

Organic Farm New Zealand 2008 AGM – Regional Reports

Far North

In the past year Far North Organic Growers (FNOG) has kept busy with funding from OANZ. We have managed to successfully hold organic workshops throughout the Far North which included:

- Market gardening
- Beef and pasture
- 2 Pest control and trapping
- Homeopathy for animals

All workshops were well attended and there was interest in becoming certified growers and as support members.

We also attended 3 of the 4 Agricultural Field Days in our region. As usual FNOG has held 3 field days through out the year leaning towards cost saving methods of enhancing soil health, e.g. using EM and Bio-Dynamic methods. This information will prove to be a very useful tool especially with the rising costs of permitted inputs.

FNOG has 18 OFNZ licensees, 10 FNOG licensees and 54 support members. In the current difficult economic climate FNOG has more than “done its bit”.

In the coming year I would like to see workshops available for the training of certification managers and auditors.

On a personal note, with the increased fresh produce prices and the advent of farmers’ markets I believe OFNZ’s small growers have an important role to play. This is a great opportunity for them to compete against the supermarkets and supply wholesome food direct to the customer at a realistic price.

I have enjoyed working with the NCC team this past year and look forward to more progress in the coming year.

Tony Henderson

NCC Rep, Far North and Central North Regions

Extra comments from AGM:

- It has been a very positive year – hard work, funding and work shops have paid-off. Good being on the NCC – good, positive interaction.
 - Feel that small growers are ‘having their day’ with demand set to increase!
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Central Northland

Chairperson’s report for AGM held 29th June, 2008

Since our last AGM in May 2007, CNO has had quite a few events and upheavals.

Due to an Organic Aotearoa NZ initiative to hold regional workshops promoting organic awareness we joined forces with the Auckland Region of OFNZ and organised a workshop on Bev. Trowbridge’s certified beef and sheep property “Muriwai Valley Farms”. This was held last November and was attended by about 30 people.

As agreed at the last AGM, CNO decided to have a site at the Dargaville Field days this year. Planning for this big event started last July, and with sponsorship from OANZ and FNOG came to fruition late February. Many thanks to all those who assisted with the planning, the making of a fantastic banner, the erection of the marquee, the support staff who fielded the questions about organics, and of course the site holders with their displays and products. It was a great team effort. (For a more detailed report see the newsletter)

We also had a site at the Maungaturoto Lifestylers Fieldday in April. Despite the appalling weather conditions we felt it was worthwhile being there to promote organic products and talk to prospective members.

Apart from these major events CNO seems to be in a bit a slump at present with very few members participating at the committee level. Since our last AGM we have lost our chairperson, secretary, newsletter editor and publicity/marketing members from the committee. As it stands now we have an acting chairperson (who is also the certification manager) and an acting secretary (who is also the vice-chairperson), both of whom wish to relinquish these roles. The only other remaining elected member is our fantastic treasurer who does a great job looking after the finances.

The certification manager and auditor are appointed by the committee and as such generally attend most meetings. This small group of 4 people have been doing their best to keep the organisation going as well as look after the certification process for the certified members.

We have been aware that some of our full members and associate members of our group have complained about the lack of information, newsletters and field days forthcoming from the committee. All I can reply to that is to invite you to come on board and assist us to make it happen. It is not possible to run a well-functioning CNO that can reach out to the wider membership with only 4 people who attend meetings. We have recently started to have a meeting via a conference call. Both a saving in time and travel costs. This might make it easier for members to volunteer.

Also we are always keen to visit interesting organic properties, these do not have to be certified ones.

Perhaps we can make a list for the upcoming year.

Julia Geljon
Acting Chairperson

Auckland

As of June 2008 the Auckland region has 22 members with 4 of these being individual audits as opposed to pod members. This compares with around 27 members last year. Numbers have fluctuated due largely to property sales and/or retirement. There are 3 prospective members from the mid-north who may join later this year and it is hoped they can be grouped into their own pod.

Members of the Auckland Region would like to express their sincere thanks to Richard Main.

Richard stepped down earlier this year from his positions of both regional representative on the National Coordinating Committee and as Chairperson of the Auckland Region Committee.

Sean Wilson
NCC Representative

Extra comments from AGM:

- Some loss of members due to people selling up – have had limited success getting new property owners into scheme.
 - Unitec gardens look like they are going to get forced to close. Especially sad, as OFNZ started there.
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Coromandel

The Coromandel region has improved its membership from 10 to 15 properties this year. We now have 4 properties in each of North, Central & South pods and 2 new properties forming an East pod. We have one individual member as well as 2 associate members. Coromandel encourages members to join the pod system as we believe this to be the best for our circumstances. There are at least 3 new properties keen to join up this year.

Our executive have remained the same again this year - Bill Bedford, Regional manager - Miriam Bedford, Hon Secretary - Paul Hamilton, Treasurer NCC Rep and trainee Auditor - Chris May, our Organic guru, as Cert. Manager. All other members are on the committee.

Our main objectives for the coming year are to actively seek out and assist prospective new members and help with the initial paperwork. Also to get the Pod Leaders up to speed with the extra requirements of their jobs. As is usual with small growers, they are all busy people and arranging suitable time, date etc for meetings & events is always a challenge.

At Coromandel, over the past couple of years, have been lucky to have a close association with the 'Organic Strategy Group'. This group was formed to endeavour to align growers with end users of product and also to educate people in the direction of organic production and sustainable living.

