

# MANX ORGANIC NETWORK

## MOGGYL ORGANAGH VANNIN

**Welcome** to our first edition of the Manx Organic Network (MON) Newsletter. For those of you who are not familiar with our group we would like to take this opportunity to give you a brief synopsis of our beginnings. In December 2003 DAFF invited Charlie Wannock, a Scottish, organic farmer and organic inspector to give a talk at Knockaloe Farm, Kirk Patrick, concerning the future of organic farming. Following this optimistic and realistic talk an in depth discussion ensued. It became obvious to all those in attendance that there was a very real interest in progressing the ideas discussed, a key point of which was the desire to increase the availability of locally produced Manx organic produce. Monthly meetings of lively discussions ensued and in April it was agreed that the time was right for us to expose ourselves at the two agricultural shows due in July and August. A leaflet and straw poll were economically produced while space on other sympathetic exhibitors stands were begged and borrowed. This is where many of you would have come across us for the first time and as a direct result of the fantastic response our movement has moved forward in leaps and bounds. We meet on a regular basis at Knockaloe Farm and our immediate plan is to have a General Meeting, establish our position, take up paid membership and formulate an action plan. Please support us if you can, all are welcome.

**Is Organic Food Healthier ?** A frequently asked question. It should be remembered that organic food is based on historically traditional growing methods that were never intended to be flagged as a health claim. Organic farmers replace toxic chemical pesticides; herbicides and fertilisers with different agricultural methods that improve soil fertility and bio-diversity. Weeds and insects are controlled with time proven techniques such as crop rotation, cultivation, mulching, manure spreading and the encouragement of beneficials—predator insects that keep pests at bay. **(Continue next**

## Issue 1 October 2004

### Organic Week Celebrated

Organic Week, 4th—12th September, probably the largest celebration of organic food and farming in the British Isles which did not go unnoticed by the MON. On Sunday Sept 5th., Pheric Curphy of Ballanea Farm, Kirk Michael, broke off from his heavy harvesting schedule and kindly invited a group of enthusiastic MON members and neighbours to walk around his organic farm. The idea was to enjoy the already recognised biodiversity of wildlife and plant life found in the meadows and pastures and to answer questions concerning methods of organic farming. Accompanying them on this walk was Roy McMillan from Manx Radio. A recording of this walk and discussion was broadcast on Manx Radio on Wed. 15th Sept at 6.15pm. The second celebration was a tasting of locally produced Manx organic produce held on Tues. 7th Sept. at a regular MON meeting. Organic potatoes, cabbages & lettuces were literally dug fresh from the earth & put straight into the pot & bowl still covered in morning dew packed with all the nutrition that nature intended. Most of the organic vegetables were from Andrew Moore's Balladoole Farm with tender, sweet, succulent lamb from Ballanea Farm; herbs & other ingredients from members gardens & probably the best home baked organic bread rolls ever produced, all presented at a veritable feast and wolfed down by an appreciative hungry crowd. Thank you to everyone.

(cont..) These methods radically change the environment, producing a rapid drop in poisonous run-off and an improvement in soil ecology. No genetically engineered crops (GMOs) are planted or allowed. Organic farms routinely see less soil erosion and more variety of animal species and micro-organism in their fields. The latest annual report on pesticide residues in the UK showed that about half the fresh food and vegetable samples tested contained pesticide residues (MAFF Annual Report of the Working Party on Pesticide Residues, 1999, MAFF Publications, 2000). A 12 year German study found that organic food contains higher levels of minerals. The largest differences were for potassium and iron, but magnesium, calcium, phosphorus and vitamin C levels were also higher in organic vegetables (W Shuphan, *Plantfoods for Human Nutrition* 23 (4) 330-358, 1973). In the UK, the House of Lords select committee on Science and Technology report in 1998 (The Stationary Office 1998) on antibiotic resistance concluded that the use of antibiotics in animal feed for growth promotion should be banned. Despite this, routine addition to the feed of non-organic livestock remains common

