Organic Dairy Farming and the Environment Fact Sheet

Organic farming has clear environmental benefits and organic farms enjoy higher levels of bio-diversity than their non-organic counterparts.[1] Organic cows live in harmony with nature and the other wildlife that you'd expect to see in the countryside. Scientific literature reviews have found that, overall, organic farms have 30% more wild species and 50% higher numbers of these species. DEFRA continue to recognise that organic farming and food offer real benefits for the environment.[2]

Reducing Pollution

What?

- Organic farming produces few dangerous waste products and lower levels of pollution.
- Organic farming helps protect the environment and biodiversity.
- People living, playing and working near organic farms are not exposed to spray drift from chemical pesticides.

Why?

- Organic farms do not use artificial chemicals or fertilisers. Instead, a sustainable system including planting of crops such as clover is used to build a fertile soil. The clover accumulates nitrogen and the use of rotations and animal manures encourages micro-organisms and earthworms that keep the soil healthy.
- Organic farmers do not use synthetic chemical pesticides which may cause pollution of the environment and damage the health of people .
- Government funded studies have shown that organic farming uses 26% less energy than non-organic farming to produce the same amount of food thanks to the decreased reliance on chemically produced feeds, fertilisers and pesticides.

Encouraging Biodiversity

What?

Organic farms are better for wildlife including birds, bats, insects and wild flowers.

Why?

- Organic farmers cut their hedges once every two years compared to non-organic farmers who cut annually. Hedges encourage wildlife by providing cover for insects, birds and small mammals.
- Organic systems use crop rotations and don't use synthetic chemical fertiliser and pesticides, this helps protect biodiversity and encourages wild flowers and animals.
- Organic farmers sow crops in spring as well as autumn providing habitats for birds such as skylarks, which are in steep decline in England. Non organic farms sow seeds mainly in the autumn, a practice regarded by the RSPB as a key factor in the reduced number of ground-nesting farmland birds.[3]
- Artificial pesticides, antibiotics and wormers upset the natural equilibrium of the land e.g. Avermectin, a worming treatment for cattle used on non organic farms, is thought to be contributing to the demise of several species of British bats.[4]

Less Energy Used

What?

- Organic farming is more energy efficient than non-organic farming.
- An organic dairy farm uses 28% less energy than a non-organic farm.[5]

Why?

- Organic farms do not use artificial synthetic chemical fertiliser and pesticides, producing these uses large amounts of non-renewable energy.

1. English Nature, 2004
2. Margaret Beckett MP, Action Plan to Develop Organic Food & Farming in England: Two Years On.
3. Biological Conservation 2004, a joint review by English Nature & RSPB
4. Duverge & Jones, 2003
5. Cranfield University 2007

For further information please contact Grayling Global:
Camille Daltrey/Edith Barton-Harvey – 01179 227799
Edith.barton-harvey@uk.grayling.com

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