



Soil Association
the heart of organic food & farming

Soil Association
Food and farming department

Organic action plan consultation meeting:

Northeast provisional outcomes

22 June 2006, Stamfordham Village Hall, Northumbria

Rural enterprise scheme – GEOrgE project
(Growing England's Organic Regional Enterprise)

**To contribute your comments to the planning process please return
pages 2 and 3 (if appropriate) to A Rollett in the SAE provided or fax
0117 314 5001**

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Preliminary outcomes from the Northeast consultation meeting (producers¹, processors/others²)

Please indicate your top three priorities (1,2,3) from each section of the table below and return by fax or via the enclosed SAE. If you wish to add your own priority/priorities please do so on the comment sheet (page 3) and return as above.

What changes or additions to current policy would have the most benefit for the organic sector?

What are the greatest technical issues affecting your organic business and what are the best mechanisms for dealing with these?

What additional market intelligence would be most useful to you?

What do you see as the weakness of the current supply chain structure in your area of organic business and what are the solutions?

In which areas do you see potential for further market development and what support for market development would be most useful?

Policy	Technical	Market intelligence	Supply chain	Market development
OELS ^{1,2} (arable bias, no training element, need support beyond OELS)	Need for more technical courses ^{1,2}	More regional information ^{1,2} (Consumers and prices)	Poor marketing ^{1,2} (Marketing hub, co-ordinator, more market awareness)	Link organic and local food with tourism ² (Local organic food in hotels etc)
Increase policy support for organic upland production systems ²	Help to access technical support ^{1,2}	Survey of Northeast organic consumers ^{1,2}	Problems with livestock transport, and general distribution ^{1,2}	Develop regional brands ^{1,2}
Increase support for in-conversion farmers ²	Bringing people together to support each other ¹ (Producer or benchmarking group)	A regional database of producers, stock ^{1,2}	Little information about contracts ¹	Add value to local products ²
OCIS ^{1,2} (Should be run regionally)	Lack of professional technical support ¹	Farm shops or other retail outlets ² (How much organic is purchased?)	Poor trade links ¹ (Need more farmers groups)	Use the Southwest region as a good model for developing the organic sector ¹
Other Comments	Lack of support for upland farm issues ^{1,2} (Closure of ADAS Redesdale)	Access to information from certification bodies and supermarkets ²	Easy to buy internationally but hard to buy locally and very expensive (processors) ²	
NEOP very important to Northeast organic sector ^{1,2}			A lack of strategic thinking coupled with a lack of co-ordination has resulted in a fragmented industry that lacks clout ²	

Comments Sheet

Policy	
Technical Issues	
Market Intelligence	
Supply Chain	
Market Development	

What changes or additions to current policy would have the most benefit for the organic sector?

POLICY	DETAILS
OELS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More suitable for arable systems^{1,2} ➤ No incentive to start an organic hill farm (therefore, many Northeast conversions from the arable sector but few from the uplands)¹ ➤ Need policy support beyond OELS (long-term support for the organic sector).² ➤ OFS used to provide money for training, as part of the package but OELS does not. The training component should have been retained within the new scheme^{1,2}
Increase policy support for organic upland production systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Want practical support, (not theoretical support such as business plans).²
Increased support for in-conversion farmers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Practical rather than financial²
OCIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Needs extension, development and improvement and it should be run on a regional basis^{1,2}.
Policy should recognise both direct and indirect benefits of organic production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Policy should include a realistic assessment of non-organic products/production ➤ The direct/indirect (environmental, social etc) effects should then be factored into business support²
Policy should ensure labelling is not misleading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure that organic labelling indicates the country in which the produce was grown and not packaged, processed etc²
Regional education package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To increase demand for organic products² ➤ More information about procedures¹
Incentive to source locally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Offered to local businesses²

Other comments

NEOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ NEOP is very important for regional representation^{1,2}
Connect the supply chain ¹	
Need regional food groups ¹	

NB: In this and all subsequent tables the superscript refers to producers¹ and to processors and others².

What are the greatest technical issues affecting your organic business and what are the best mechanisms for dealing with these?