**Locally grown organic produce and the Co-op.** MON is particularly proud to announce that following our tasting evening, Peter Whittaker, Operations Manager with the Manx Co-operative, made an agreement with Andrew Moore of Balladoole Farm, Castletown, to sell any surplus organic vegetables from their southern outlets in Port Erin, Castletown and Port St Mary. Andrew Moore has been farming organically for over 12 years and is certified organic through the certification body Organic Farmers & Growers (UK2). This is a welcome development for supporters of locally grown organic produce as it gives an opportunity for more consumers to buy fresh organic produce and experience what we believe to be healthier food which benefits the consumer and the environment. Please support the Co-ops' decision and buy this delicious and nutritious organic produce from their stores.

### **The How and Why of Organic Farming.**

**By Mark Waugh, PR, Organic Farmers & Growers.**

Because the term 'organic' is regulated by law, it does mean that to call your produce truly organic your business has to be inspected and certified—and that means extra cost. But with that extra (and not prohibitive) cost can come extra value, especially if you find the right outlets for your products. And because of the generous grants available from DAFF, it's even easier to get started. Organic Farmers and Growers (OF&G) inspects and certifies organic production and processing, with a practical view to the needs of the industry. With a number of licensees on the IOM, OF&G's inspector for the island, Peter Lawler, has a good understanding of what it takes for the farmers to get that all important certificate. ***How does organic certification work ?*** You begin by applying to a certification body, which will send you the relevant paperwork. With OF&G you are allocated a Certification Officer (CO), who will always be your personal point of contact. A date will be arranged for the inspector to visit and carry out your first inspection. Once the inspector's report has been assessed and approved by your CO, a certificate proving your organic (or in-conversion) status can be issued. Your farm, or processing business is then inspected annually to keep your certification up-to-date. Anyone who sells produce as organic must label it with the UK operating number of their certification body. In the case of OF&G, this is 'Organic Certification UK2'. But you are also entitled to use the OF&G logo on your premises and products, to add value and create trust in the minds of your customers. The market for organics is still growing, faster than the conventional sector, and there are opportunities to be taken. Look at your market and look at your produce, then ask yourself if there is more to be made of them. ***Could organic be your way forward ?***

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**Results from Straw Poll:** As part of our presence at the two agricultural shows this summer, members of MON carried out a short straw poll on passers by. The questions were:

1. *Do you buy organically & if so, what ?*
2. *Have you bought Manx organic ?*
3. *What would encourage you to buy ?*
4. *Would you pay more for organic ?*
5. *Would you be interested in supporting MON ?*

149 straw polls were completed, 139 of which expressed an interest in supporting MON, all of which would prefer to buy locally produced organic produce if more readily available.

1. 83% bought organic vegetables  
68% bought organic fruit  
54% bought organic dairy produce  
43% bought organic meat  
32% bought organic rice/pasta  
28% bought organic bakery goods
2. 38% bought local organic vegetables  
35% did not  
The rest were unsure if what they bought was organic or not.
3. 63% would buy more if more available  
30% would buy more if cheaper  
The rest were made up from a combination of availability, reliability, variety, quality, food scares, environmental issues.
4. 2% Would not pay more  
26% Would pay 10% more  
41% Would pay 20% more  
21% Would pay 30+ more  
2% Would pay 50% more for chickens.

**Conclusion:** We were received very well by most people of all ages. When we explained to the visitors who we were and what we are hoping to achieve it was greeted with a lot of enthusiasm. What began to emerge very clearly is that a lot of people were confused believing that **all** Manx meat is already organic and that **all** local farm produce is organic. A lot of people also thought that 'Free Range' eggs and chicken meant they were organic and were surprised to learn that this is not the case.

