Soil Association
Food and farming department

Organic action plan consultation meeting:

East Midlands provisional outcomes

11 October 2006, Attenborough Nature Reserve.

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

To contribute your comments to the planning process please return pages 2, 3 and 4 (if appropriate) to A Rollett in the SAE provided or fax (0117 314 5001)

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Preliminary outcomes from the East Midlands consultation meeting (producers[1] and others[2])

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 4) and return as above.

Policy *What changes or additions to current policy would have the most benefit for an expanding, viable and well-balanced organic sector in the East Midlands?*		**Technical Issues** *What are the greatest technical issues affecting your organic business in the East Midlands and what are the best mechanisms for dealing with these?*		**Market Intelligence** *What additional market intelligence would be most useful to you?*		**Supply Chain** *What do you see as the weakness of the current supply chain structure in your area of organic business in the East Midlands and what are the solutions?*		**Market Development** *In which areas do you see potential for further market development in the East Midlands and what support for market development would be most useful?*	
A strategy to link the organic supply chain, to help the sector grow[1] More joined up policies[1]		No regional organic centre[1,2]		More forecasting information[1] ➢ To include trends (by e-mail or a dedicated website)		Lack of abattoirs in the region (particularly in Lincolnshire). Also problems with regulations		Educate and publicise the organic message to consumers[1] What is the best way to promote the organic message?	
Improve producer confidence[1]		Limited sharing of and access to knowledge[2] ➢ Sign-posting system from regional centre/person[2] ➢ Informal meetings at farms or pubs[1]		Projections of value and land area[2] (prevent under/over supply)		Lack of processing facilities (e.g. for wheat)[1] ➢ Set up shared facilities		Consumer Education[2] (convey positive, inspiring messages about organic)[2] ➢ The 'O' factor	
Soil Association to help producers with publicity/promotion and to promote whole carcass utilisation[1]		Complex time consuming paperwork[1]		Soil Association to supply predicted growth information to members[1]		Disproportionate cost to the small producer of drying/cleaning grain[1]		Exploit media generated opportunities to promote the organic message[1]	
Need to learn the language of the Regional Development Agency and increase engagement with them[2]		Set up an equivalent of OCIS for processors[2]		More frequent/up to date price information[1] Real time/regular[2] (system to be self sustaining)[2]		Supply chain is unbalanced by supermarket dominance[1]		Create organic ambassadors ➢ Supply organic ambassadors pack[2]	
Small is beautiful[2] (Policy makers need to see things at a level smaller than regional)		Lack of co-ordination between certifying body standards[2]		Open book accounting[1] (price transparency)		Wholesalers supply second grade produce to small retail outlets[1] Traceability of wholesale product[2]		Organic should be promoted as inclusive not exclusive[1,2] Emphasise health benefits[1]	

Policy		Technical Issues		Market Intelligence		Supply Chain		Market Development	
Define the regional organic voice and ensure it is heard[2]		Difficult to keep up with regulations (e.g. waste and health and safety) [2] ➢ Include in standard updates, certification news[2] ➢ Soil Association news bulletin to include information re policy change[2]		Data on levels of productivity[2] What is available to free market?		Issues of traceability (also above) (processed food and ingredients)[2] ➢ Label at source[2] ➢ Create a system that values provenance[2]		Specific ethnic/cultural markets and products[2]	
More focused regional support in the East Midlands[2]		Limited consumer knowledge/awareness of organic ➢ Package of information to promote the benefits of organic (OAP, Organic Ambassadors Pack)[2]		Compilation of accurate data[2] (a financial incentive could be offered to achieve this)		Lack of adequate UK arable supply[2] ➢ Bring arable players together[2]		Important to reinforce the organic message (big baby food market but this market is not retained)[1]	
Support for an alternative viable system to supermarkets to prevent domination[1]				A common approach by certification bodies[2] (to ensure data is comparable)		Lack of planning by farmers ➢ Need to inform market 12 months in advance what they will have for sale[2]		Soil Association to return to core values[1] and organic to be lead by principles[2] (unique selling point[2])	
				Dissemination should be unbiased, neutral[2]		Certification for small distributors[2] ➢ Turnover related charges		Non-food organic awards[2]	

