

Livestock For Sale

Full symbol Organic Galloway pedigree cattle. Galloways of Lecarrow Organic Farm, Spencer Harbour, Drumkeerin, Co. Leitrim Contact Joachim Schaefer 071-9648960 gallowaysoflecarrow@iolfree.ie

1 purebred registered AA bull 13 months; 2 purebred AA hf. Contact Philip Moynagh 087-7998633 or 049-4337465

Pedigree AA hf. Contact Gerry Fitzsimons at 087-9463738 or 049 4336708.

6 top quality continental cross hf and 4 bulls, weanlings, for sale. Contact Shane Woods 071-9641213

2AA Hf weanlings, 3 Friesian X weanling bulls. Contact Ralph 086-8928375

For sale 4 Tamworth Sows -4 year old - laois area Contact Dominic on 087 9694070

Livestock Wanted

Organic boar, any breed. Contact Fiona Crowe, Highdell Farm, Navan, Co. Meath 086-2632657

Produce For Sale

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Mole's Organic Farm, Cloonslanor, Strokestown (closed Sundays) Phone: 071-9633775

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Organic Galloway Beef - Galloways of Lecarrow Organic Farm. Contact Joachim Schaefer 071-9648960 gallowaysoflecarrow@iolfree.ie

Lamb and eggs. Pauric & Brid Tiernan, Pollnamaughill, Hillstreet, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Roscommon 071-9635662 or 087-9608963

Organic hens for sale Contact Mary Luthers, Dromahair, Co. Leitrim 086-1025317

Beef, eggs & vegetables. Mary Rose Geoghegan, Aughacashel Organic Farm, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim 071-9641324

Turnips for sale. Contact Philip Moynagh 087-7998633 or 049-4337465

For Sale

Machinery for Sale Earthway Precision Seeder for sale, complete with plates. Perfect condition. €230 Contact Kearns Organic Growers, Ruskey, Co. Roscommon 087-2402669 or 087-7695268

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& ORGANIC PRODUCER

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Organic Beef Price highest in years

The price for Organic Beef is now the highest it has been since the late nineties. Leitrim Organic Farmers' Co-op opened the new year on €3.75/kg (IR£1.35/lb) and the price has now moved to €3.90/kg (IR£1.40/lb). In the past few weeks some prices have exceeded €4.00/kg. This is very good news for beef finishers, who have had a number of uncertain years in the business. There is really no excuse now for farmers selling their stock in the conventional market.. The Co-op has developed a good relationship with Linden Foods through Slaney Meats and continues to supply that contract. Demand from the UK is very strong, where the price has been in excess of €4.00/kg through the latter part of last year. There is also strong domestic demand, with increased interest from the food service sector.

Lamb has started well with quotes of €4.40/kg (£1.59/lb) available at ICM Camolin and Leitrim Organic Farmers' Co-op and others. Hogget prices will remain high with even a tighter supply situation in the Northern part of the country than last year. Farmers' Markets have taken a battering this month, with gale force winds and rain making it a challenging shopping experience. Leitrim Organic Farmers' Co-op has commenced the markets again, with Carrick-on-Shannon on Thursdays, Roscommon on Fridays, Sligo on Saturday Morning and Boyle on Saturday afternoons. "The Organic Butcher" in Ballinasloe is open Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays each week. It has an extended range of products on offer, now including lamb sausages available nowhere else. Once again this year the Co-op will be led by the market. In conjunction with The Western Organic Network, we hope to present opportunities to our members, especially in the areas of Pigs and Poultry, which remain very under supplied.



Declan McCarthy (on left), butcher for the Leitrim Organic Farmers' Co-op, with Minister Eamonn O Cuiv, Michael Finneran TD and John Brennan, the Co-op Manager at the opening of the Roscommon Farmers Market. See page for full story

BASF Bows out of Ireland

MEPs vote for caution, but Minister Coughlan plans to bring in Co-existence

As we go to press BASF has officially confirmed that it has abandoned its plans to trial genetically modified potatoes in Ireland. The company decided too many restrictions had been imposed by the EPA last year. It is now opting to grow them in Britain, where there are fewer restrictions. But UK Friends of the Earth campaigner, Clare Oxborrow, says, "We don't need GM potatoes and there is no consumer demand for them. The Government should promote safe and sustainable agriculture, not this half-baked GM potato plan." MEPs have just voted to delay a controversial draft Biotech Resolution in the European Parliament, to allow more time for the agriculture committee to scrutinise it. This follows European-wide opposition from MEPs and citizens of all political persuasions. However, the GM-free Ireland Network warned that

Agriculture Minister Mary Coughlan still plans to publish her strategy "to ensure the co-existence" of GM crops with conventional and organic agriculture" after the General Election. "This would open the floodgates for the GM invasion of Ireland to begin", he said.

Drumshanbo Spring 2007 Organic Mart

will be on Sat 24th March

As usual, all livestock should be booked in with the IOFGA office by Friday 23rd March

Phone: 043-42495

Fax: 043-42496

Drumshanbo Mart Office:
071-9641116

“It gave me an oops in my tummy to see standing room only at the Organic Conference in Carrick-on-Shannon recently – what a change from the years gone by when there might be a scattering of 40 or 50 pioneers and a few reluctant, not to mention deeply sceptical officials from the Department.”

Darina Allen, guest speaker at the conference, reflecting in the Irish Examiner Weekend's Food File a few days later

All-Ireland Organic Food Conference flies flag for organic food in the North West

The North West is still feeling the buzz from the All-Ireland Organic Food Conference held on November 7th in Carrick-on-Shannon during National Organic Week 06. It was designed to provide practical help to businesses across the organic sector, and to present the latest market research to attract conventional players to 'go organic' too. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive based on what delegates learnt, the contacts they made, and the tremendous feel-good factor of uniting over 200 attendees under one roof to develop the Irish organic sector. Atlantic Organics was proud to host the conference in the North West, and to bring together key players from both sides of the border, in line with its own cross-border project focus.

The conference was organised by Atlantic Organics in association with the WDC (Western Development Commission) and ICBAN (Irish Central Border Area Network) and Western Organic Network. The Event Partners were Bord Bia, the Department of Agriculture and Food, Leitrim Organic Farmers' Co-op, North West Organic Co-op, The Organic Centre. Sponsors included IOFGA and Enterprise Ireland.

The event set out to provide practical help to farmers, growers, processors,

manufacturers, distributors and retail from both organic and conventional food businesses. It was also an opportunity for organic food SMEs to gain access to support resources and find advice to help boost their businesses.

People flocked to Carrick-on-Shannon from the North West and far beyond. Around 20% of the audience were from Dublin, 12% from Leitrim, and smaller numbers came from elsewhere on the island and England too. The largest group represented in the audience were involved in production (nearly 40%) followed by retail (over 20%) with a good public-private spread of delegates from a broad range of organisations.

When asked what was the best thing about this conference, there were responses such as:

- That it happened – and in Leitrim!
- The sense of enthusiasm about organics
- Hearing the experiences of those that have reached the consumer with their organic products
- The power of organic people together.

Atlantic Organics were delighted with the level of press interest in the event too, which meant they exceeded their expectations for generating publicity to raise awareness of organics in the public eye. The event attracted PR coverage in

13 different regional publications, 8 nationals, and 5 business/specialist publications too, appearing more than once in many. It was a great indication of the increased public interest in organic food when the conference appeared on RTE1's 6 o'clock news, and when Pat Kenny invited the Atlantic Organics team to join him on his radio show to discuss the event and the organic sector in general.

Overall, the conference demonstrated that the market for organic food is increasing rapidly in Ireland, and there has never been a better time to get involved.

Consumers are beginning to realise the benefits of eating high quality food that has met high standards of production, and they are valuing provenance too – preferring food produced close to home. The conference also tackled the challenges such as supply deficits and distribution complexities, but with more opportunities to thrash out these hurdles together, the sector will continue to grow and progress. It was the focal point of National Organic Week 2006, and will be a learning and networking experience that people will feel the benefits of for some time to come. Let's hope it can be followed by more gatherings on an organic theme in the not too distant future!

