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The Organic Industry - Current Requirements for  
Introductory Information



# THE ORGANIC INDUSTRY

## CURRENT REQUIREMENTS FOR INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

TERENCE M WHELAN 1995



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REPORT TO:     KELLOGG RURAL LEADERSHIP  
                  PROGRAMME XIII  
                  LINCOLN UNIVERSITY

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## OBJECTIVE

To investigate requirements for Introductory Information relevant to Organic Farming and to assess the current material available with a view to writing/compiling specific subject matter to meet current and future requirements of the Organic Industry.



## TERMS OF REFERENCE

Review the current material available to new entrants to the Organic Industry.

Assess the requirements of new producers.

In the absence of adequate informative literature write specific introductory material for new producers.



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## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How adequately the new entrant to Organics was being served with information was the cornerstone to this brief. Due to resource constraints the efforts of BIO-GRO alone was assessed rather than that of the whole organic industry.

Organic production pre 1980 was largely a piece meal picture of scattered growers adhering to non defined standards. In 1984 with the founding of the New Zealand Biological Producers and Consumers Council Inc, there began the step toward production standards; inspection and verification of licensees and licence applicants. BIO-GRO was born and now forms the basis of the certification system.

New BIO-GRO applicants were surveyed to assess the requirements for information and for feed back on the adequacy of what they had received. Existing certified producers were canvassed to obtain their opinion on what information they believed new producers should receive.

BIO-GRO personnel confirmed the existing practices carried out, the information supplied and the relationship with advisors and educational institutes.

The predominant issue that arose was that producers came into the Organic Industry at various levels of expertise and therefore required a varied array of information response. This situation was not a static occurrence but was echoed again among existing certified producers. Existing producers continued to require further information for advancement. **The information required was Multi Level for both new entrants and existing producers.**





The level of information required is so varied I believe it impractical for BIO-GRO to concentrate its resources beyond the purely elementary. Interest enquiries can be catered to by simple explanation leaflets as now. Subscription members are well serviced by the production standards, "The Way Ahead" book, Grower Directory and Bio News package.

**There is room however to operate a Fact Sheet System to facilitate Information Transfer.** Dedicated material already exists in many forms and from different sources to satisfy most requirements. The future can only deliver an expansion of information. It therefore becomes a matter of knowing what information is out there and where to find it. Given a Fact Sheet it is then over to the producer to seek what information they require and educate themselves to whatever level they desire.

New entrants and existing certified producers gained the greatest value input from direct contact with other producers. Producer Field Days and the Grower Directory need to be appreciated as information transfer tools in their own right.

The implications for BIO-GRO of the preceding comments are noted in the recommendations and conclusions of this report.





Grow organic

New Zealand's leading organics journal  
**Soil & Health**  
June 1993 \$4.95

Bio News  
The magazine  
BIO-GRO  
New Zealand  
March 1993

THE WAY  
AHEAD

Certified Bio-Gro  
Organic Production Standards



New Zealand  
Biological Producers  
& Consumers Council (Inc)

BIODYNAMIC  
FARMING  
AND  
GARDENING  
CALENDAR

1995  
1996

Demeter Certification Trademark  
PRODUCTION STANDARDS  
for New Zealand



Biodynamic  
Agriculture  
August 1993

Harvests

CERTIFIED ORGANIC  
The Future For New Zealand Farmers



Resource Directory  
for  
Biodynamic  
Gardening  
1995 - 96

Harvests

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **2.1 Enquiry Information Pack**

Rationalise the present three leaflet package - preferably to one.

A separate fee chart should be retained as this then does not affect printed information material in the event of a fee change.

### **2.2 New Members Information Pack**

Retention of present pack format recommended.

A balance is achieved with "The Way Ahead" book setting the scene being complimented by the Production Standards and Grower Directory information.

### **2.3 Fact File System/Data Bank**

Compilation of topic specific fact sheets.

The fact sheet system would satisfy the requirement for education/information transfer as well as allowing individuals to source topic specific detail to the level they require. Continual updating of this system as information comes to hand would need to form part of the office system.

Note

Provision for this does not have to rest with BIO-GRO though naturally the BIO-GRO office would play a strategic role. The compiling and repository could rest in the hands of another.





## 2.4 Producer Field Days

Apply partnership approach to producer field days.  
 Notify commercial companies of willingness to participate.  
 Director/Inspector representation should be considered.  
 Opportunity exists for field day summary sheet.

## 2.5 Education Institutes

A continued partnership approach will ensure consistency of message and identify any missing links in the information being delivered.

## 2.6 Consultants/Advisors

A close association is imperative to maintain momentum in the same direction.  
 Rulings by the inspectorate especially new or altered principles (or reasoning) should be conveyed to specialist Organic Consultants as a matter of course. (This would also be relevant to Education Institutes).

### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

*In assessing and summarising the introductory material available to new entrants to the Organic Industry I have concentrated on the area of Certified Organic Production encompassed by BIO-GRO New Zealand. Given the limited resources available to me it was necessary to put this restriction upon my investigation rather than look at the total certified organic industry and the introductory material available to it.*

*This is in no way a rejection of the Bio-dynamic Farming and Gardening Association and Demeter but rather a reflection of the limited resources available.*

*The assessment and recommendations contained in this report may have relevance to the Bio-dynamic Farming and Gardening Association and to that end and because of their openness to my request for information a copy of this document will be made available to them.*





The New Zealand Biological Producers and Consumers Council Inc. was founded in 1984 to promote the interests of organic production in New Zealand. Its principal activities include the setting of organic production standards; inspection and verification of BIO-GRO licensees and licence applicants; research and education.

The quality of introductory material has been questioned on occasion leaving doubt as to whether new entrants to the industry were being adequately served. BIO-GRO has been acutely aware throughout its existence that financial constraints had limited its ability to fund the areas of research and education to the level it would have liked.

Enquirers to BIO-GRO are supplied leaflets titled "What is Organic Farming" and "What is Organic Food", as well as a BIO-GRO information leaflet, membership application form and a fee chart.

In 1993 "The Way Ahead" booklet was written by Peter Davis and Alex Schubert. This booklet set out to provide a simple down to earth explanation of organics and the Certified Organic Industry. This booklet together with the BIO-GRO Production Standards, Certified Grower Directory and Bio News (bi-monthly publication) are all given to new members as part of the sign up package.

A review was undertaken from the point of view of what new entrants to the industry require rather than solely an assessment of that which already exists.



# LOOK FOR THESE



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BIO-DYNAMIC  
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# TRADEMARKS

These trademarks are your guarantee that the products  
are produced without the addition of artificial fertilisers  
and harmful chemicals.

The Bio-dynamic Farming & Gardening  
Assn. in NZ (Inc.)  
P.O. Box 306 Napier  
Ph (070) 352-428

NZ Biological Producers Council (Inc.)  
P.O. Box 36-170 Northcote, Auckland 9  
Fax/Ph (09) 480-6650



## **4.0 METHOD**

Two separate surveys were carried out.

The first survey concentrated on prospective new producers while the second canvassed a selection of current certified producers.

Additional information was gained from discussion with BIO-GRO staff.

### **4.1 Survey Groups**

- \* Prospective New Producers (Group 1)  
Direct telephone communication
- \* Current Certified Producers (Group 2)  
Written survey format. (Appendices 1,2,3,4,5,) Follow up telephone communication

### **4.2 Questions Applied**

#### **Group 1**

How do you come to be interested in Organics?  
Did you find the introductory material supplied by BIO-GRO satisfactory?  
What was the most beneficial source of information?  
What extra information or help would you have appreciated?

#### **Group 2**

The response from Group 2 was via their own comment on the survey forms supplied (Appendix 2, 3, 4, 5) with follow up telephone contact.



## 5.0 FINDINGS

### 5.1 Group 1

The majority had had contact with organics through other producers with lesser numbers having completed a tertiary course with organic content or come from a conservation/sustainable background.

Information and material supplied from BIO-GRO was considered adequate. The comments varied from too much literature to digest to not enough practical detail.

People desired a variety of levels of information detail. The difficulty arose from the different levels of competence and commitment at which individuals entered. The type and intensity of production system operated played a major role.

The BIO-GRO office was considered to be professional, knowledgeable, friendly and helpful.

#### Written Material:

Quality without exception though care with terminology and concepts needs to be watched as it is new ground for many.

Quality - Volume was an impediment for some.

Cost was appreciated by most as an integral part in the supply of any service or information. Two groups had a problem with cost.

- Those with a very limited budget.
- Those who had an aversion to paying for anything especially information.

Sourcing extra specific information was seen as an area in need of attention eg Agronomy Guides, Gross Margins.



Personal dialogue with existing producers was considered the single most important source of information both for Group 1 and Group 2. "The openness and freeness with which information was shared," a common expression of many surveyed and a true commendation for the industry as a whole. **More over it provides opportunities for the industry to educate itself** through direct Producer-Producer, Producer-Processor contact. The Grower Directory list and Producer Field Days assume a major role under this scenario.

New producers encountered problems of sourcing information and products due to a lack of networks relevant to their new field of endeavour. Modern organics is a fledgling industry and has not built up the same associated infrastructure as that which supports conventional producers. A conventional producer changing to the organic system initially fails to appreciate this fact. Indeed new entrants coming from any previous field of endeavour have in most cases had back up infrastructure in the environment from which they came.



## 5.2 Group 2

Existing certified producers surveyed proved to be at various levels of the knowledge cliff-face also looking to advance to the next step. Clearly the concept that new producers lay at one level and existing certified producers lay at another complete level is not accurate. The fact is be they new producers or existing producers they are scattered over the knowledge cliff-face all searching for the next foothold for advancement.