We have had a small stall at the local market during the autumn and hope to improve on this in the coming year as there is a strong demand for good organic produce. There is a good 'feel' to the organic movement in our area now and we all hope to benefit from a strengthening of our collective group.

Paul Hamilton
NCC Representative

Extra comments from AGM:

- The increase in members is somewhat attributable to Paul, as he has had time this year to help new members through initial stages and paperwork.
 - There is a stable committee and the feeling is buoyant in the regional group.
 - Also represent Waikato and Taranaki regions. Will endeavour to have more contact with these regions. Have asked both Waikato and Taranaki to advise when meetings are, and would like to attend these to connect with these areas. Hope we can do a better job of having reporting from these areas in the future.
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BOP

As per usual, there is not a lot to report, but there are a few significant points.

Membership has remained constant with three dropping out but these being replaced by new members.

We have done a considerable amount of work to tidy up our documentation. Some pods had not been as careful with ensuring consistency between PMPs and peer review forms as they should have been. This new round of peer reviews should see that cleaned up.

We are also now pleased to have two of our members approved as auditors. We hope this will mean the lateness of certificate delivery, which has annoyed members for some years, will now be averted.

While Peter Downard was visiting the region last year to complete the last round of certification, we organized meetings in both Tauranga and Opotiki to promote the Smart Start Programme offered by OANZ. The meetings drew good attendances, but largely of the already converted. However, they 'flew the flag' for organics.

Some good news is that the property of long-standing members near Katikati, was recently selected by Environment BOP as the "Best Lifestyle Property" in the Bay of Plenty.

Jim Bennett
NCC Representative

Extra comments from AGM:

- BOP works as East (Tauranga-Katikati) and West (Opotiki area)
 - Hoping that more kiwifruit growers will convert with the good premiums for organics
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Wairarapa

The region is large and covers Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa, Wellington, Horowhenua, Gisbourne, Wanganui and Manawatu.

Wairarapa Organics continues to give administrative support to both Wellington and Horowhenua in the absence of resources in the local area.

Licensee numbers for these 3 areas totals 27, with 4 from the Horowhenua region and 2 from Wellington included in these totals. The Certification Manager has made the decision to have one renewal date for all licensees which is around the end of August.

Wairarapa Organics continues to use John Fawkner from Taranaki to undertake auditing for the region. Hopefully one renewal date will mean that John can make one visit only to the region in an effort to manage expenses.

Wairarapa Organics had their AGM last weekend and have had some changes in the Board this year. They have nominated Dave Treadwell as my replacement to the NCC. Wairarapa Organics have been supporting growers with a number of workshops throughout the year and have just been notified that they were successful in gaining funding from OANZ (\$7500) to support further education in the region.

Unfortunately I have not been able to get an update from our Hawkes Bay OFNZ person so failing that I have got an update from head office. Wanganui has 3 current licensees, Hawkes Bay licensees are all expired currently and Gisborne has 3 licensees. There are some renewals in the pipeline and some new members coming on.

Heather Atkinson
NCC Representative

Canterbury Organic

Canterbury continues with a strong committee and certification team. The auditor shortage in our region was very capably filled by Bob Burton from Otago. He also helped with training our new auditor (which is ongoing). Thanks to both Bob and the Otago regional committee for their co-operation and support.

Our certified growers have increased to 18 with four of those being individual certifications. There are also three new growers. Fighting the paper war at this stage!

We feel the workshops we were able to run with OANZ funding last year helped to encourage this enthusiasm. The extra incentive of a reduction in certification fees before December also helped convert some to certification in a reasonable time frame.

There were three OANZ workshops completed after July last year and these were well attended. An application for funding for more seminar/workshops this current year was unfortunately declined by OANZ.

However our growers attended the workshop on potting mixes and reduced tillage by Anu Rangarajan run by Canterbury Commercial Organics Group in March. Further co-operation with CCOG resulted in last Saturday's event - starting with lunch followed by three speakers with the Canterbury Organic AGM at the end. It is worth mentioning that the speaker on Biodynamic growing, Liz Alington, was very good. The BD group got funding from OANZ so their speakers are available to OFNZ regions. The next Canterbury farm visit in September is on "starting out".

With the expert guidance of Hugh Mingard as our treasurer the funds are looking good and hopefully the steady build up of certifications will keep the finances secure.

In May we had a joint meeting with the Otago growers which covered wide ranging topics and resulted in a "rush of enthusiasm" for our team. Cooperation between regions is great, we always pick up on some better procedures and ideas.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the NCC team for the very positive outlook this year and congratulate them on significant progress.

Robyn Patchett
NCC Representative

Extra comments from AGM:

- New producers are sometimes finding paperwork a hurdle. Sean suggested asking established members to help at initial paper stage.
 - Thanks to NCC for positive and productive meetings during the year, and thanks to Carol and Paul for work on finances.
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Otago Organics

This year our membership has increased to nineteen, some of which are very recent new members. Committee members have been active in promoting OFNZ locally and in both Central Otago and Southland. We have now established our first pod in Wanaka after having had just an individual member there for some years. We are also optimistic that we will soon have a pod in Southland.

Our main activity was organizing eight workshops that were funded by OANZ through the Organic Advisory Program. They covered topics ranging from management of pests and diseases to permaculture and were held in various locations from Mosgiel to Dunback.

In March we hosted the first harvest festival to be held in this region in recent times. We had about 40 people attend from near and far (Christchurch) and it proved to be an enjoyable weekend. We hope to make it an annual event.

We also prepared a display on organic and sustainable food production for the International Science Festival held in Dunedin in July.

Dennis Enright
NCC Representative