

# MANX ORGANIC NETWORK

## MOGGYL ORGANAGH VANNIN

**UPDATE:** We could not even hesitate to produce this newsletter without mention of the hugely successful evening of organic presenters at the Manx Museum on Friday 20th May at 7.30pm. It was a SELL OUT. Infact, selfless committee members actually gave up their seats in favour of optimistic members of the public who arrived without tickets. From the sale of those tickets we raised a staggering £1,300 which went towards paying for the venue, Bob Flowerdews' appearance fee and Peter Seggers' expenses. Many of you will be familiar with the celebrity gardener Bob Flowerdew, who was hugely entertaining, but you may not be familiar with Peter Segger—organic farmer, MD of Organic Farm Foods Ltd, long time council member of the Soil Association, founder member of the IFOAM and OBE in 1997 for his phenomenal contribution to organic agriculture. We invited Peter Segger to speak because we hoped that his vision, enthusiasm and practical solutions for sustainable agriculture would appeal to the audience. Peter also spoke to an invited audience earlier in the day. This was a more formal meeting with people from DAFF and the food and farming industries. MON opened the talk with a brief presentation of positive findings of a straw poll that we have been conducting in major shopping centres around the island—results of this are on the back page. Peter spoke for about 30 minutes on issues & challenges facing the farming industry today and where farming links into a successful and sustainable local economy with strong connections to tourism. On the next page is a synopsis of that discussion. The meeting was well attended and the discussion moved easily into an enthusiastic question and answer session which unfortunately had to be brought to a close for lunch. Homemade organic refreshments were well received. Thank you to all the members who thoughtfully provided these.

### Issue 3 July 2005

#### **Organic Island—Feasibility Study:**

Penny von Spreckelsen and Janet Bridle attended a meeting with Chris Corlett, Chief Executive of the Department of Trade and Industry. The MON is interested in encouraging the Government to consider the possible advantages of converting to organic. We intend to lobby Government, through DAFF, to finance a study that would provide a detailed analysis of the costs, benefits and opportunities presented by the growing enthusiasm for organic produce and organic farming methods. This study could provide the impetus for an Island wide debate on the subject.

It is interesting to note that the rapidly growing consumer interest and demand for organic produce has occurred without any Government support or intervention and in its development we have seen an impressive public and social movement. We believe that the Isle of Man and Isle of Man Government has an opportunity to investigate ways of promoting a 'greener' and more 'organic island'. This has implications for the future prosperity and health of the population and fits well with current discussions regarding the 'branding' of the Island. We believe there are clear commercial opportunities that may assist the agricultural industry and possible spin offs with the development of eco-tourism.

Watch this space.

**Organic Week:** ..is a nationwide celebration of organic food and drink, 3-11th September 2005 including a week long organic festival in Bristol. Last year we organised a farm walk on the Curpheys' organic farm in Kirk Michael accompanied by Roy McMillan from Manx Radio which was then broadcast the following week. We also hosted a very successful social evening enjoying locally produced organic foods picked and cooked by members of MON. This year, in addition to those activities we would like to offer the opportunity for members of MON to open their gardens on an invitation basis to fellow MON members during Organic Week. This would be the perfect opportunity to share ideas and techniques with fellow organic gardening enthusiasts as well as those of us that like to think we will, eventually—well, when the children have grown up and when the ironing is finished—aspire to those ideals. We know that some of you have livestock as well, chickens, goats and bees and sharing your experiences might encourage others to do the same. The celebration will culminate with a tasting evening at Knockaloe Farm on **Wednesday 14th September at 7.30pm** where we would also like to encourage you to bring along any produce, cuttings, seeds, eggs, honey etc that you could sell or exchange during the evening. If you are interested in participating please call Sharon Jamieson on 836626.

**Presentation by Peter Segger OBE  
Lock Prom Methodist Church  
Friday 20th May at 10.30am**

The presentation commenced with a discussion of global issues and the responsibility we all must take in looking after our environment. All countries must act responsibly and develop appropriate policies—this must also be the case for the IoM.

Farming is facing huge challenges as it is changing and being less supported by the public purse. Farming changes in the last decade have included:

- Stubble burning
- Intensive methods under scrutiny
- Over use of nitrogen and other substances
- Antibiotic resistance

The concept of 'Greenness' has come more to the fore with the 'drip, drip, drip' of public awareness and pressure. If antibiotics are becoming less effective then where can we go next?