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Website News

The Western Organic Network's new website is now up and running. For full details of 2007 courses, forthcoming events and much more, see www.westernorganicnetwork.com

Leitrim Organic Farmers' Co-op website - the new online shop facility - will be available in late April. There will be a training evening organised for members.

The **North & West Organic Producer** will also be accessible from the website in the near future.

Aid for African farmers - Bothár concert

The students of the Drumshanbo College of Further Education are presenting a concert of Traditional Music on Saturday March 30th at the Mayflower in Drumshanbo. The doors open at 7.30 and admission at the door is €5. All proceeds are going towards Bothár, the charity that specialises in helping poor farmers in Africa and other third world countries to help themselves by giving them the gift of livestock. By sending cows, goats, camels, pigs and trees and providing education and veterinary back-up, Bothár is tackling poverty and supporting sustainable development.

Organic Livestock Spring Seminar



On the 14th of March Leitrim Organic Farmers Co Op held a very successful seminar on organic livestock production in the Bush Hotel, Carrick On Shannon, Co Leitrim over 70 farmers from Monaghan to Ofally attended the evening.

The Seminar focused on Beef production from an organic perspective. There was a strong emphasis placed on finishing and breeding and it that while a grading report from Slaney showed that organic beef was on par with conventional finishing, there was more work to be done. Manager of Leitrim Organic Farmers Co Op John Brennan says "Organic meat is in high demand at present and as the market expands it is important to ensure that farmers produce the correct animal type at farm level according to consumer needs. It is very heartening to have a seminar of this type so well attended, it just shows the confidence and belief that there is in the sector".

The seminar featured presentations from the Aberdeen Angus Society on the merits of the Aberdeen Angus breed and presentations from Slaney Meats on beef quality and how cattle supplied to Slaney Meats through Leitrim Organic Farmers Co Op There was also a presentation by the Department of Agriculture on the European issues facing organics and a fresh update on the opportunities for Organic Farming under REPS 4 and the Scheme of grant aid for the Development of Organic Scheme. The event is sponsored by Leitrim Organic Farmers' Co Op and is free to all to attend. Western Organic Network launched a pilot rare breed programme aimed at increasing the number of Irish Moiled cattle in the North West. The programme aims to assist organic farmers buy the cattle and to increase biodiversity on farms through funding from the The Heritage Council. For further details on any of the above, please contact Leitrim Organic Farmers Co Op on 0719640868

Rossinver Organic Porridge Oats and Organic Tomato Relish set for national distribution



Atlantic Organics Ltd is part-financed by the European Union through the Interreg IIIA Programme which is managed for the Special EU Programmes Body by the ICBAN Partnership. It has been awarded funding of €481,233 of a total project cost of €641,645 for two projects under Measure 1.1 of the INTERREG IIIA Programme.

Atlantic Organics has announced that the first two products in their newly developed range of Rossinver organic products from the North West are to be distributed nationally. 'Rossinver – Grass Root Organics' Porridge Oats and Tomato Relish have been piloted locally for the past few months. Following an overwhelmingly positive response to the products, two distribution companies have now been appointed to distribute them nationally. They are Odaios and Simply Wild. Both these companies specialise in distributing a range of high quality and organic food products. Lucie Kennedy of Atlantic Organics commented, "Having spent the past two years developing the Rossinver range, we are delighted to be able to announce their national distribution. We have had a really positive response to our local launch. I have no doubt that there is a sizeable market throughout Ireland for quality organic produce from the North West. Look out for Rossinver Organic Porridge Oats and Rossinver Organic Tomato Relish in your local shop and if you know of a retail outlet where you

would like to see them please contact us by emailing lucie@atlanticorganics.com or by getting your local shopkeeper to contact us directly."

Whilst focusing on the national launch, Atlantic Organics continues to work on extending the range of its products. Other Rossinver products in the pipeline include Rossinver organic pork and lamb sausages and Rossinver salami.

Atlantic Organics was established to develop a range of organic products, and pass the benefits back to the local cross-border region. The brand name 'Rossinver-Grass Root Organics' comes from the parish in North Leitrim where Atlantic Organics is based. An important aim of Atlantic Organics is to support local organic producers, and each of its products has been produced with a focus on harnessing local artisan expertise and organic produce supply.

The three leading organic organisations in the region are behind the project: Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-op, North West Organic and The Organic Centre. It is also facilitated and supported by the Western Development Commission.

Atlantic Organics Ltd

The new joint venture cross-border company established by the Organic Centre, the North West Organic Co-op and the Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-op with support from Interreg and the Western Development Commission.

For more information phone: 071 98 54014



This project is supported by
the EU INTERREG IIIA
Programme
Ireland/Northern Ireland



REPS 4 – A Preview

Basic Measures	REPS 4 Biodiversity Category 1 Options	REPS 4 Biodiversity Category 2 Options
<i>(compulsory - basic rates payable)</i>	<i>(Must commit to 2 Biodiversity options, at least 1 from Category 1 - no additional payments) New or revised in REPS 4</i>	
1. Nutrient Management Plan (limits as in Nitrates Action Programme + derogation, to be approved by EU)	No Options	
2. Grassland Management Plan.	2A traditional hay meadows 2B species rich grassland 2D use of clover in swards	2A traditional hay meadows 2B species rich grassland 2C mixed livestock enterprises 2E use of trailing shoe 2F control of invasive species
3. Protect and maintain watercourses, waterbodies and wells		3A increased watercourse margin 3B reduce nutrient inputs and protect vulnerable soils in catchments
4. Retain wildlife habitats	4A creation of new habitat 4B tree planting 4D establish farm woodland see FEPS	4B tree planting 4C nature corridors
5. Maintain farm and field boundaries	5A coppicing of hedgerows 5B laying of hedgerows 5C plant/new hedgerows 5D additional stone wall maintenance	
6. Restricted use of pesticides and fertilizers near field boundaries, ponds, streams and wells.	No Options	
7. Protect features of historical and archaeological interest.		7A increased archaeological site margins 7B site management where public access
8. Maintain and improve visual appearance of farm and farmyard.	8A landscaping around farmyard 8B traditional farm enterprise/skills	8A landscaping around farmyard 8B traditional farm enterprise/skills
9. Tillage crop production.	9A green cover establishment 9B environmental management of set-aside 9C increased arable margins 9D low input cereals/root crops 9E bio-energy crops 9F eco tillage crops	9A green cover establishment 9C increased arable margins 9D low input cereals/root crops 9E bio-energy crops
10. Training in environmentally friendly farming practices.	Compulsory 10 hour REPS appreciation course and farm visit for those who have not attended a REPS 2 or 3 training course. Increase in Demonstration Farms and payments. Practical training courses eg. hedgelaying	
11. The maintenance of farm and environmental records.		

Basic payments in REPS 4 represent a 17% increase on those in REPS 3, which Minister Mary Coughlan hopes will encourage more farmers to join. She is also proposing an additional 15% top-up for island land in REPS.

She said this week that some 3,334 farmers in Co. Leitrim are currently signed up. A significant development, she pointed out, will be that all farmers will be eligible to join, as long as those operating above the limit of 170 kg of organic nitrogen per ha have a derogation under the Nitrates Regulations – this will be subject to approval by the EU Commission. However, organic farmers may have some reservations about this measure (1).

Details of the new Forest Environment Protection Scheme (FEPS)

“FEPS will add a further dimension to the planting programme, opening up new land to forestry and highlighting the environmental benefits of forestry. With the increasing evidence of climate change before us, with the need to find alternative fuels and with the demand for cleaner air and a better environment, it is more important than ever that we plant more forests”

The new scheme has been widely welcomed. It will make environmentally friendly (high nature value) forestry an attractive land use option for farmers in REPS, finally removing the barrier to forest planting by farmers participating in REPS.

- The objectives of FEPS include:
 - o To encourage farmers to establish and maintain high nature-value forestry through measures such as increasing biodiversity and protecting water quality.
 - o To support, establish or provide habitat for wildlife.
 - o To encourage provision of protective forestry, eg. Riparian planting.