Comments Sheet

Policy *What changes or additions to current policy would have the most benefit for an expanding, viable and well-balanced organic sector in the East Midlands?*	
Technical Issues *What are the greatest technical issues affecting your organic business in the East Midlands and what are the best mechanisms for dealing with these?*	
Market Intelligence *What additional market intelligence would be most useful to you?*	
Supply Chain *What do you see as the weakness of the current supply chain structure in your area of organic business in the East Midlands and what are the solutions?*	
Market Development *In which areas do you see potential for further market development in the East Midlands and what support for market development would be most useful?*	

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

NB: In this and all subsequent tables the superscript refers to producers[1] and to others[2].

Policy	**Details**
Strategies to link the organic supply chain, which will help to grow the organic sector[1] **More joined up policies[1]**	➢ Current policy has no emphasis on the whole supply chain (the middle parts of the chain are left to market forces)[1] ➢ Current policy is disjointed but at least has clear direction[1]
Improve producer confidence[1] Policy to encourage more organic conversion[1]	➢ Only in some sectors – e.g. no market for beef calves[1] ➢ At present there is little incentive for conversion[1]
Changes to Soil Association policy[1]	➢ Support producers through help with publicity and promotion[1] (The current lack of promotion is seen as a weakness) ➢ Promote whole carcass utilisation[1] (educate consumers and restaurants) ➢ To maintain integrity of organic through ensuring a sustainable organic industry[1]
Learn the language of the regional development agency (RDA) and increase engagement[2]	➢ Push the sustainability/climate change angle[2] ➢ RDA focus is on job protection/creation and originally started for urban purposes[2] ➢ RDA borders are almost all in rural areas which creates conflict between neighbouring RDAs[2]
Improve regional focus in East Midlands[2] **Need for focused regional support[2]**	➢ East Midlands is a very diverse area and there is a need to draw attention to that diversity[2]
Small is beautiful[2]	➢ Current project for huge food mall in Buxton – 8 small ones would be much better for local communities[2] ➢ Difficult to make policy makers see smaller than regional[2]
Define regional organic voice and ensure it is heard[2]	➢ What/who is the East Midlands organic voice?[2]
Convince government that organic is part of sustainability[2]	
Ensure a demand led sustainable market[1]	
Improve clarity of economic advantages of organic and push that into policy arena[2]	
Encourage local sourcing policies in restaurants[1] Expand the eating out side of organic[1]	➢ But do producers wish to supply to this market?[1] ➢ Not all areas have the opportunity to promote organic using tourism but in all areas people eat out[1]
Set up a confederation of small retail shops[1]	➢ Soil Association to support this initiative[1]
Less red tape from EU[1]	➢ Too many rules and regulations – e.g. cutting plants[1]
Funding for Market Intelligence – that feeds back to strategy[2]	
Lack of schemes and grants for certain types of businesses in East Midlands[2]	➢ Necessary to identify how to support small organic businesses as all business grants as support changes[2]
Policy for OCIS holding[2]	➢ Size of OCIS holdings, need to ensure small producers are supported[2]

Other comments

Need an alternative viable system to supermarkets to prevent domination[1]	➢ Supermarkets getting into local food market[1] ➢ But also use cheap imports in preference to UK food[1]
Get producers to want to be involved in organic[1]	➢ Need to be able to see the long-term benefits[1] ➢ Lack confidence to make the change to organic – doubts about the long-term future and stability of the organic market[1]
No major players are involved in organic[1]	➢ Mainly small-scale businesses[1]
Farms are a tangible asset[1]	➢ People can visit, associate their food with a place and a 'story'[1] ➢ Soil Association need to help develop the link between the farm and the consumer[1]
How to know about eligibility for funding and opportunities[2]	
Lack of communication within region[2]	