PS brought our attention to tourism which now brings in more revenue than farming. There is more emphasis building on responsible travel and tourism. Tourists want to connect with the land they are visiting and good quality food is that connection, but it must be delivered with integrity.

**In this context what does organic farming have to offer?**

1. **Will provide better soil, soil carbon and increased bio-mass all year round.**
2. **Will produce better tasting food.**
3. **Will provide a better environment because it encourages biodiversity and does not attack that biodiversity.**
4. **Will employ more people on the land.**
5. **More responsible and economical—no costs of removing the chemicals from our waterways.**
6. **Social and cultural development of farms and farming systems.**

There are a number of different interest groups which are all, in turn, drawn to 'organic' including those who are interested in:

- Locality of food
- Taste of food
- Fair trade (not wanting workers to be sprayed with pesticides)
- Bird/insect diversity.

Saying that there is simply a market for organic at x% misses the point; the consideration should be

for creating a lifestyle which fosters environmental sustainability. Philosophically there is a consideration over the extent to which we should support mans' dominance over nature. At present the side effects upon global warming, diet etc suggest that this is not working. We should show more respect for the land and the farmer who is working the land and delivering our food with integrity; which is where the connection with tourism comes in. PS used his part of the world, West Wales as a good example.

- Wales did not have pride in its food
- PS started the first food festival 5 yrs ago
- This year there will be 55 food festivals in different villages

Reasons they are considered important:

- They provide pride in local farming
- They provide interest and connection for tourists
- They provide for investment.

Another good example of changing attitudes to tourism and local foods has been the phenomenal success of the Slow Food Movement, started in Milan, Italy which in under 6 years has 80,000 members worldwide and last years festival in Milan attracted 30,000 visitors—good food connected with integrity.

Benefits of the development of LOCAL food industries:

- Studies in SW England on the importance of investing in local food suggested that for every £1 spent meant £3-4 was recycled in the community
- Local producers of food achieved a better sales price for their product by selling them locally than by selling through supermarkets.

Organic Box Schemes are an example of such locally produced food distribution. Suggestions that their increase is dropping off are unfounded. They have increased by 30% in the last 3 months. They thrive on the fact that they have:

- A loyal market
- A sustainable market
- A profitable market

The Isle of man is a good size to become organic—the UK and other nations are too large and inflexible.

There then followed a question and answer session, below is a selection of topics raised:

***Will a change to organic farming result in increased unsightly scrubland?***

Management of the land is important, diversity comes from more grasses and herbs growing in a healthy soil, therefore it becomes more beautiful and each adds to the biodiversity.

From a practical tourist perspective, Peter advised that he had typed 'food' into the islands website and found nothing. After further searching he came up with only queenies and kippers. In Wales there was a lack of good restaurants for the visitor. The development of a food culture has led to better restaurants being set up as they are able to source good local food which in turn attracts more visitors.

***How is organic produce dealt with in a non organic dairy?***

Peter Segger was assisted in this response by Peter Lawler, organic adviser/inspector from Organic Farmers & Growers (OF&G) who both confirmed that there are ways to allow both to be processed at different times in the same way that is currently being achieved at the abattoir. (Note that a subsequent discussion with Finlay McLeod from the Creamery and others brought up the fact that Jersey processes organic and non organic milk on the same day, the organic is processed first.)

***Is organic food just for wealthier people?***

Organic food is not about rich people; rather it is about informed people. The organic core (ie people who tend to buy regularly) is around 30% of the population—which is supported by our sample; 35% advised that they buy organic regularly. (see back page)

***Will the consumer or the government pay for the change to organic production?***

The concept that a change would be solely consumer driven is a nonsensical one—as only about 30% would be committed enough. The other benefits, in particular to the environment, are in the public interest and therefore are in the governments' interest. Thus the support by the government through conversion subsidies is justifiable BUT it must also be consumer supported and in time consumers must take this on.

***If you lived on the IoM, would you buy imported organic or local IoM milk?***

IoM does have the transport issues of the imported organic milk, BUT

- Significant health advantages in organic milk—increased Omega 3, largely due to the required change in diet for organic cows to mixed grazing

with clover

- Suggestions of E-coli risks are unfounded. E-coli 157 is found where dairy cattle are fed grains. Organic dairy herds are not fed grain or high protein feeds thus E-coli 157 is not found in organic dairy herds.
- Reduced risk of antibiotics given to cows passed through the milk.
- Impact on soil, bird life etc
- Takes 7 tons of oil to make 1 ton of nitrogen which can be obtained naturally from clover and recycled manure.
- Conclusion: PS would buy imported organic milk.