- o To produce a commercial crop of timber while making an enhanced contribution to the environment.
- o To increase Ireland’s woodland cover to contribute positively towards climate change mitigation.
- Farmer eligibility is the same as for REPS and includes farmers who intend joining REPS.
- Like REPS, the scheme will run for a 5 year period, initially on a pilot basis, under the Rural Development Plan, 2007 – 2013. If successful, however, it is likely to continue indefinitely.
- The basic formula is REPS + Afforestation Scheme = FEPS

REPS 4 Supplementary Measures

(Top-up payments for 2 only, but no limit to no. which may be implemented)

- Low input tillage crops.
- Eco tillage.
- Importation of organic nitrogen.
- Traditional farm enterprises, eg. traditional Irish orchards, small scale poultry production, beehives, etc.
- Traditional sustainable grazing.
- Clover swards.
- Conservation of wild bird habitat (eg. Corncrake) with BirdWatch Ireland
- Heritage Buildings (with Heritage Council)
- Lake catchments (pilot project, with Leader)
- Conservation of animal genetic resources (rare breeds).
- Riparian Zones.
- LINNET (Land Invested in Nature, Natural Eco-Tillage) Habitats.

REPS 4 Stand-alone Measures

- Natura 2000 (SACs & SPAs only + Water Framework Directive Designations)
- Non-Natura 2000 NHA / Commonage
- Organic farming.

- As we go to press the draft version of REPS 4 still awaits approval by the EU Commission, and the details need clarification. There is no start date set, though it is expected to be as early as possible this year. There will be a 2 month lead-in time for printing documentation, training, etc. REPS 3 closed to new applications on 13th Oct 2006, and the current vacuum is causing difficulties for many farmers.
- 54, 300 farmers are currently in REPS, and over €2 billion has been paid out since the scheme began in 1994. The Department aims to have 65, 000 farmers signed up in due course.
- The consultative process for REPS 4 started in late 2005 (the Co-op was one of the many stakeholders to make a submission), and concluded following a conference organised by Teagasc in Tullamore in Nov 2006.
- The EU Council proposed strategic guidelines for Rural Development for period 2007 – 2013, with their key priorities Biodiversity, Water and Climate Change. REPS 4 will meet these by offering more options and supplementary measures, focusing especially on Biodiversity. There will be 26 Biodiversity options, compared with 16 in REPS 3, again in 2 categories. These will enhance the 11 compulsory basic measures, and give more choice to suit farmers' circumstances, but with no additional payments. Hedgerow planting and maintenance are already proving popular options with farmers, and Teagasc is now running open days and practical courses.
- It appears that **4D Establish farm woodland** will attract payments for farmers also going into FEPS, the new environmental forestry scheme, linking farming and forestry payments for the first time.
- There are now 12 supplementary measures, most new or redefined in REPS 4. Any number of these may be implemented, but top-up payments are made only for two.

Basic REPS 4 Payments

- €234 /ha up to 20 ha
- €205 /ha for next 20 ha
- €82 /ha for next 15
- €10 / ha thereafter

Additional payments can be cumulated with the basic payment, to include 1 or 2 supplementary measures, and stand-alone measures: Organic farming, Natura 2000, Non-Natura 2000, depending on farmers' circumstances.

It is stressed that REPS 4 will provide for a minimum level of farming activity which must be above the baseline required under the Single Farm Payment Scheme. Only areas declared in this application will be eligible for REPS 4 payment.

Main Sources:

Preview of REPS 4 Gerry Rice Dept of Ag & Food presented at the *Teagasc National REPS Conference* Nov 10th 2006

REPS: the basics: What do I need to know? Joanne Fox *Irish Farmers' Journal* Jan 20th 2007

Good News for Organic Farming

– there will be significant changes for organic farmers in REPS 4. Delegates at the National Organic Conference in November heard a preliminary announcement by Minister Brendan Smith that organic support payments will be made outside of REPS 4 (as a stand-alone measure) Organic farmers can still apply for REPS 4, but small farmers and growers in conversion who might not qualify for REPS will be eligible for support. No details are yet available.

announced by Minister Mary Wallace in January 2007

● The minimum eligible area is 8 ha. Farmers will get an annual REPS premium of up to €200 per ha in addition to the current forest premium, depending on the farm size and the area planted. REPS farms of 40 ha or less will receive the maximum of €200 per ha planted; 40 – 55 ha, €82 per ha planted, and over 55 ha, just €12 per ha planted. The forest premium payable will depend on species mix planted, with the emphasis being on broadleaves and native conifers. Enclosed Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine are not eligible under REPS.

● For example, a REPS farmer who plants 8 ha of oak in FEPS could receive

up to €759 /ha for 5 years, followed by €559 /ha for 15 years, with all premiums tax-free over the 20 years.

● FEPS payments will be in addition to a 15% increase in the annual forest premium, and also a 14% increase in forest planting grants.

● Farmers planting under FEPS will have to adhere to enhanced environmental objectives as in REPS, some mandatory, and a menu of options including biodiversity, habitats, species mix, environmental impact and visual considerations.

● The hope is that farmers will combine REPS and FEPS, receiving the FEPS

payment for afforestation carried out under REPS. Previously REPS farmers were free to plant land, but the afforested land would be excluded from REPS payments, while land under REPS disallowed applicants from making forest grant or premium claims. This actively discouraged REPS farmers from getting into forestry.

● Farmers in FEPS will now be able to stack total entitlements, to include Single Farm Payment + REPS + FEPS (REPS element + afforestation premium)

For full details of the scheme see the Teagasc website: www.teagasc.ie

Bird Flu – the Price of the £5 Turkey

The recent outbreak of the H5N1 strain of bird flu at a Bernard Matthews turkey farm in Holton, Suffolk, UK, apparently came as a surprise to the UK authorities. But there's no real mystery. Highly pathogenic bird flu such as H5N1 thrives wherever there is industrial poultry production. We looked at some examples in our newsletter in spring 2006. The unregulated large scale poultry industry of South east Asia appears to be the original breeding ground of this virus. From the horrendous conditions in the factories the newly evolved virulent strains easily spread to the wild bird populations and the crowded backyard poultry flocks and markets in the region, causing high mortality. Most of the cases of human deaths have occurred in these circumstances. Milder strains of avian flu viruses are naturally prevalent in the indigenous bird populations, but cause few deaths. Most birds with H5N1 don't survive long. The routes of infection over long distances correlate much more closely with industrial transportation routes than with migration flyways. But it has been expedient for governments and the poultry sector to blame migrating wild birds for the spread of the disease, and to impose restrictions on free range poultry flocks, while there has been silence on the role of the factory farms. Bernard Matthews has a highly profitable business in the UK and is considered a top brand. In reality the turkeys are raised in typical factory farm environments where deaths are 'nothing out of the ordinary' (according to the Defra Minister, Ben Bradshaw). Undercover investigations by Animal Aid in 2002, 2005 and 2006 produced evidence of crowded, dirty conditions with severely injured, diseased and dead birds. The white turkeys grow fast and die young, bred to put on weight as quickly as possible. Over a few days at the end of January more than 2,500 8 week old poults (turkey chicks) died in just one of the 22 sheds at the farm. The vet initially

failed to suspect bird flu and Defra was only called in after 800 birds had died. According to Defra factory farms usually have high levels of biosecurity, and the sheds at Holton are supposedly sealed from outside contamination. Urgent investigations started, as usual, by blaming wild birds for carrying the virus, with an infected bird or excreta assumed to have entered the shed via an air vent. This implied the H5N1 virus was already present, undetected, in the wild bird population in Britain, as the returning spring migration had not yet started. However, there are many sources of cross-contamination, and the disease could easily have been spread by human ignorance and negligence, and so it is likely to prove.

Senator David Norris links Avian Flu to Factory Farming

In a debate in early February Senators David Norris and Mary Henry linked factory farming of poultry to avian flu and hospital-acquired infections like MRSA. David Norris said he had absolutely no sympathy for the proprietors of the Matthews factory farm in Britain. "These things are concentration camps for animals. They're extremely dangerous. If we lose respect for other creatures on this planet then we will very quickly lose respect for ourselves and for our fellow humans. Avian flu spread like wildfire and the virus is capable of mutating within these horrible places where you have hundreds of thousands of birds stuffed in." His colleague Dr Henry had indicated to him that in some of those places creatures were so overfed that their legs could not keep them up.