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

Technical Issues	**Mechanism**
No regional organic centre[1]	➢ Provide a centre to offer a place to come together/useful to discuss ideas[1]
Sharing/access to knowledge[2] (lack of collaboration)	➢ Dedicated person/centre to co-ordinate and disseminate technical support[2] ➢ Signposting system[2]
Need more face to face technical support not more literature[1]	➢ Technical issues are usually discussed via 'word of mouth', networking and communication[1] ➢ Could set up informal meetings at farms or pubs to discuss technical issues[1] ➢ Alternatively set up e-mail groups to transfer knowledge[1] ➢ Online forums could be used to discuss technical issues[1]
Complex time consuming paperwork[1]	➢ Simplification of record keeping for Soil Association via IT[1] ➢ Soil Association could design an organic focussed computer based system for farm management/records[1]
Lack of co-ordination between standards[2] Organic wine issues[2] Labelling regulation confusion[2]	➢ OCIS equivalent for processors[2] ➢ Support for licensees through application process[2]
Keeping up with policy (waste and health and safety regulations)[2]	➢ Include in standard updates, certification, news[2] ➢ News bulletin could include a policy change section[2]
Limited consumer knowledge/awareness of organic[2]	➢ Package of information to promote benefits of organic (OAP – Organic Ambassadors Pack)[2] ➢ Soil Association to work with other organisations to raise profile
Limited awareness of technical support available[1]	➢ E.g. HAWL run a regional support group, hold talks and discussions. Also HAWL trained farmers in the East Midlands who can offer homeopathy support to other farmers[1]
Lack of organic research and development[1]	
Loss of specialist agricultural knowledge at Business Link[2]	➢ Be proactive with Business Link and the RDAs[2] ➢ Signpost regional Business Link[2]
Lack of focus in Soil Association newsletter[1]	➢ Soil Association newsletter should include case studies to create discussion on topical technical issues. Also case studies which allow farmers to learn from things that have happened to others in a similar situation[1]
Lack of abattoirs and/or distance to them[1]	
How are the different certification body standards reached[2]	
Small scale processors lack recognition[1]	➢ Soil Association to help raise the profile of these processors[1]
Support is usually from within the industry not government directed[1]	

What additional market intelligence would be most useful to you?

Market Intelligence	**Details**
More forecasting information in preference to historical data[1]	➢ This information should include trends, comments etc[1]. ➢ Could be disseminated by e-mail or via a website[1]
Projections of value and area[2]	➢ To help prevent under/over supply – learn from lessons of milk predictions[2] ➢ Current and 3 year projections[2]
Levels of productivity[2]	➢ Also what is committed and what is available, and where?[2] (E.g. 50 acres of carrots grown in Leicestershire may not be available for sale in county)[2]
Soil Association to supply predicted growth information[1]	➢ Has started to forecast for milk but should expand in other sectors[1]
More frequent/up to date price information[1] **Real time and regular price information[2]**	➢ Weekly or fortnightly would be ideal[1] ➢ System needs to be self sustaining (Should not rely on funding for long term survival)[2] ➢ To include ex farm (direct, packer and wholesale prices) and supermarket/retail[2]
Open book accounting[1]	➢ This requires all parties in a transaction to be open about their costs to set a fair price for all[1]
A common approach to data collection by certification bodies[2]	➢ To ensure all information is in the same format[2]
Compilation of accurate data[2]	➢ Could certification bodies offer a reduction for accurate information?[2] ➢ Certification process can be a useful tool if used correctly[2]
Market intelligence presented in an unbiased, neutral perspective[2]	
Information about other organic producers in the region[1]	➢ Useful to know about other organic farmers in the region (but data protection issues are a problem)[1] ➢ Soil Association could facilitate this in some way[1].
Future supply of animals to abattoirs[1]	➢ Awareness of seasonal trends would allow a planned response[1]
The price of vegetables boxes and their content[1]	➢ But, mainly happy to find this out themselves[1]
What is in conversion[2]	
National level of market intelligence[2]	➢ Could Agricultural census identify organic holdings[2]

Other comments

Forward contracts to stabilise the market[1]	
Can now produce all food organically[1]	➢ But lack the marketing skills to sell it successfully[1]
Organic sector relies on the market structure associated with the non-organic sector[1]	➢ Need to develop markets in accordance with organic principles[1]