***What areas of organic production are the easiest to convert to and/or offer the best returns for farmers?***

Cereals

- There is good returns from organic wheat
- Oats can vary depending on demand

Dairy

- Advantages for the farmer
  - One of the easiest to convert
  - UK support is for 5 yrs front end loaded commencing £70-90 per hectare. After 5 years becomes £30 per hectare
  - Change in grazing and few antibiotics means drop in vets bill
- Disadvantages for the farmer
  - Reduced yield due to smaller number of animals per area—note that rotation of grazing is important to reduce worm build up
  - Risk of over supply, however a study by Nick Lampkin, University of Wales, suggesting that these farmers are not at a disadvantage as the markets will continue to grow. Rachel's Dairy, a small UK farm that converted and with excess milk commenced farm yoghurt production that has been extremely profitable.

Beef/lamb

- There is a growing demand for beef—these do well as there is a noticeable difference in taste which the consumer appreciates
- In Wales lamb has been difficult as there is a large amount of hill lamb.

***Are local producers earning more for their money?***

Yes, they get better returns than through supermarkets have more flexibility.

**ECO DAY:** On Friday 1st July Ballakermeen High School in Douglas hosted an ECO day in which the MON was invited to participate. The idea was to raise awareness of important environmental issues and challenges that are facing us today and what each of us can do to help preserve what we have today for the children of tomorrow. Other organisations present included the One World Centre, Manx Wildlife Trust, Friends of the Earth, Permaculture and Zero Waste Mann to name a few. Our brief was to create an activity that would last 95 minutes for 10-18 pupils aged 11-12 yrs and to repeat it 3 times over the course of the day. MON was also given the responsibility of providing an organic packed lunch. We planned our activities by splitting the groups into 3 smaller ones and involved them in 3 separate activities:

Group 1: Worked through a detailed worksheet covering basic issues of organic farming and gardening.

Group 2: Blind food tasting of organic tomatoes, carrots, bread, muffins, chocolate, biscuits and yoghurt versus non-organic and discussed food additives and 'what's on the label?'

Group 3: Made biodegradable pots out of newspaper, filled them with organic compost and planted an organic seed. We also did some sprouting in jars.

It was a long day and a lot of hard work but we all pulled together brilliantly & gave the children an interesting and informative series of activities. A huge thank you to everyone that took part in the preparation and the day itself.

**Northern Group:** Ian and Viv Davies, a couple of very enthusiastic supporters of organic foods & gardening, are hoping to set up a proactive network of MON members in the North for those who cannot always travel down to meetings at Knockaloe etc. Call them on 882332 for details of activities & events they are planning.

### Shoprite in Ramsey

Ian Davies (see above) has been pushing Shoprite to restock Manx organic beef. He has been talking to various members of staff of the Ramsey shop and has convinced them that there is a growing demand for this precious commodity. The measure of his success is that they are now trying to commit to have some in every 2 weeks or so. The availability is limited as they are only taking one side to see how demand fares. Please buy some now and support it on a regular basis but be aware there is only a finite amount of Manx organic beef at present. Pheric Curphey, the main supplier, admits that it will take him some years to make a major change in the volume he can supply but lets at least match demand with supply. Please call Shoprite in Ramsey on [818720](tel:818720) and ask for the Butchery Department if you wish to make an order.

### Results of Straw Poll

The survey ascertained the eating habits of more than 270 Isle of Man residents.

Questionnaires were completed in respect of 103 Isle of Man resident main food purchasers. The number of people in their households totalled more than 270.

The survey was carried out at 10 locations in the IoM during April and May 2005

These included shopping locations in Douglas, Ramsey, Port Erin and St Johns.

#### Results – Current Purchasing

**85%** of the sample currently buys organic produce.

65% of the sample currently buys organic vegetables

43% of the sample currently buys organic fruit

21% of the sample currently buys organic meat

**83%** of the sample specifically buys Manx

**59%** of the sample stated, if available, it would be important to them that the Manx produce be -organic.

#### Results – Future Requirements

**83%** of those questioned would be prepared to pay a premium for Manx Organic produce.

**92%** of those questioned would be interested in a farmers market as a place to specifically buy Manx produce.

**54%** of those questioned would be interested in a home delivery box Scheme for organic vegetables

Dates for open MON meetings at Knockaloe Farm:

Wednesday 13th July, 7.30pm

Wednesday 3rd August, 7.30pm

**MEMBERSHIP: 155 and growing....**

### 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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