Subsequently it transpired that the most probable source of infection was the Matthews-owned company, Saga Foods in Hungary, where there had been a number of bird flu deaths in January. Analysis at the EU Veterinary Laboratories Agency in Weybridge, UK,

showed that the H5N1 strains were essentially identical, ruling out wild birds as the source of the Suffolk outbreak, and suggesting illegal or unsafe movements of poultry products from Hungary to the UK. However, investigations on both sides have so far shown no evidence of this.

On this occasion the spread of the infection was halted. All 159,000 turkeys at the Suffolk farm were soon culled as a precaution – ironically the carcasses were transported through Britain to a large scale rendering plant in Staffordshire for safe incineration, to the alarm of the public who encountered the trucks en route. An exclusion zone was put in place, free range poultry kept indoors, movements restricted, all personnel in contact with the farm given Tamiflu. Five countries banned imports of all UK poultry products, but EU states are only allowed to ban products from within the exclusion zone.

Bernard Matthews will get compensation for his losses. The real casualties of a major outbreak will be the livelihoods of ordinary poultry farmers, small scale commercial free-range and organic poultry and egg producers. Wild birds will be at risk of widespread slaughter. Poor communities dependent on their backyard flocks for survival, as in the Danube Delta last year, have already suffered devastating culls - in this case infected birds migrating from Siberia most likely were the cause of the outbreaks. And humans, of whom at least 150 have so far died following very close contact with infected poultry, face a potential pandemic if the critical mutation takes place to allow human to human infection, most likely starting in south east Asia.

All this because of our greed. The demand for cut price chicken and turkey, all the year round - £5 for turkeys in UK supermarkets last Christmas – can be met only by factory farming. It is time people made the connection.

World Scientific experts condemn factory farming

While government officials look for scapegoats such as wild birds and back yard poultry flocks, many of the world's scientific authorities now agree that industrial poultry farming is responsible for the emergence of virulent bird flu viruses. Some go further, and condemn all industrial livestock farming as a key threat to the global environment.

In a recent report the U N Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has stated "We are wasting valuable time pointing fingers at wild birds when we should be focusing on dealing with the root causes of this epidemic spread, which...[include] farming methods which crowd huge numbers of animals into small spaces." They also say the livestock industry is degrading land, contributing to the green house effect (producing 18% of global greenhouse emissions, compared to 13.5% emitted by transport) polluting water resources, and destroying biodiversity. The World Health Organisation blames "intensive poultry production" for H5N1, and the "industrialisation of the animal production sector" as a factor in the increasing trend of emerging infectious diseases.

Livestock's long shadow – UN FAO Report 2006 at www.virtualcentre.org/en/library/key_pub/longshad/A0701E00.pdf

Education for Sustainable Development: The Community Powerdown Handbook

Make sure your organic business or sustainable project is listed in this forthcoming publication from the Sustainable Ireland Network's Cultivate Centre

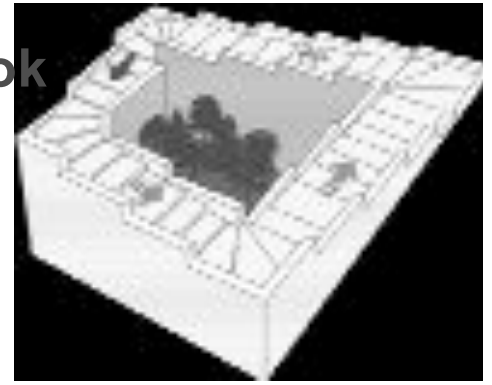
Organic farmers, organic and sustainable enterprises, especially projects providing training, should check out the Sustainable Ireland website at www.sustainable.ie/directory/ to ensure up to date details are listed in their on-line directory. Back in 2000 Sustainable Ireland, which is now based at the Cultivate Centre in the Temple Bar in Dublin, published their very valuable Resource Book. This was the first comprehensive attempt to produce a directory of sustainable and organic resources in Ireland. Since then their on-line directory has been available for updating, but a quick review shows that entries for the north west are scanty and usually very out of date. The locally produced Organic & Green guide to Ireland 2005 – 2006 is another important resource. But the scene is so diverse and changing so fast, that we should support every effort to keep people informed about initiatives in the region.

Now the Cultivate Centre is updating their online directory:

“to feed into an education for sustainable development directory, which will be a section in their new Community Powerdown Handbook. This informative and inspirational Handbook will use the climate crisis and the need to reduce our non-renewable energy dependency as a catalyst to move towards sustainability. Articles, information boxes, practical tips, and the directory will inform people about changes that they can make and the organisations that can help them in this evolution. The Handbook, supported by Irish Aid, is due to be launched in April as part of the 12th Convergence Sustainable Living Festival.”

Educational providers within the area of sustainable development can avail of free listing in the Handbook or pay for a more detailed entry or full advertisement. We would encourage all our readers to check out the Sustainable Ireland website for further details, and update their own directory entry on-line.

The Cultivate Centre produces a monthly e-bulletin, now called Cultivate Living and Learning, which includes news of sustainability events round the country, as well as their own innovative programme of events. Subscribe at www.cultivate.ie. You can contact them at 01-674 5773.



Organic farming more energy efficient, lower carbon emissions - says UK government report

A study published in 2003 by Defra in the UK concluded that organic farms produce lower CO₂ emissions than conventional farms, are usually more energy efficient and their energy consumption is lower. This makes organic farming very important as part of a national or global strategy to reduce overall carbon emissions and help slow the rate of global warming.

The Defra report, on organic farming and the environment, was prepared by a Subgroup of the Action Plan for Organic Farming, chaired by Defra, which includes members from the Soil Association, Elm Farm Research Centre, English Nature, the RSPB, and Environment Agency.

Organic farming is shown to be better for the environment in most respects, summarised as follows:

Biodiversity	On average organic is better
Nutrient pollution to water	Available information is limited, but losses of nitrate from organic systems are similar on an area basis to losses from conventional systems subject to limits on quantity and timing of fertiliser and manures.
Pesticide Pollution	Organic is better
Energy efficiency	Organic is usually better
Soil protection	On balance organic has benefits for soil organisms although little difference has been shown for physical effects
Carbon dioxide	Organic is better because of reduced energy use
Ammonia	Little difference per unit yield, but probably lower emissions from organic per unit area
Nitrous oxide	Insufficient information
Methane	Conventional is probably better per unit of output, but may be similar on an area basis
Controlled Wastes	Organic is better
Pathogens	No information – subject to ongoing research

Some of these conclusions seem cautious, and occasionally surprising. The report notes, however, that the differences relate to an average farm (apart perhaps from pesticide pollution). Individual farm management and farmer motivation will have a significant effect on environmental impacts regardless of the farming system. In Ireland, some conventional farms in REPS might come out well in such a study. In September 2005 we reported on a comparative biodiversity research project carried out on organic and conventional farms across the UK. This showed organic was significantly better for biodiversity, especially for animal wildlife. On the other hand, higher methane emissions from organic farms could be due to the higher fibre content of organic feed, especially if livestock are largely grass-fed, but counter-balanced by lower stocking densities.

Further comparative research is needed, but the environmental benefits are undoubted. See the Defra website for full details:

www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/policy/research/pdf/env-impacts2.pdf

New Organic Course Programme Launched for 2007

There has never been a better time to be an organic food producer!

Western Organic Network has just launched its new programme of courses, aimed at small-holders, organic producers, and farmers interested in seizing the opportunities to be found in the organic marketplace.

John Brennan, chairperson of the Leitrim-based WON, says:

“The rise in market demand for organic vegetables and meat is dramatic, people are really catching on to the benefits of high quality, sustainably produced food. But what’s also important is that it is produced and sold locally and that’s what these new courses are all about”.

The increasing consumer demand for local organic produce through box schemes, shops, restaurants and farmers’ markets has led to an urgent need to increase supply in the region. It is this opportunity that WON hopes will help drive more people into ‘going organic’. The broad range of courses now available – over 30 in all – cover every thing you need to know about growing vegetables and herbs, keeping pigs and laying hens, how to market your produce, hedge-laying and forestry on the farm. A range of business courses are also on offer to enhance the skills of producers – from farm accounting to desk top publishing – along with distance learning courses in organic theory.

