



PROJECT PART-FUNDED BY THE SUSTAINABLE FARMING FUND

This project documented and disseminated successful organic management practices. Its aim was to lift productivity across the organic dairy sector and stimulate a higher level of certified organic dairy production.

GROW ORGANIC DAIRY

THE OPPORTUNITY

The global demand for organic dairy products is rapidly growing. Further, increasing the sustainable organic practices of organic dairy farms may help decrease the dairy industry's environmental footprint.

Mainstream farmers are, however, slow to take up organics. This is often attributed to the high variability among organic dairy producers (ranging from 4500kg to 11 000 kg milk solids hectares/year).

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Nine leading organic dairy producers were selected as case studies, representing a range of organic farm types. The project identified successful organic practice in four key areas: animal health, pasture management, soils/soil fertility and farm management.

A trial was conducted around the nutrient status of organic soils and effectiveness of organic fertilisers. Further research was done on mastitis management and calf rearing. DairyBase was used to analyse physical and financial farm business information.

RESULTS

The findings from this project have shown that organic management practices are a good alternative to conventional dairy farming with organic dairy farms performing more or less equally to conventional farms (financially and physically).

Organic best practice includes:

- » It is possible to rear quality young stock without drenching. Organic farmers have developed grazing strategies to avoid early exposure of young stock to the autumn larval peak by creating a bank of clean, quality feed. Organic remedies such as apple cider vinegar or homeopathics may assist in prevention of worms.
- » Organic farmers are able to prevent mastitis by focusing on hygiene and health of cows at all times.
- » A number of strategies to minimise risk to farm management were identified, including building up a buffer of supplements, reducing stocking rates, growing a wide variety of pasture species, growing own supplements and moving stock to runoffs for winter grazing.
- » Mixed swards, containing plantain and chicory along with ryegrass and clovers, provide a high-quality feed.
- » Good pasture management ensures weeds are not usually a problem, and biological controls are available for many weed species.

Information sheets can be downloaded from: <http://www.organicpastoral.co.nz>

AT A GLANCE

SFF project	08/017 Growing Organic Dairy
SFF investment	\$370 000 (GST incl)
Other contributors	Farmer-led Organic Dairy Producers Group, DairyNZ, Massey University
Total project value (including in-kind contributions): \$824 000	