

# AGM & Training Weekend Report

8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> August 2009

Hamilton Gardens



This year the OFNZ AGM was held at the Hamilton Gardens in conjunction with a training and workshop weekend, which qualified for Wintec funding of \$30 per attendee. The Waikato team inspired by Tim Newton and Clare Jackson, hosted two great days of talks and visits and included some very good organic food. We are pleased to acknowledge the support and sponsorship of Ceres and Fresh Direct for this event.

Around 60 participants attended the weekend, being both OFNZ members and members of the public. We are fortunate to have Jeanette Fitzsimons as a Coromandel member, and she presented the opening address. This was followed by a presentation 'Organics in New Zealand' by Carol Knutson, from our National Office and a summary of the OFNZ scheme by Dennis Enright, OFNZ Chair.

On Saturday morning we enjoyed Chris Fairley's talk and visit to the permaculture garden in the Hamilton Gardens which demonstrates all the key features of permaculture and is really popular with the public. Following that Wayne Bennett spoke with passion and knowledge on re-establishing native trees and shrubs, noting the parallels with permaculture in how you need to pick the species to best fit the topography, climate and space.



The OFNZ AGM was attended by 26 members, and was held on Saturday afternoon. The meeting heard how the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) has been taking steps to update the documentation and ensuring consistency of application of the scheme across the country. General discussion centred on the stable membership numbers and how this might be addressed. It was agreed that we need to increase our presence in the community and that this could be achieved most economically by members displaying our logo wherever possible and explaining what we offer. Concern was expressed that public perception is that produce labelled "organic" meant "certified organic" and this is not so. When produce is not certified, it is not audited and less likely to have met the stringent criteria of that which is certified.

The OFNZ regional representatives this year are:

Julia Geljon – Far North/Central Northland

Sean Wilson – Auckland

Paul Hamilton – Coromandel/Waikato

Jim Bennett – Bay of Plenty

John Fawkner – Taranaki/Whanganui

Dave Treadwell – Wellington/Wairarapa/Horowhenua/Hawkes Bay

Alvina Murphy – Canterbury/Nelson Bays

Dennis Enright – Otago/Southland

The AGM meeting closed at 5.30pm and was followed immediately with an NCC meeting where Dennis was re-elected chairman, Sean vice-chairman and Paul treasurer. There was some discussion about two issues from one of the regions, one was where the Council is threatening to spray a noxious weed on a certified property, and the other where the water supply has been accidentally or purposefully contaminated with fertiliser. We also discussed the new PMP for Processors. This meeting closed at 6.30pm.

On Sunday we began with a very interesting talk from Wiremu Puke on traditional Maori food plants and a visit to Te Parapara garden again located within the Hamilton Gardens. This is the only garden of its type where a range of traditional food plants are grown and protected by a traditional palisade fence. Plants discussed included; Taro, Pikopiko, Kumara, Tipore, Tawa, Hinau, Karaka, Raupo and Nikau.



Following morning tea we all thoroughly enjoyed six 15 minute talks: Peter Bacchus on Compost, Peter Robinson on Water, Dave Treadwell on Seed Saving, Paul Hamilton on Raising Seedlings, Tineke Vekade on Homeopathy, and Dianne McKinnon on Selling at Farmers Markets. The speakers were well received and discussion continued over lunch.

Then we were off to visit Rainer Eschenbruch who owns Birchwood Lane vineyard, a small vineyard (2 acres of vines within a 10 acre block) producing more than 2000 bottles a year. Rainer is not certified, but is practicing organic techniques.



Next was a Biogro and Demeter certified beef farm owned by Norman and Dianne Baker. They overwinter approximately 140 head of cattle on 44 hectares.

Many thanks were extended to the Waikato team for a weekend that was very well organised, with a great selection of speakers and topics being covered. Overall, it was an extremely positive event.