The Western Organic Network has gone from strength to strength in recent years. John is delighted not only to have such an extensive range of training, but also in extending the number of counties in which it is available, from Donegal right down into Mayo, Galway and Clare. “It is really vital that we have a strong community of local organic producers to meet demand. The North West has always had a reputation for



caption

environmentally friendly farming practices, and we are hoping to build on that by encouraging more producers to get involved.”

Sean added that these courses offer a first step, or a way of improving what you are already doing, and ideas for diversification. The variety of courses extends beyond horticulture and livestock, with new courses on medicinal herb growing, bee keeping, alternative energy and homeopathy for animals. Courses are open to anyone by becoming a member of the network. Members also have the opportunity to benefit by exchanging ideas at monthly meetings, and availing of talks, demonstrations and open days on organic farms. As an additional support the network are investigating alternative organic business options for its members. Investigations under way at present include small scale chicken production and rare breed organic meat production.

To find out more about becoming a member – and how to get an early bird discount by booking courses in advance, visit the WON website or contact the manager Sean McGloin directly.

For further information, please contact:

**Sean McGloin - Network Co-ordinator
Western Organic Network
The Enterprise Centre, Hill Road,
Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim
Office Tel: 071 96 40688
Mobile: 086 1728442
Email:
info@westernorganicnetwork.com**

Western Organic Network is an Accel project funded by member companies, the European Social Fund and the National Development Plan. WON was established in 2003 as lack of training was identified as a barrier to developing the organic sector.

New Bog Trail



Knockvicar Bog Nature Trail at the Knockvicar Organic Garden near Boyle opened to the public recently. This Nature Trail is a marked walkway along the Historical Trail on the edge of a raised bog. “Seven signposted stops and a printed guide help you to learn about raised bogs, their natural history, traditional use, flora and environmental aspects”, says Laszlo Kenderesi, manager of the project.

On the way you will walk through a small hazel woodland, then along/through the

bog. Numbered signposts will help you to use the guide, and photographs to identify a few significant plants.

The Trail is open to visitors all year, Monday to Saturday. Picnic tables are located along the walk. Printed guides can be bought at Knockvicar Organic Garden. Guided tours and field trips are available for all Primary and Secondary school groups.

Walking distance is 2 km return on green road and bog-surface (absolutely safe on the marked way).

Western Organic Network Course Calendar 2007

COURSE	DATE (2007)	LOCATION	No of Days of course	
Business Skills	Autumn	Donegal	3 evenings	
	Autumn	Galway	4 evenings	
	Autumn	Leitrim	5 evenings	
Cheese Making	4 & 5 April	Sligo	2 days	
Computer Training	Autumn	Leitrim	depending on course	
	Autumn	Mayo	depending on course	
Computerised Farm Accounts	Autumn	Mayo	evening & day options	
Conversion to Organics	12 & 19 Sept	Donegal	evening & afternoon session	
	24 & 27 Oct	Mayo	evening & afternoon session	
	12 & 17 Oct	Galway	evening & afternoon session	
Crop Planning	24-Feb	Sligo	1 day	
	03-Nov	Donegal	1 day	
	17-Nov	Mayo	1 day	
Cut Herb Production	11-Apr	Leitrim	1 day	
	25-Jul	Galway	1 day	
	28-Jul	Galway	1 day	
	26-Sep	Galway	1 day	
	20-Oct	Mayo	1 day	
	17-Nov	Donegal	1 day	
Desk Top Publishing	25-Oct	Donegal	6 evenings	
Farm Accounts	Autumn	Mayo	6 evenings	
Fruit Crop Management (Autumn)	20-Nov	Galway	1 day	
Hedge Laying	8 & 9 Sept	Donegal	2 day	
	15 & 16 Sept	Mayo	3 day	
	22 & 23 Sept	Roscommon	4 day	
Homeopathy for Animals	Autumn	Leitrim	2 day	
Integrating Forestry with Organic Farms	Autumn	Leitrim	1 day	
Intro to Bee Keeping (1 day)	29-Apr	Leitrim	1 day	
Bee Keeping advanced (3 day)	12-May	Donegal	3 day	
Intro to Farmers' Markets	24-Oct	Mayo	1 day	
	25-Oct	Galway	1 day	
	Autumn	Leitrim	2 day	
Introduction to Alternative Energy	14-Oct	Leitrim	1 day	
Introduction to Organic Farming		Distance Learning		
Livestock - Grassland and Soil Management	18-Apr	Leitrim	1 day	
	13-Jun	Clare	1 day	
Livestock - Veterinary Management	05-May	Roscommon	1 day	
	20-Jun	Clare	1 day	
Machinery for Horticulture	16-Jun	Galway	1 day	
	29-Aug	Roscommon	1 day	
Marketing Skills for Organic Producers	Autumn	Donegal	3 evenings	
	Autumn	Leitrim	3 evenings	
	Autumn	Galway	3 evenings	
MSC/PG Dip in Organic Farming		Distance Learning		
Organic Egg Production	02-Apr	Leitrim	1 day	
Organic Horticulture	10-Feb	Galway	7 days 1 day a fortnight	
	14-Feb	Galway	7 days 1 day a fortnight	
	07-Mar	Galway	7 days 1 day a fortnight	
	23-Mar	Mayo	7 days 1 day a fortnight	
	03-Apr	Leitrim	7 days 1 day a fortnight	
	02-May	Cavan	7 days 1 day a fortnight	
	05-May	Donegal	7 days 1 day a fortnight	
	05-Jun	Leitrim	7 days 1 day a fortnight	
	10-Aug	Mayo	7 days 1 day a fortnight	
	Organic Livestock Autumn Seminar	07-Sep	Monaghan	Evening session
	Organic Pig Production	19 & 26 May	Roscommon	2 days
		23 & 30 June	Roscommon	2 days
	Organic REPS		Any county on demand	1 day
Organic Salad Production	25-Apr	Galway	1 day	
	02-Jun	Sligo	1 day	
	11-Jun	Donegal	1 day	
	13-Oct	Mayo	1 day	
	15-Oct	Roscommon	1 day	
	05-Feb	Cavan	1 day	
Pest, Disease and Weed Control	19-May	Sligo	1 day	
	10-Sep	Donegal	1 day	
	14 & 21 April	Roscommon	2 day	
Polytunnel Erection	15 & 22 May	Mayo	2 day	
	31-Mar	Sligo	1 day	
Protected Cropping	02-Jun	Galway	1 day	
	06-Jun	Galway	1 day	
	07-May	Sligo	1 day	
Vegetable Crop Profiles				



Membership Application Form

To participate in a WON course you must be member of the Network. Annual membership is just €60 per year and covers a family, farm, or small company. WON also organises open days on organic farms, talks, demonstrations and organic events. Members are invited to join their local network group and exchange experiences and ideas at monthly meetings. Support may also be available for individual enterprises through advanced training, specialised meetings, and mentoring. To become a member or renew your membership, simply complete the form and post or fax to the WON office (contact details below)

Contact Details

First Name

Surname

Address

.....

Tel:

Mobile:

Fax:

Email:

Website.....

Farming Enterprise

Cattle Sheep Fruit Vegetables

Poultry Deer

Pigs Cereals

Other (please give details)

Organic Status

Conventional

In Conversion

Organic (certified)

Certified by:

Membership Fee €60 per annum

For further details contact:

Sean McGloin (Network Co-ordinator)

Western Organic Network

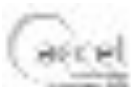
The Enterprise Centre, Hill Road,
Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim

Tel: 07196 40688 Fax: 07196 40869

Mobile: 0861728442

Email: info@westernorganicnetwork.com

Web: westernorganicnetwork.com



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Irish Moiled Cattle Breeding Programme

The Western Organic Network is in the process of launching a pilot project in the North West for organic beef farmers to commence a breeding programme to preserve and enhance the Irish Moiled Cattle breed in Ireland.