Other Highlights from Group 2:

Personal contact with other producers including Produce Field Days important.

The requirement for a data bank or fact file system to facilitate information transfer of topic specific information.



## CONCLUSION

- \* BIO-GRO already provides a series of simple leaflets explaining Organic Farming, Organic Food, the role of BIO-GRO and the cost to join or support such an industry.
- \* BIO-GRO has an introductory package for new members.

"The Way Ahead":

This booklet sets the scene in simple language providing an overview of the Organic Industry.

Organic Production Standards:

A detailed standards book for Certified Organic Production and Processing. (Not a recipe book).

Grower Directory:

List of certified producers and processors including broad product description.

Bio News:

Bi monthly publication of topical interest.



- \* No Comprehensive Organic Information Library Exists.  
There is a need for a computer data bank or fact file system. Producers/Members would be well served by a single repository detailing where to find additional information and resources.
- \* Producer to producer contact was emphasised as the most important source of information. The Grower Directory and Producer Field Days are two strong elements supporting this. Potential exists to enhance Producer Field Days as a means of information transfer.
- \* Educational institutes provide a key role in information transfer. The partnership approach adopted by BIO-GRO in supporting and liaising with these avenues of information flow can only be beneficial to the industry.
- \* Consultants/Advisors are another source of information transfer. BIO-GRO's openness with this side of the industry will pay dividends over time.

## END NOTES

- \* BIO-GRO staff were considered very helpful, knowledgeable and in tune with the industry. This situation could change dramatically if BIO-GRO were faced with staff changes.
  
- \* BIO-GRO certified producers and processors need to appreciate BIO-GRO certification as a consumer based guarantee - not an arbitrary standard with loopholes.

Consumers focus should be drawn to view BIO-GRO certification as a quality standard producers and processors have achieved for sustainability of the land and the health of all.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BIO-GRO New Zealand who fulfilled all my requests for material and information. In particular I acknowledge Denise Pilbrow, Chief Executive Officer and Mark Levick, Certification Manager.

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I am grateful to the individual members of BIO-GRO who freely participated in the surveys giving their opinions and ideas frankly without reserve.

Andrew Ward of Wattie Frozen Foods for the provision of display material.

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Jackie and Robert Aitchson for the provision of display material and sharing of information.





## APPENDIX 1

Greetings

I trust the first signs of Spring are starting to show about you and the seasons potential is in sight. Like most areas of the country South Taranaki experienced a very wet June/July but went on to enjoy a magic month in August with ample sunshine and warm weather.

My reason for writing is that I have taken on the task of putting together written introductory material for people enquiring about 'Organic Farming'. Most of you will have fielded enquiries in the past - and would it not have been convenient after having answered verbally a few pertinent questions simply sent some ready made written material in the post to cement the encounter.

My approach in putting together a pack of information or booklet for would be Organic Producers is to canvas the expertise in the field for simple down to earth practicalities. I am particularly interested in your ideas on first step principles for successful Organic Farming as well as conversion considerations. The aim is not to duplicate the Bio Gro Production Standards book or provide detailed recipes for Organic Farming but rather to provide introductory information as a first step.

Please take a few minutes to collect your thoughts and jot down some comments under the various headings. Feel free to write as much or as little as you please it will all be helpful. YOUR INPUT is vital for the success of this work.

I will phone you in approximately ten days to enquire if you have any problems with the reply layout and answer any general queries. A prepaid reply envelop is enclosed for your convenience. Once the Introductory Information Pack/Booklet has been produced all those that have made it possible will receive a copy. If you do not wish to participate please return all information promptly in the prepaid envelope.

I thank you now in anticipation of your effort in helping make this valuable tool for the Organic Movement a success.

Cheers.

## APPENDIX 2

### CERTIFIED ORGANIC: LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

#### Soil

Fertility:

Structure:

Other:

#### Livestock

Species Mix:

Breeding:

Grazing Management:

Stocking Rate:

Production Level:

Animal Health:

Other:

#### Pasture

Weed Control

Species Mix:

#### General

#### Economics

## APPENDIX 3

### CERTIFIED ORGANIC: CROPPING/VEGETABLES/FRUIT/FLOWER PRODUCTION

#### Soil

Fertility:

Structure:

Other:

#### Crop

Propagation/Seed:

Management: eg Rotation, weed control

Crop Health (Pest & Disease):

Production Levels

Other

#### General

eg Shelter etc

#### Economics

## APPENDIX 4

CERTIFIED ORGANIC: POULTRY

### Livestock

Breeding:

Management:

Animal Health:

Feeding:

Other:

### Housing

### General

### Economics

## APPENDIX 5

CERTIFIED ORGANIC: HONEY BEES

### Livestock

Management:

Health (Pest & Disease):

Other:

### Apiary

Weed Control:

Hives:

Other:

### General

### Economics