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
Lack of abattoirs in the region (particularly in Lincolnshire). This is mirrored in the non-organic sector[1]	➢ Soil Association or the government to set specific targets for maximum distance to slaughterhouse. This would help with targeting new locations for abattoirs or pinpointing need[1] ➢ Current abattoir regulations make it difficult to blend non-organic and organic enterprises maybe need to review these[1] ➢ Could run mobile abattoirs these would reduce animal stress and be convenient for farmers but problem with regulations[1]
Lack of processing facilities (e.g. wheat processed in Cumbria)[1] Disproportionate cost to the small producer of drying/cleaning grain[1]	➢ A collaborative/collective approach to the problem to prevent small-scale producers being pushed out of the market[1] ➢ Set up a shared facility for drying/storing grain (as exists in non-organic sector) but fears that certification process (cost and time) may act as a deterrent[1] ➢ Encourage more processors to become organic to increase capacity[1]
Supply chain is unbalanced by supermarket dominance (organic producers are vulnerable as small-scale operators)[1].	
Wholesalers tend to supply first grade produce to supermarkets leaving second grade for smaller retailer outlets[1]	➢ Maybe need more specialist organic wholesalers[1]
Traceability of wholesale product Also mills and processed food (origin of flour/ingredients)[2]	➢ Labelling at source[2] ➢ Create a system that values provenance[2]
Hard to deal direct with arable producers (prefer to make one phone call to a merchant or co-operative)[2]	➢ Bring arable players together[2]
Lack of adequate UK arable supply[2]	➢ Perhaps use storage on other holdings to allow buying at certain times of year[2]
Farmers tend not to plan ahead (need to inform market 12 months in advance of production levels)[2]	➢ More communication with the co-operatives[2]
Certification for small distributors[2]	➢ Turnover related charges[2] ➢ Soil Association to use National Parks scheme as a case study[2]
Small abattoirs are forced out of business by rules and regulations[1]	➢ May need to review rules and regulations, also see the first point in this table[1]
Lack of joined up thinking, (the scarcity of abattoirs does not back up policy makers desire for local food)[1]	
Lack of communication and infrastructure between arable buyer and seller[2]	
Most co-op arable supply goes to Southwest due to concentration of customers in that area[2]	
Lack of organic producers in the region[1]	
Confusion over what is local?[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**
Need to educate and publicise the organic message to consumers[1] How should the organic message be promoted? **(**Via celebrities, by farmers, by sexing up the message or by promoting the 'values' and ethos of organic production?)	➢ Long-term advertising programme aimed at mass market (concentrated advertising)[1] ➢ Use local radio to promote the organic message using local organic producers, processors etc[1] ➢ The Soil Association should compile a list of local speakers who can be called upon to discuss local issues (or with permission given to the press)[1] ➢ Sector ambassador or champions (on a regional basis)[1] ➢ Ambassadors – OAP (organic ambassadors pack)[2] ➢ Media training for licensees or people who have contact with consumers, to nurture speakers and advocates[2] ➢ The O factor – TV programme/talent spotting competition[2]
Need to time PR to exploit media generated opportunities to promote the organic message[1]	➢ Soil Association should ensure they receive up to date information about what is to appear in the media/on TV that will provide an opportunity to promote the organic message. That information should be disseminated to members in the relevant region.[1]
Organic should be promoted as for everyone not just the privileged few[1,2] (Emphasise health benefits)[1]	
Ethnic/cultural markets and products[2]	➢ Listen to different communities[2] ➢ Funding to bring ethnic/cultural consumers out onto farms[2] ➢ Break down misconceptions[2]
Consumer Education[2]	➢ Educate children (more Jamie Olivers)[2] ➢ Enable those with contact with consumers to convey positive, inspiring messages about organics[2]
Non-food[2]	➢ Soil Association to send media information on organic cleaning products[2] ➢ Non food Organic award[2] ➢ Household cleaner or feed compounder of the year[2]
Highlight the benefits of organic farming to climate change and sustainability[1]	
More organic poultry[1]	
Organic farm shops on organic farms[1]	
Public procurement in schools[1,2]	