The breeding programme to be developed will include assistance towards the cost of purchasing breeding cows and training the farmers on managing the breed in terms

of

- Enhancing breed quality and status.
- Animal welfare
- Biodiversity planning for each farm
- Maintaining suitable grazing practices that reflect traditional grazing patterns and maintain field & hedgerow diversity
- Monitoring and recording breed activity with emphasis on ability of native traditional breeds and their progeny to thrive on poorer quality rough grassland and withstand pests & diseases (eg liver fluke) that are endemic to the West of Ireland.

To ensure economic viability of the rare breeds, a feasibility study of developing a niche market in rare breed meat sales will be undertaken. If you are interested in applying to be one of the participating farmers on this programme, please contact the Western Organic Network for further details.

The project is part sponsored by The National Heritage Council.

LIBRARY FOR THE WESTERN ORGANIC NETWORK, INISHOWEN BRANCH

Therese Morgan

I have been growing herbs and flowers for many years, but only recently learning about organics.

At the end of last year I moved into a new house with a large garden back and front. Fortunately it was left grassed over but the soil underneath is thin clay. I dug out enough stones for several rockeries.

I had great plans but where to start? The previous year I joined the Western Organic Network and began to learn about growing without chemicals.

The wet spring brought an influx of slugs and snails which feasted on the seedlings I had planted out. The gardening books which I had at that time advised only sprays and chemicals.

At the network meetings we discussed swapping what books on organic gardening we had amongst ourselves. A lending library was suggested if funding could be found. I agreed to act as Librarian and to bring the books to the monthly meetings. This year thanks to North West Organics, Greenhill Farm Malin, and the Western Organic Network for funding and buying the books we now have our organic library.

Over the growing season I had many books to consult about how best to deal with the slugs and about improving the soil in my garden. The idea of improving the soil instead of applying chemicals to the plants was new to me.

Now that method makes sense as I learn more and more.

I grew vegetables for the first time and impressed some family visitors with fresh salad and vegetables for the table.

Winter allows the gardener more time to read and to plan for the next year. Sitting by the fire I am enjoying the new books which are inspiring me to grow some fruit next year. I am looking forward to the spring and the new gardening year.

I wonder where would be the best place for the fruit garden?

If you are a member of the Western Organic Network or North West Organics you can borrow a book free of charge.

For further information contact Therese Morgan on 074-9329489.

The Organic Centre

Making a Meal of it

Cookery courses at The Organic Centre 2007

When it comes to putting food on their plates, many consumers discover that organic foods offer the tastiest and healthiest way forward, but healthy food is only nutritious if it is prepared and cooked properly. Find out about wholefood, discover the best recipes and learn how to sprout seeds, mill your own flour from wholegrain and bake delicious bread at the Organic Centre's courses:

Cooking with the Grass Roof Café

– an introduction to cooking
Sunday 4th March

Grow organic- cook organic

–4 days of seasonal growing and cooking
starting 11th March

Grains, Breads and Sourdough

– more than just a baking course
31st March

Wholesome cooking for children and teenagers

21st April

Exploring the links between blood group and diet

22nd April

Cooking with seaweeds

5th May

All courses are from 10am to 5pm and cost €0.

For bookings and more information on the above courses and a full programme for 2007 call 071-98 54338, e-mail: organiccentre@eircom.net, website: www.theorganiccentre.ie <<http://www.theorganiccentre.ie/>>

If you want to receive a 2007 programme with more than 120 day and weekend courses from gardening to cooking, natural cosmetics to basket making, from growing and using herbs to painting, in hard copy please send your postal address to:

**The Organic Centre,
Rossinver
Co Leitrim**

Growing in Confidence – A Community Food Project –

Now with 6 gardens

Jointly funded by the HSE West and by the Department for Agriculture and Food the Community Food Project is run and coordinated by The Organic Centre. The project is running for the fourth year and will be expanded to six gardens. The aims of the projects are

- Learn how to grow organically
- Learn about varieties and seeds
- Learn about the nutritional value of food
- Learn how to cook your vegetables & fruit
- Learn how to store and preserve food
- Cut costs on your shopping bill
- Garden together in your community
- Life long learning opportunities

Besides the established gardens at The Organic Centre in Rossinver, St. Michaels Family Life Centre and the Forthill Men's Group at the Northside Centre in Sligo, new gardens and groups will be established in Manorhamilton, Bundoran and Riverstown. Information meetings will be held at the beginning of March to recruit participants.

The Organic Centre has developed a How-to guide to help people to set up similar projects all over the country. The guide is available free of charge from the centre.

For more information please call 071-9854338 or e-mail: organiccentre@eircom.net

ECCE-Bio

ECCE-Bio is a European organic producer co-operative which believes that a fair, ecological and co-operative food system is vital for the future of farming, the environment and a healthy society. The co-operative has come together under Aliminterra, which is a European Leader Initiative. Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-

op has represented Ireland so far and the new co-op has now developed a charter and a set of principles. The co-op will be established in the UK and has a diverse range of members. European members are based in Italy, France, Spain, Ireland and the UK. Leitrim Organic Farmers is unique in that it is the only meat-producing co-op in the group. Other



Olive pressing premises on an organic farm in Andalusia

members are involved in Pasta, Fruit and Vegetable production. It is hoped that markets can be gained through linkages and that the coop will also facilitate training and educational opportunities as well as fostering cultural links. Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-op has been represented by the current Vice-Chairman Tom Martin and Co-op Manager John

Brennan. Later this year the co-op will host a meeting of the members in Leitrim and it will be an opportunity for organic farmers in the region to come along and meet with their European neighbours. It is hoped that the co-op will also have benefits for other co-ops and the Dublin Food Co-op which is a consumer co-op has already shown an interest in the project.



Open air lunch at an organic farm in Andalusia

Book Review



With so much emphasis on climate change and our impact on the planet, I read George Monbiot's book "Heat" recently.

This is indeed a well researched book and not written from a negative point of view, but coming up with possible solutions, many of them calling for huge societal changes and some reduction in our freedoms. The book looks at the opportunities for renewable energy as well as its limitations. It casts a cold eye on our food systems and deals extensively with transport. He deals with the energy loss from our own homes and also with the issue of "Love Miles" which is what happens as families become more dispersed and need to travel long distances to come together. The book is a must for those of us who are promoting a more sustainable way of living. It challenges all of us, and many of our so-called "environmental celebrities" do not escape with their "jet set" lifestyles. I think that the book poses major challenges and the time frame for action is short. One interesting thing that comes from the report, is that most of the "climate change deniers" are middle class, mainly because they are the people who will have more adjustments to make if they are to eschew their consumer lifestyles and abandon their "Chelsea Tractors".

Whether governments will have the will to tackle the Airline industry and other Globalised businesses that are the major catalysts for changing our climate remains to be seen. The choices as portrayed in the book are stark. We should all be as informed on this subject as possible and Monbiot's book is a very good, if scary starting point.

'Heat' by George Monbiot is published by Penguin Books and costs £19.10

John Brennan

The End of Oil is Nigh?

The title of the Soil Association 2007 conference held in Cardiff in January was 'One Planet Agriculture – Preparing for a Post Peak Oil Food & Farming Future'. At the risk of understatement, it was a very stimulating and challenging conference. There was so much food for thought and action that you felt 'stuffed like an Ardennes goose', as one participant put it. The speakers, some of whom were experts on the subject of peak oil, were excellent, and the following will hopefully provide a flavour of the issues addressed (transcripts and podcasts of speakers' presentations are available on the Soil Association website – www.soilassociation.org).

'Peak oil' refers to the point where global oil production begins to decline. The reduced availability of oil is likely to have dramatic effects on all aspects of economic and social life, not least on agriculture and global food trade, both of which are heavily dependent on cheap oil. The accepted view within the oil industry is that peak oil will occur in about 20 to 25 years, allowing time to develop alternative sources of energy. A dissenting view was presented at the conference by Colin Campbell, a former oil industry geologist, and by Jeremy Leggett, CEO of SolarCentury, and author of *Half Gone: Oil, Gas, Hot Air and the Global Energy Crisis*. They, along with a growing number of oil industry 'dissidents', claim that the main oil producing countries have consistently over-inflated estimates of their reserves, and that global peak oil will occur within the next 3 to 5 years (see Association for the Study of Peak Oil website – www.peakoil.net).

