

Organic Farming

A Teagasc Advisory Newsletter

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Farm walks look at organic opportunities

In this issue:

- Basic principles of organic farming
- Organic farming sector in Ireland
- Organic farm walks 2011
- Faces and stories behind the organic demonstration farmers

Organic farming continues to be a popular option for farmers. With premium prices available and good support payments in the organic farming scheme, there is potential to generate a respectable level of profit.

Basic principles of organic farming

- Maintenance and enhancement of natural soil fertility and soil biodiversity;
- minimum use of non-renewable resources and off-farm inputs;
- efficient re-cycling of nutrients;
- maintenance of animal health by encouraging natural defences, also selection of appropriate breeds and practices;
- observance of a high level of livestock welfare; and
- maintenance of plant health by preventative measures e.g. choice of species and varieties resistant to pests /diseases.

Organic farming sector in Ireland

In Ireland the sector is growing steadily and currently occupies over 1% of the total farmed area in the country, a doubling of area in the

last decade. Latest Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food figures show there are 1,714 organic operators registered with 55,693 ha of land under organic production. The majority of these farms are involved in drystock production. It is envisaged that the area farmed organically will increase further in the coming years due to a strong market demand for organic produce, the suitability of many farms to organic conversion, and scheme/grant incentives on offer from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Organic farm walks 2011

In the last number of years Teagasc in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the organic certification bodies have been running the organic farming demonstration programme. This year 19 demonstration walks will be held between June and September covering the length and breadth of the country. A wide range of sectors will be covered including drystock, dairying, cereals, horticulture and pigs. The walks are a great opportunity for conventional farmers to see the developments and innovations currently taking place on organic farms. For organic farmers, the walks provide the opportunity for the sharing of information and experiences between producers in an open and informal manner. All walks commence at 2 pm. Check the advertisement in this issue for full details.

The faces and stories behind the organic demonstration farmers



Alan Mooney, Portglorim, Kilcock, Co Kildare

Alan Mooney farms 65ha in north Kildare, close to Kilcock. This beef and tillage farm underwent conversion to organic production in April 2009. Alan changed over to the organic farming system due to the tightening margins in conventional farming. The organic system of farming is offering lower costs with higher prices available for beef and grain as well as a support payment through the organic farming scheme.

In the conversion process 16ha were retained in commercial barley; this year, 8ha of this was put into conversion with the remaining 8 ha due to be converted into organic production next year. This was done to facilitate sustainable crop rotation for a future in organic farming. The organic crops on the farm are winter oats and winter wheat. Red clover is used as a crop for silage and fertility building. The beef enterprise is a simple weanling to beef enterprise with 30 – 40 weanlings purchased every Autumn from other organic farmers and finished 15 – 18 months later in the Spring to early Summer when prices are at peak.

Alan's farm walk will take place on **Wednesday 29 June at 2pm.**

This is a great opportunity for farmers to meet with specialists within the organic farming scene and discuss the option of organic beef and tillage farming.

Items for discussion at the walk include:

- Soil nutrient and fertility management
- Animal health and productivity
- Crop performance and management



Mark Duffy, Clogher, Ballybay, Co. Monaghan

Mark Duffy is farming near Ballybay, Co. Monaghan. In 2005 the dairy herd on the farm was replaced by a suckler cow to beef system and in May 2009 the farm began its conversion to organic production. Since then the suckler cow numbers have been reduced significantly and Mark is buying in most of his animals and finishing them on farm. Mark is very conscious of the market place and demand for finished animals in the sector and therefore aims to have a continuity of supply for the market.

The recognised higher price for organic rations has been identified as a barrier for farmers entering organic production. To combat this, the silage area has been reseeded with a red clover and perennial ryegrass mix and to date three cuts per year is being achieved. A certain level of organic rations have to be bought in but this is greatly reduced by the fact that Mark also grows an area of wholecrop mix of oats, barley and peas, which along with the red clover silage is fed to the finishing animals. The grazing area has also been reseeded in the last three years.

Mark's farm walk takes place on **Thursday 30 June at 2pm.**



Silvia and Gerard Langan, Ower, Headford, Co. Galway

Silvia and Gerard Langan made the decision to convert to organic farming in early 2009. The husband and wife team farm 20ha in Ballisnahyna, close to scenic Lough Corrib, about 5 miles from Headford, Co. Galway. The farm has both a cattle and horticulture enterprise, the latter being a relatively new venture for the couple.