**Using Fresh Seaweed:** During the course of the Royal Show the question of using seaweed as a fertiliser cropped up a couple of times. We were fortunate enough to be on the stand of Organic Farmers & Growers (OF&G) who were able to confirm that it is an acceptable method of fertiliser which is approved by them as a certifying body. The question came up again at our tasting evening so we have followed that up with an enquiry to HDRA who sent us the relevant fact sheet No.GG15, 1997 HDRA's Information and Education Department. The fact sheet confirms that it is a highly valued resource, wonderful as a stabilising winter mulch. The 2 commonest are Laminarias (long, flat fronds) and the bladderwracks (*Fucus* species). A typical analysis of these show nitrogen, phosphate and potassium levels roughly comparable to farmyard manure plus an impressive array of other minerals, trace elements, vitamins, amino acids, plant hormones and carbohydrates. The carbohydrates decompose very readily and act as a soil conditioner, improving soil structure and encouraging a proliferation of soil bacteria. Seaweed is the perfect organic fertiliser, working to improve long term stability and life of the soil as a basis for healthy plant growth. Seaweed can be used as a mulch, dug into the soil and composts well when chopped and mixed with other ingredients in the heap. A fascinating aspect of seaweed that still needs researching is its reported beneficial effect on plant resistance to pest, disease and other stresses like frost.

**NB:** *Sadly, our seas are polluted and seaweed absorbs its nutrients directly from the sea. It has been shown to accumulate both heavy metals and radioactive elements. It would, therefore, be unwise to collect and regularly use seaweed from coasts likely to be affected by radioactive or other industrial effluents.*

**Bill & Cilla's Autumn Gardening Tips:**

**Cilla:** To control black spot on rose bushes—1 tablespoon, per bush of Epsom Salts. Sprinkle around base of bush in autumn and repeat again in spring. To control black spot in general—collect all dead leaves and preferably burn them to prevent spore infestation. A hot compost heap will do if unable to burn.

**Bill:** -recommends generally tidying up the garden ready for winter. Any bulbs can now be planted up to end of November. Bushes, especially roses, should be pruned back a third then pruned harder in March. Digging over of the garden should be left until December as if dug too early weeds may reappear.

**School Wormery:** In support of DLGE's initiative to get children interested in natural composting MON is happy to announce that they are sponsoring a Wiggley Wiggles Wormery in Rushen Primary School. DLGE are offering these extremely effective and natural composters to schools on the island at a discounted price of £25 each. About the size of a medium dustbin, these odourless units can be fed fruit and vegetable peelings as well as tea bags and pencil sharpenings. The resulting liquid and dry compost can then be fed to school plants and dug into the school gardens. For further information, please contact Stephanie Gray at 686533.

**Organic Gardening:** Over the summer Cilla Platt has been holding regular sessions at the organic gardens in Cregneash. These sessions are open to anyone interested in organic gardening. If you would like more information please contact Cilla on 835014 for future dates.

**Organic Fertilisers:** We have recently been contacted by Farmers Combine Ltd, in Ramsey, who are currently stocking organic fertilisers from a company called Soil Fertility Dunns. The products available include Rock Phosphate which can be used without a derogation and Phosphate which would require self-assessment or a derogation to use. **NB:** Any organic or potential organic producer should check with their certification officer prior to applying any product. **Farmers Combine Ltd, Ramsey, Tel: 813178**

**Farmers Corner: Pheric Curphey, Ballanea.**

After the dismal month of August, it's easy to write off the summer as a washout but contrary to that, from a farming point of view I feel it was just an early summer. Being an organic farmer isn't **just** about growing and producing food anymore. With an increasing concern about the destruction of our natural habitats for wildlife, part of the criteria for organic certification is to have a 'biodiversity plan' although to many farmers this may sound like a reason to resist the organic movement. With the help of the Manx Government's 'Agri Environment Scheme' we have been able to create new ponds, fence off rivers, areas of woodland and scrub, which, if we are honest, were a nuisance to try and farm anyway. It is also very encouraging to see a wider variety of flora and fauna beginning to return to the area, in particular many different species of fungi, butterflies and even orchids.

**Aims and Objectives of MON**

- 1. To promote** awareness of the benefits of organically produced food and sustainable agriculture.
- 2. To promote** Manx organic farmers and growers by encouraging consumers to buy locally produced organic food.
- 3. To create** a network of local resources, information and advice.
- 4. To encourage** the Manx Government to continue and increase its support for organic production.
- 5. To develop** an identifiable Manx Organic Brand.

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