A third speaker, Richard Heinberg (author of *The Party's Over*, *Powerdown* and *The Oil Depletion Protocol*), predicted that fossil fuel depletion would necessitate the de-industrialisation of agriculture, and re-localisation of food production. Existing capital intensive farming methods will have to be replaced by more labour intensive methods. Large urban populations will become unsustainable, requiring a major demographic shift from cities to the countryside. Heinberg and other speakers referred to Cuba as a possible model. In the 1990's, Cuba's agriculture underwent an 'organic revolution' imposed by the



loss of oil and chemical fertilizer imports previously supplied by the Soviet Union. 25% of the Cuban population are now involved in food production. This compares to 6.5% in Ireland and 1.5% in the UK.

The transition to post peak oil agriculture will, according to Heinberg, require strategic leadership from government, with policies for education and training, housing, and incentives to attract people into agricultural employment. It will require land reform supporting small-scale, sustainable farming systems, and the encouragement of local food distribution.

Decisive political leadership and forward planning is unlikely to be forthcoming. According to a fourth speaker, Rob Hopkins, governments are caught up in a wider collective denial regarding peak oil. The initiative has to come from local communities developing their own integrated 'energy descent plans' that address local food production, development of alternative energy, use of local building materials, local healthcare strategy, etc (Further information about energy descent planning is available at www.transitiontowns.org).

Patrick Holden, the Director of the Soil Association, described himself as 'strangely inspired' by the prospect of a post fossil fuel age. However, the transition poses very serious risks, including: the possibility of global economic depression; military conflict over remaining oil reserves; the collapse of globalised food distribution systems; etc. All the more reason to face this challenge decisively and urgently now, at both national and local levels, to mitigate the impact of these risks, and work towards what could be a more sane and sustainable future.

Wayne Foord,
Manager of the Organic Centre,
Rossinver

National Bioenergy Conference announced

Earlier this month Minister Mary Wallace announced the National Bioenergy Conference, "Agri-Vision for Bio-Energy", organised jointly by Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture and Food. This aims to explore the commercial opportunities for biofuel and biomass production in Ireland.

While the increasing interest in biofuel and biomass crops is a welcome development from a sustainable energy perspective, it brings with it a very real concern that this will prove a backdoor route for the legal growing of GM crops (especially GM oilseed rape) – as energy, rather than food crops. Another consideration is an ethical one – the world may eventually be faced with a choice between growing food or growing bioenergy crops – there will not be enough land to meet our needs for both. Biofuels are probably only an interim solution to Peak oil.

Exclusion of REPS farmers from bio fuel scheme was third major failure by Govt – Naughten

In February it was claimed by Fine Gael Agriculture Spokesperson, Denis Naughten TD that the exclusion of REPS farmers from the energy crop scheme was a significant failure by the Fianna Fail/PPD administration in developing a viable bio-fuel sector in Ireland.

"It seems unbelievable that a scheme which is supposed to protect and promote the environment is excluding farmers from producing bio fuels which could have a very positive effect on Ireland meeting its Kyoto targets.

"This decision clearly shows the lack of joined-up thinking from a Government in office for the last 10 years which is now using a band-aid set of proposals to get it onto the green agenda rather than supporting the development of a viable bio fuel industry.

"This is the Government which is allowing the sugar factories in Carlow and Mallow to be developed instead of securing the properties for the processing of bio fuels, and this is the Government which announced welcome proposals in the Budget to support the growing of renewable energy crops but which failed to create any outlet or market for the sector.

McDaid calls for biomass price guarantees for farmers

Green Party candidate in Roscommon-South Leitrim, Garreth McDaid, has claimed that the ESB's plans for the co-burning of biomass products in peat-fired stations like Lanesborough do not go far enough to ensure that farmers will have a guaranteed market for biomass products. The ESB's proposals relate to the co-burning of miscanthus (Elephant Grass) and willow at the Lanesborough, Edenderry and Shannonbridge peat fired stations, where the ESB hopes to produce 30% of its power with biomass products by the year 2015.

"The ESB's plans are indicative of the lacklustre attitude to renewable energy production that has been fostered by the present Government. The key element in the establishment of a supply chain of renewable energy products is a price guarantee for farmers, which the ESB has refused to entertain."

"To expect farmers to convert from beef production to biomass production without a price guarantee is completely unreasonable, and demonstrates yet again that the Government is simply not aware

of the enormous potential of the renewable energy market."

Mr. McDaid also said that the target date of 2015 was not realistic in terms of the choices farmers now have to make, and that the confusion that currently exists regarding establishment grants for REPS farmers was undermining confidence in the sector.

"Elephant Grass and Short Rotation Coppicing (SRC) willow products grow in 2 to 3 year cycles, but the earliest conversion target the ESB will commit to is 2015. How can farmers be expected to invest in a crop that has a 2 to 3 year rotation cycle in the knowledge that their market might not be established for 8 years?"

"The Government's handling of the biomass sector has been completely inept. This industry has created over 170,000 jobs in Germany in the last 6 years, largely due to the efforts of Green Party Minister for Agriculture, Renate Kunast, but under this Government, the industry here is still struggling to get off the ground."

"There is no point encouraging farmers to grow renewable energy or bio fuel crops when there is no market for them.

Stop Press – Bioenergy Crops to qualify for REPS after all

The Minister has just announced that REPS payments will after all apply to the planting of willow and miscanthus bioenergy crops. The maximum planted area will be 10 ha or 25% of a REPS holding, but cannot exceed 20 ha per applicant under the bioenergy scheme. REPS farmers will now be eligible for the bio-energy establishment grant of €1,450 / ha, the EU energy premium of €45 / ha, and an adjusted REPS 3 payment of €155 / ha. Under REPS 4 this payment will increase to €189 / ha. This development will give a significant further boost to REPS and to the Bio-energy Scheme.

The policy vacuum at the heart of the FF/PPD Government is exposed by its failures in this area. There are:

- No plans to legislate to ensure blended bio fuels replace petrol and diesel
- No

proposals for the extension of the removal of excise duty on bio fuels · No plans to open a public competition for capital start-up grants for bio fuel processing plants · No plans to require public transport and other public service vehicles to convert where feasible to bio fuels · No proposals to make a major capital allocation to bio fuels instead of wasting money buying carbon credits

"There is an appalling lack of joined-up thinking. This is why the FF/PPD Government believes that by 2009 there will be an uptake of only €6 million on grants for the growing of renewable crops. However, this week Fine Gael will try to address this imbalance when we will propose the passing of a new law that would force all fuel distributors in this country to include a bio fuel mix in all petrol and diesel. Our plan will not cost motorists extra as it will not require modifications to car engines.

"The new proposed law would be a positive step to protect our environment and create a market for renewable energy. The reality is that mandatory fuel blending is standard practice in other EU States and should be introduced here immediately."

Monsanto knew GM Potatoes "unfit for human consumption": secret study suppressed for 8 years

Last year BASF failed in their attempt to trial GM potatoes in Co. Meath after massive public protest. While the EPA controversially approved their application, albeit with many security restrictions, Meath Co. Council then declared the county GM-Free, and proposed the application be referred to An Bord Pleanála as it involved change of land-use. BASF made their excuses and pulled out. Unfortunately similar trials by BASF have since been approved in the UK and elsewhere. However, it has now become apparent that fears about the toxicity of GM potatoes were fully justified.