TECHNICAL ISSUE	MECHANISM
Need for more technical courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ But difficult to know what was available and where to find that information² ➤ Need people who can provide a link to this information, NEOP was seen as a valuable resource in this respect^{1,2}
Help to access technical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lots of technical support available but difficult to access² ➤ The human side of technical information very important to help resolve problems^{1,2} ➤ Although useful, a website might not be as good at solving problems as a person (e.g. lack of interaction, or difficulties in describing the problem).²
Bringing people together to support each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Producer or benchmarking groups are a good opportunity for technical support¹. ➤ Share best practice, organic master-classes and technical speakers¹
Lack of professional technical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Become more aware of the services of the Soil Association's Food and Farming team¹
Lack of support for upland farm issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The closure of ADAS Redesdale and worries about the continuation of the NEOP²
Getting people to attend courses and generating interest in training opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hold meetings at a farm and include a farm walk and a specialist speaker (offers the chance to see how to do things (and how not to) in a farm context)¹ ➤ Run regional workshops¹ ➤ Ensure that courses are relevant² ➤ Events with small numbers best for learning²
Poor technical support from OCIS (lack knowledge of upland issues) ^{1,2}	
Weed management ¹	
Sheep scab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The withdrawal of synthetic pyrethroid dips along with the problems associated with using organophosphorus dips¹
More support with regard to processing technology and transforming a raw product to a saleable commodity ²	

Other Comments

The truth behind 'Old wives tales'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Technical guides should include information to back-up or disprove these stories¹
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What additional market intelligence would be most useful to you?

MARKET INTELLIGENCE	DETAILS
More regional information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More consumer information to help to understand the market^{1,2} ➤ More regional and more frequent information about organic prices^{1,2} ➤ A weekly 'eye on the market' in e-mail format, which included regional and national variations (to also include price guidelines for produce at the farm gate, wholesale and retail)¹ ➤ Price information from the Internet for ease of access, perhaps by subscription¹
Survey of Northeast organic consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To determine who is buying what, where, why and how^{1,2}
A regional database of producers, stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A regional organic e-bay (to include how much produce was available, what it would cost and when it would be available)². ➤ This could also be used as a service to link up farmers, e.g. with rare breeds or breeding stock¹
Farm shops or other retail outlets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Data with regard to what, where, when and how much organic purchased²
Access to information from certification bodies and supermarkets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ As this data exists and is comprehensive it could provide valuable market intelligence if the money was made available to analysis it²
Consumers' organic buying habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A detailed breakdown would be useful²

What do you see as the weakness of the current supply chain structure in your area of organic business and what are the solutions?

SUPPLY CHAIN WEAKNESS	SOLUTIONS
Poor marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Farmers needed to be more aware of their markets and to improve their strategic thinking¹ ➤ NEOP should form a marketing hub to support organic businesses (could also increase the power of the producers who were no longer operating in isolation).¹ ➤ Need a small number of active producer groups (a large number of groups would increase fragmentation).² ➤ Groups should utilise/ employ a marketing co-ordinator or expert¹ ➤ A resource or individual to offer information about available contracts¹
Problems with livestock transport, and general distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase in collaboration and co-operation with regard to the transportation of animals (e.g. sharing transport to abattoir).^{1,2} ➤ Co-ordinate transport schedules (the increase in fuel costs might add to the desire to do this)² ➤ Co-operative buying of fuel (and seeds etc) could reduce costs². ➤ The provision of a delivery service for small-scale producers²
Little information about contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More information about contracts that are available – i.e. Oriel Jones/St Merryn¹
Poor trade links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Help develop farmer groups to increase the power of farmers¹
Easy to buy internationally but hard to buy locally and very expensive (processors)²	
A lack of strategic thinking coupled with a lack of co-ordination has resulted in a fragmented industry that lacks clout²	
Difficult to source organic livestock and seeds. ^{1,2}	

In which areas do you see potential for further market development and what support for market development would be most useful?

Market Development	Support
Link organic and local food with tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Build the connection between tourism and food² ➤ Local organic food could be supplied to hotels, bed and breakfasts, restaurants and so on²
Regional brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emphasise the fact that the item has been produced, processed (if appropriate) and sold within the region² ➤ Regionally branded goods should not be sold in supermarkets but in local outlets (difficult to compete with the supermarkets in terms of price but may be able to compete on the local connection)² ➤ Establish a trading network with a regional focus¹
Add value to local products²	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Southwest region a good model for developing the organic sector (look at what they did to develop the market in that region ten years ago and use that information as a template for development)¹
Poultry, vegetables and bread products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong links between market intelligence and market development (need to confirm potential new markets through robust market intelligence)¹ ➤ Work with organisations such as Business Link to develop new markets¹