There are 10 suckler cows and all progeny are kept to slaughter. Later this year cattle will begin to be slaughtered organically once

the 2 year organic conversion period elapses and it is hoped that a good premium price over conventional will be achieved. Since conversion, paddocks have been over-sown with white clover. Arable silage (oats and peas) has also been grown. This helps provide top quality grass and feed for the Winter period in the absence of artificial fertilizers.

The couple also have a horticulture enterprise producing 30 types of veg. from just 0.8ha including 4 polytunnels. Vegetables including potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, scallions, beans, corgettes, cucumbers, lettuce, tomatoes and beetroot are sold directly to local consumers through a box delivery scheme and a new on-farm shop opened earlier this year.

In the future, the couple intend to expand the vegetable enterprise and diversify further into poultry and pig production.

To find out more come to the farm walk on **Thursday 28 July at 2pm.**



Sean Condon, Fanningstown, Crecora, Co. Limerick

In 2004 Sean Condon a dairy farmer from Crecora in Co Limerick was at a crossroads as further expansion of the farm was hindered by the unavailability of milk quota. Sean decided to switch to organic milk production to increase value. This meant a switch to autumn calving and the introduction of clover across the entire farm. In addition, Winter accommodation had to be modified to meet organic standards. Sean is milking 70 Friesian / Jersey cross cows, a breed ideally suitable for organic dairying. According to Sean when one is considering organic dairying one needs to be mindful of the high cost of organic milk production and ensure that a market is available for organic milk.

A farm walk will take place on Sean's farm on

Thursday 8 September at 2pm.



Organic Farming Open Days 2011

June - September

A nationwide series of national organic farming open days will take place this summer. Teagasc, the Department of Agriculture, Marine and Food, and organic organisations invite all interested to see organic farming in practice and to meet and speak with the producers and the sector's experts.



BEEF

OFFALY

Thursday, 23 June

Sean & Orla Clancy, Tonelmore, Cloghan

MONAGHAN

Thursday, 30 June

Mark Duffy, Bellview, Clogher, Ballybay

LAOIS

Wednesday, 6 July

Eamonn Holohan, Barney, Grogan, Rathdowney

SLIGO

Friday, 8 July

Danny Kilcullen, Seaview House, Enniscrone

CORK

Wednesday, 20 July

Pat O'Connor, Mullinroe, Clondrohid, Macroom

GALWAY

Thursday, 21 July

Teagasc, Mellows Centre, Athenry

MEATH

Thursday, 18 Aug

John McLoughlin, Moneymore, Trim

LONGFORD

Monday, 12 Sept

Gerry Fitzsimons, Mullahoran, Kilcogy, Cavan Via Longford

DAIRY

LIMERICK

Thursday, 8 Sept

Sean Condon, Fanningstown, Crecora

TIPPERARY

Tuesday, 13 Sept

Fintan Rice, Everardgrange, Fethard

HORTICULTURE

KILDARE

Monday, 27 June

Liam Ryan, Spratstown, Ballytore

CORK

Tuesday, 28 June

Colm O'Regan, Ballyregan, Dunderrow, Kinsale

WEXFORD

Thursday, 14 July

Desmond & Olivia Thorpe, Knockroe House, New Ross

GALWAY

Thursday, 28 July

Gerard & Sylvia Langan, Ballisnahyna, Ower, Headford

GALWAY

Wednesday, 7 Sept

Pdraig Fahy & Una Ní Bhroin, Beechlaw, Ballinasloe

CEREAL

KILDARE

Wednesday, 29 June

Alan Mooney, Portgloriam, Kilcock

KILKENNY

Tuesday, 5 July

Patrick J Tobin, Main Street, Johnstown

WESTMEATH

Tuesday, 19 July

Pat Lalor, Ballard Farm, Kilbeggan

PIGS & HORTICULTURE

WICKLOW

Wednesday, 27 July

Alan T. Pierce & Mark Winterbotham, Balleshall, Aughtrim

All walks will commence at 2pm sharp

Contacts:

Pat Barry	Moorepark	Mob: 087-2138331	email: patrick.barry@teagasc.ie
James McDonnell	Oak Park	Mob: 087-3293820	email: james.mcdonnell@teagasc.ie
Daniel Clavin	Athenry	Mob: 087-9368506	email: dan.clavin@teagasc.ie
Elaine Leavy	Grange	Mob: 087-9853285	email: elaine.leavy@teagasc.ie



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