For eight years Monsanto chose to suppress the results of a secret feeding study conducted by Russian researchers on their behalf, until forced to hand over the report in a court case in 2005. This showed that GM potatoes are highly toxic to rats, and "unfit for human consumption", while Monsanto continued to promote them as completely safe. They withdrew from potato development in 2002, and BASF, meanwhile, who must have been aware of these studies, stepped into the breach with their blight resistant varieties without any plans to conduct further feeding trials. The details of the Monsanto cover-up are outlined in a recent press release by GM-Free Cymru (Wales):

A secret feeding study of Monsanto GM potatoes, conducted in 1998 by the Institute of Nutrition of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences and suppressed for 8 years, showed that the potatoes did considerable damage to the organs of the rats in the study. In comparison the rats in the "control groups" which were fed on normal potatoes or on a non-potato diet were healthier, and had much less organ and tissue damage. This research, fully supported by Monsanto through the provision of the GM potatoes, was conducted at approximately the same time as Arpad Pusztai's research in the Rowett Institute. The potatoes used in the study were Monsanto GM NewLeaf potatoes bred in 1995 from the Russet Burbank variety to be resistant to the Colorado Beetle. The GM event was registered as 082, and the potatoes are included in the Bt group of GM crops. They also contain an antibiotic resistance marker gene. (The potatoes were deregulated in the USA in 1998, without any feeding studies being required. Another line was deregulated in 1999. Even earlier, in 1996, Monsanto started to introduce the potatoes into Russia

and Georgia, and probably into many other countries with lax approval regimes as well. For some reason (probably to assist in the consent process) Monsanto co-operated in some feeding studies involving rats from the Institute of Nutrition of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences. Something "inconvenient" showed up in these feeding studies, but the Institute refused to release all the information into the public domain and in 1999 the researchers presented a "doctored" version of their Report in support of Monsanto's application for Russian commercialization. The consent was duly given in 2000 by the Russian regulators on the basis of this corrupt piece of science. However, Greenpeace and other consumer groups mounted a protracted and immensely frustrating campaign to obtain a sight of the feeding study Report. In May 2004 the Nikulinski District Court in Russia ruled that information relating to the safety of GM food should be open to the public. On the basis of this ruling Greenpeace tried to obtain the GM potato report; but the Institute and Monsanto refused to release it. So Greenpeace and local activist groups again took the Institute to court, and in October 2005 won a ruling that the Report must be released. At last it was handed over, and examined by Dr Irina Ermakova at the request of Greenpeace. She produced a brief Russian paper on her findings, and we have now produced an English-language version with the kind agreement of Greenpeace. Ironically, the NewLeaf GM potato was a failure, and it proved to give poor yields and to be susceptible to disease in European environments. While Monsanto was enthusiastically promoting its GM potatoes in Eastern Europe, it was having second thoughts in the United States and Western Europe, and pulled out of GM potato development in 2002. The results of the 1998 GM potato rat feeding study may well have had a bearing on that decision.

Dr Irina Ermakova, the Greenpeace consultant, has herself conducted animal feeding experiments with GM materials. In her very restrained commentary on the Russian study she criticized the small scale of the experiment and its design, and was especially critical of the complacent conclusions drawn by the authors from evidence which was actually profoundly worrying. The GM potato was nutritionally inferior to its conventional counterpart and to other Russian potato varieties. The research results showed that both "normal" Russet Burbank potatoes and the GM variety caused "serious morphological changes in the internal organs" of the animals in the trials. They also showed that the group of animals fed on the GM potatoes suffered greater weight loss than the other animals, and statistically significantly greater damage to kidneys, liver and large gut. There was also greater damage to blood serum, testes and prostate. Dr Ermakova concluded: "The GM potatoes were the most dangerous of the feeds used in the trials..... and on the basis of this

evidence they CANNOT be used in the nourishment of people."

Given the small scale of the feeding trials (only ten animals in each feeding group) and doubts about the statistical significance of some of the Report's findings, Dr Ermakova stressed the importance of follow-up studies on a larger scale and with more careful experimental design. But no matter what the shortcomings of the work may be, the Institute of Nutrition research did nothing to show that the Monsanto GM potatoes are safe. That should not be a surprise to anybody, since Bt potatoes are classified as pesticides in the US and have never been tested for toxicity or allergenicity.

According to Dr Brian John of GM Free Cymru, it is incredible that Monsanto and the Institute of Nutrition have kept the research secret until now. "That obsessive secrecy has clearly been against the public interest," he says, "and it tells us a great deal about Monsanto's priorities. If the company had any regard at all for the health of consumers, it would have published these results world-wide in 1999, and at the very least it would have commissioned follow-up research which might have confirmed or discredited the study's findings. Instead of that, it connived with the Russian researchers to keep the information away from public scrutiny, just as it did with the feeding study results for MON863 maize in 2005. On that occasion too, it took a court case and massive media coverage to obtain sight of the research team's raw data and to reveal evidence of damage to health."

While Monsanto attempted to suppress the information from the 1998 Russian study, it connived in the vilification of Dr Arpad Pusztai, a respectable and careful scientist whose findings were very similar. The company must have known that the release of its own feeding study information would have supported his findings and would have contributed to a general understanding on health concerns specific to GM potatoes. "The actions of Monsanto in this case have been utterly reprehensible," says Dr John. "The company has continued to promote its GM potatoes as perfectly harmless, while for eight years it has managed to keep out of the public domain clear evidence that they are harmful to animals and hence to human beings also. And it has got away with it because the science establishment and the GM regulators within the EU -- as in Russia -- cannot see scientific corruption when it is staring them in the face."

Principle Sources:

Medical-biological investigations of transgenic potatoes, resistant to the Colorado beetle (under agreement with Monsanto Co.) Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, Institute of Nutrition Moscow, 1998 Full Report 275 pp, including raw data.

The commentary on the rat feeding study by Dr Irina Ermakova is here:
<http://www.gmfrecymru.org/>
 Ewen SWB, Pusztai A (1999) *Effect of diets containing genetically modified potatoes expressing Galanthus nivalis lectin on rat small intestine. Lancet 354:1353-1354*

North & West ORGANIC PRODUCER

March 2007

Monsanto takes fright at the 'Future of Food' on RTE

The welcome broadcasting of the film, 'The Future of Food' (in abridged form), by RTE 2 at the end of January, has caused a stir. Monsanto Ireland's CEO, Patrick O'Reilly, was furious with RTE and has also complained to the chief scientists of the various agricultural research bodies.

The Irish Farmers Journal printed the following article in its issue of 3rd February.

"MONSANTO SLAM RTE TV SHOW ON GMO

The Dealer notes that Monsanto did not spare the rod this week when beating up independent film maker, Deborah Koons Garcia, whose documentary "The Future of Food" was screened by RTE2 on Monday evening [it was actually shown on Sunday].

The documentary, it appears, was in the style of a "Dr. Who" take on GM Food debate, full of scary claims about three headed potatoes and celeries that can dance a salsa.

The film was immediately panned, by Monsanto's Dr. Patrick O'Reilly, as plodding, overlong, a pain in the backside and a cinematic cliché.

The barrel of vitriol about Ms. Koons Garcia was emailed Tuesday morning to all the main scientific heads in the Irish agricultural research world, in case their objectivity in the GM debate might have wavered had they watched Monday night's polemic from Ms. Koons Garcia."



This is ridiculous comment on the brilliant film now seen by many during the past year, which has brought home to them the horrifying truth about GMOs. We are grateful to RTE for having the courage to show it. They adopted a low key approach, which unfortunately gave GM-Free campaigners no chance to flag the film, but nevertheless it has now reached a much wider public, and Monsanto is clearly worried. We hope MEP Mairead McGuinness' call for an open debate on GM issues will be taken up by RTE, and that they will actively keep the public informed. Michael O'Callaghan of GM-Free Ireland suggests contacting Brian Walsh, Acquisitions Director with RTE (Donnybrook, Dublin 4) on 01-2082661 or e-mail: brian.walsh@rte.ie . In the mean time the Irish Farmers' Journal has declined to publish a letter from Michael seeking such a debate, and continues its pro-GM stance.

See the film

If you haven't yet seen "The Future of Food" the full length film is still being shown at venues round the country, most recently in Longford. The DVD is also available for sale via the GM-Free Ireland website at www.gmfreeireland.org/ . Nine counties have now declared GM-Free: Co. Westmeath, Cavan, Clare, Fermanagh, Kerry, Kildare, Meath, Roscommon, Monaghan; also the district of Newry & Mourne and local authorities in Bantry, Bray, Derry, Galway, Letterkenny, Navan, and Clonakilty, as well as over 1,000 smaller areas.



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