

LIVESTOCK WORKSHOP

By Robyn Patchett

Hullo everybody, it's great to see you all here. My name is Robyn Patchett and I am on the committee for Canterbury Organic as the certification manager. My job is to look after the files of the growers and oversee the certification process. I have to say that it is the certification committee (three of us) that make the final decision on any certification. When we do this we refer to the peer review ; the auditor's report; and the production standards.

So, we live at Robbies Patch at Ellesmere on a 70 acre property that has been BioGro certified since 1988. Brian works for a Grain and Seed firm and he 'brings home the bacon'. I work at home. We have about 1800 pipfruit trees, walnuts, a few plums

and hazelnuts, 100 ewes, 10 cows and their progeny and about 35 hens.

This mix of production is a nightmare at times –like now when I should be pruning 20 hours a day but the ewes are lambing and the cattle are still in winter mode needing daily electric fence shifting and hay.

However there are also major benefits. Firstly, you aren't reliant on one product for income. As you can imagine the odd hail storm can wreak havoc with the fruit. I also believe that this complementary mix gives better sustainability and greater total production from the land.

So the chooks scratch under the fruit trees, spreading the compost, eating some codlin moth larvae, and of course spreading their manure.

The sheep graze the orchard in winter cleaning up any fallen fruit, mowing it down and spreading their manure.

The cattle provide dung for making liquid feed for the orchard and of course are rewarded with the third grade apples at sorting time.

The main aim of my talk today is to give some help for people just getting started with organic livestock.

The first requirement is to learn basic management practices. For example from my experience sheep require much better fencing than cattle. There's always a bright spark in the mob who specialises in fence breaking. It is essential to be able to save grass ahead of the sheep at tupping time and coming up to lambing. I know – I haven't saved quite enough for some of my old girls this month.

The next question is the breed of sheep best suited to organics. We have mostly Romney ewes –they seem to be pretty healthy beasts. We have used a texel ram in the last two years and the lambs from him are much cleaner. I'm told texels have been bred for resistance to internal parasites. Of course wiltshires are reputed to be excellent, also perendales.

Breed of cattle –well ours are a real mix but predominantly angus and they are hardy.

So let's look at some-one, say Ruby, who's just bought a property and decided to run 50 certified organic ewes. The first question is whether it is an advantage to buy organically certified ewes. Financially it is a disadvantage because generally organic prices are higher yet in her first year of conversion to organics Ruby will have to sell her lambs on the conventional market. The fully certified stock become CO as soon as they come onto Ruby's place. However the organic stock will be best suited to an organic regime. They will already be adapted to the system.

When Ruby's property progresses (all going well) to full organic certification her original 50 ewes will now be producing fully certified lambs. Some will be ageing and she will need to buy in replacements. Buying organically certified ones would be the best option. If there are none available Ruby would be allowed to buy in uncertified ewes to 10% of her flock ie 5 uncertified ewes can be bought in. These uncertified stock will never gain certification for meat. However as long as the mother is on the certified property prior to conceiving then the progeny will be fully certified. When the bought –in conventional stock have been on the fully certified property for one year the milk, fibre, eggs, they produce will be fully certified.

If you buy in day old chicks or bobby calves under 7 days old provided these are raised on the certified pasture or fed certified organic food they will be fully certified. However the calves will not be certified for meat if they are raised on conventional milk powder.

There are some concerns about animal treatment. Of course in an ideal world well fed stock will not become sick. Homeopathic remedies are permitted for organic growers and we have certainly had success with a treatment for pink eye in sheep. Homeopathic Farm Supplies are set up to post out treatments and I have the contact details on the sheet.

However we all know that there can be a cow with an infection in it's hoof following some damage. OR a ewe that gets sick after a difficult birth. As organic growers you are required to treat sick animals. When you ask the vet for a treatment for the animal you should explain that your property is certified organic and ask for the product with the shortest withholding period.

Two years ago we bought in some conventional ewe lambs for replacements and they suffered with internal parasites the following winter –my garlic and cider vinegar didn't do the trick. The vet advised we drench them with levicare hi min which has a 10 day meat withholding period. We did that, put them in the quarantine paddock for 48 hours and took a record of their number etc. These lambs recovered well and twelve months later regained their partial certification.

So you can see that if you have to treat a lamb you cannot sell it as certified. By the time it has regained certification it will be a hogget.

Cattle however usually take around two years to fatten so it may be possible to sell a beast as certified after it has been treated as a calf.

Just remember to keep a record of any treated animal and use the quarantine paddock as required.

Another complication we have struck is where a cow needed antibiotic following calving. In this case the calf regains certification a year later at the same time as the mother. Similarly if the cow calves within the year following treatment the new calf can feed off the cow and will regain certification when the mother does.

Other points of interest.

Vaccinations non GE vaccines for the prevention of clostridial diseases such as 5 in 1 can be a restricted practice

Salt licks restricted must not have additives

Molasses –allowed as long as the sugar is not a G.M.O.

Pine tree branches, flax leaves, garlic –all helpful to cattle and sheep.

Pasture mix, especially chicory and plenty of legumes. On a small property can spread seed by hand.