic places to stay in Ireland (in addition to England, Scotland and Wales) and gives you all the information you need for an 'organic holiday'.

**Organic Inform has a copy of the book to give away to a registered user drawn at random.**

If you are already registered to receive a monthly newsletter, why not check that your contact details are still correct? Encourage your colleagues and contacts to register to continue supporting the Organic Inform project and its future.

Register on [Organic Inform](#) or [update your details](#).

## Is the market for organic livestock products holding up better than expected?

Media reports, most recently in the Farmers Guardian (06/02/09) have highlighted the challenges being faced by organic businesses in the face of the credit crunch, but is the idea of a crisis being made worse by failing to make comparisons between years and between organic and conventional sectors?

A new analysis of the retail market for organic meat for Organic Centre Wales using TNS data shows that organic meat sales in the four main multiples (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Asda) were higher in 2008 than in 2007, only dipping below 2007 levels briefly for one 4 week period in the autumn. By contrast, conventional meat sales in the same retailers were lower in 2008 than 2007 for most of the year. Of course, if you compare the spring peak and the late summer/autumn trough within a year, you can show a sharp decline in sales for both conventional and organic sectors, but this is part of a seasonal trend which occurs every year.

What is also true is that organic supplies and conventional prices have also been increasing, with the result that the organic premium has come under pressure. Price data made available to Organic Centre Wales by Graig Producers indicate that for beef the premium has all but disappeared, and it is significantly reduced for lamb. However, because of the rise in conventional prices, the prices received by organic producers in 2008 were as good as 2007 for beef and better for lamb. OCW calculates that at these higher prices, even if there is no price premium, there are still opportunities for lower costs elsewhere to generate better margins under organic conditions.

Similar patterns can also be seen for the milk sector. So while the economic situation may be challenging, it does not appear to be the disaster implied by the media. But why spoil a good crisis story?

Read the full story and see the figures on [Organic Inform](#)

### OMSCo launches demonstration farms

The Demonstration Farms Programme consists of six selected organic farms that will be used as role models from which others can learn. The farms, selected on reputation and through an application process, are located across the country.

OMSCo hopes that the Demonstration Farms will be centres where farmers can meet, view and discuss technical and management issues, using real life examples and experiences. A key goal of the programme is to help farmers improve the profitability and quality of their farming businesses through the sharing of best practice and knowledge transfer.

For more details, visit [Organic Inform](#)

## Forthcoming Events:

### Organic Cereals Research Day

Wheat agronomy, wheat breeding and intercropping-  
Wednesday 4 March 2009  
Wakelyns Agroforestry, Suffolk

### Soil: The Forgotten Farm Asset?

Dr Liz Stockdale is a leading expert in soil science. This will be a fantastic opportunity to broaden your knowledge of soil management.  
Friday 6 March 2009  
Abbey Home Farm, Cirencester

### Organic Farming and SRDP seminar

Making a successful organic SRDP-RP application.  
Tuesday 24 March 2009  
Birmam, Dunkeld

### Lupins: risks and opportunities

A stakeholder meeting.  
Wednesday 25 March 2009  
Harper Adams University College

### Abacus Organic Study Tour

A tour of farms and the Lois Bolk Institute in the Netherlands.  
Monday 30 March 2009 to Thursday 2 April 2009

### BBOP meeting

Surviving the Credit Crunch – cutting costs in organic egg production  
Thursday 2 April 2009  
The Good Egg Company, Herefordshire

### Soil and Soil Management Seminar

OGA event: An opportunity to learn more about the precious resource under your feet.  
Monday 6 April 2009  
Tolhurst Organic Produce, Berkshire

### National Organic Cereals 2009

Practical and realistic advice on the benefits and challenges of turning to organic production – or expanding existing acreage.  
Thursday 9 July 2009  
Shimpling Park Farm, Suffolk

### 1st International IFOAM Conference

on Organic Animal and Plant Breeding - Breeding Diversity  
Tuesday 25 August 2009 to Friday 28 August 2009  
Sante Fe, New Mexico

For full details on these and other events, visit:  
[Forthcoming Events](#)

## Organic Farm Management Handbook 2009

The eighth edition of the Organic Farm Management Handbook is now available. Price: £19 including P&P. To order your copy, telephone 01488 658279 or email [elmfarm@organicresearchcentre.com](mailto:elmfarm@organicresearchcentre.com)

## Local not always better for the environment

Shopping locally may not be as good for the environment as having food delivered, according to new research by the University of Exeter.

Published in the journal Food Policy, the study shows that, on average, lower carbon emissions result from delivering a vegetable box than making a trip to a farm shop. The study found that if the average car journey made to a farm shop is a round-trip of more than 6.7km, home delivery was a better option, even if the competing farm shop used no lighting, heating or chilling. While a delivery van will travel up to 360km to deliver an organic vegetable box, this trip will cover a large number of addresses, resulting in low carbon emissions per customer.

Read more at [Organic Inform](#)

## Food Futures: Rethinking UK Strategy

The UK food chain needs to be prepared to manage continued volatility in global food markets, says a new Chatham House report. The report is part of the "UK Food Supply in the 21st Century: The New Dynamic" project.

Read more at [Organic Inform](#)

## New green farming guide launched

A new one-stop shop practical guide to help farmers, growers and land managers protect the environment effectively is now available. "Protecting our Water, Soil and Air: A Code of Good Agricultural Practice for farmers, growers and land managers" is available from the Defra website and is suitable for all farming systems, including organic farming.

Read more at [Organic Inform](#)

## OCIS: free advice for organic conversion

Free Organic Conversion and Information Service (OCIS) helpline number: **0800 980 0048**

Read more at [Organic Inform](#)

The Organic Inform project is supported under the England Rural Development Programme by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund.



## Market updates

### Eye on the market: Horticulture

Latest prices from the Soil Association and HDRA (Prices collated February 2009).

### Kingshay: Organic Dairy Production

Organic market and yield information from Kingshay have been published by DairyCo (February 2009).

### Livestock, dairy and eggs

Latest prices from the Soil Association (Prices collated October / November 2008)

### Organic Grain Market Update

Prices and commentary on the organic grain market (February 2009).

## Naked oats for poultry

A recent article in Farmers' Weekly examines the potential for using naked oats to feed poultry.

A potentially good way of reducing organic feed costs is to grow your own. Home grown cereals can help producers to become less reliant upon imports whilst staying in control of their feed costs.

Heather McCalman of the IBERS Grassland Development Centre, Aberystwyth, comments that "Naked oats are an ideal crop for marginal areas, where the climate and soils aren't suitable for growing wheat and can help organic producers meet the 100% organic feed rule even on mainly grassland farms."

Read more at [Organic Inform](#)

## And finally:

Proceedings from this year's Organic Research Centre Producer Conference are now available online.

If you were unable to attend, I hope you find this a good insight into the details of the conference - and that we will see you next year.

For those of you who did attend, I do hope that the document provides a valuable reminder of all the things you planned to do when you returned to the farm!

Proceedings now available from [Organic Inform](#)