



The Good Life Trail- A Show Case of Choice

by Joanne Kilsby

As the cloud lifted to reveal a sunny autumn morning, Heather Atkinson and the 'Good life' team of Wairarapa Organics breathed a sigh of relief. After many months of planning, which involved organising four properties which would show case organics and eco-friendly sustainable lifestyles in South Wairarapa, it was very encouraging to have great weather and a crowd of enthusiastic people for the launch of this inaugural event.

The day started at Wharerata, a 250 hectare BioGro registered property of Heather and Ian Atkinson. This property, nestled in the fertile foothills of the Northern Haurangi Range is an established commercial agricultural enterprise, which has successfully embraced organic principals since 1990.

The current farming activities include approximately 600 red deer, 300 breeding ewes and their progeny and grazing of young dairy stock for a local organic dairy farmer. A portion of the property is also leased out. This property was responsible for supply of beef and lamb for New Zealand's first certified organic butchers' shop.

In addition the property has a 20 hectare pine plantation, 6 hectares of Queen Elizabeth II native tree covenant area which is actively being developed and 1200+ coppicing firewood trees which are milled sustainably.

The concept of the coppice was explained during the tour and visitors could see first hand how the Atkinson's manage this block of trees. The block is based on the Brandenburg model, established in 1985 by Lincoln University. Coppicing involves harvesting tree's by cutting them near ground level to allow them to regrow for use in a sustainable manner. The harvested wood can be used for fodder, firewood, basket making, poles for fencing or quality timber for furniture or tools. Coppices are also useful as shelter belts, erosion control or to provide habitat for birds and insects used in biological pest control. The Atkinson's choice of trees included eucalyptus ,acacias,sycamore,black locust and liquidambar.

In addition to the coppice tour visitors were treated to sheep shearing , wool spinning , trade displays or were able to wander through the productive, well maintained organic vegetable garden laden with ripe berry fruit.

Next stop was Shooting Butts Orchard and the straw bale house of Steve and Carol White. This property epitomises the concept of choice. After researching different methods of house construction Steve and Carol decided on strawbale because as a family they could take part in it's construction. All the house's external walls are straw fill, except for the wet areas, and the framing is timber with a conventional iron roof. The couple choose conventional gib internal walls due to space saving as straw bale internal walls can be very thick.

The variety of trees and their maintenance also represent choice. Trees were chosen for their flavour and resistance to diseases such as black spot and mildew as they didn't wish to spray coppers or sulphurs. Codling moth is also a problem faced by apple growers and the well known variety of 'Cox's Orange' is a good choice because of it has great flavour

Wairarapa Organics

AGM

Saturday 12 August 2006

4 pm, St. Marks Church Hall, Carterton

Guest Speaker:

Colin Walker

Board Member of Koanga Gardens and Organic Seed NZ

Shared meal to follow AGM, Please bring a plate

and thick skin which make it more resistant to codling moth. Carol also recommends a triple grafted tree of Freyberg/Discovery and Dayton for the home gardener due to their disease resistance and taste.

Working part-time off the property suits both Carol and Steve as they can share child minding and orchard duties. Orchard duties can vary depending on available time. Some years trees are thinned and pruned whilst other years they are not. The couple are very relaxed about this. As long as the trees are growing well they do not stress themselves rushing around mowing grass and all the other time consuming orchard activities. Where possible they use time saving methods like using sheep to eat the grass, windfalls and leaves which may have black spot. By clearing the fallen fruit and leaves it helps with disease prevention for next years crop.

The Whites also harvest pears. Doyenne Du Comice is the main pear variety grown due to it being relatively disease resistant and it is a popular exportable crop.

In addition they have planted approximately 260 plums, mainly a variety called Fortune and grow a selection of Apricots, Cherries, Feijoas and Olives.

The Whites have been registered as BioGro but have recently changed to OrganicFarmNZ certification.

After a lunch break, which for many included a tasty lunch from Watermill bakery, visitors then drove to the very grand immaculately presented property of Liz Stringer and Robbie Morrison. Falkirk was purchased by the current owner's six years ago. Since then extensive renovations have taken place, firstly within the house and more recently in the grounds.

The property consists of an orchard with 100 fruit trees of many varieties, sourced from Waimea Nursery, with a herbal ley of lucerne and chicory beneath it. There is an extensive organic kitchen picking garden with macrocarpa edging, hosting roses, herbs, and vegetables. A recent addition is the domes planted with grapes and hops. A guided native bush walk through one of the recently replanted gullies was testament to the extent this couple are willing to go to restore the native environment of this area. They started from the base of the gully clearing away years of farm rubbish, pines and scrub. Beneath the rubbish they uncovered a stream, a sandstone waterfall and signs of natural revegetation. They have terraced the gully walls and left some of the original tree lucerne and plums to act as soil stabilisers until the planted natives become established. To date 4500 native trees (3000 this season) have been planted to enhance this natural area with plans to protect it with a covenant in the future.

The property has many other outstanding features and many of the visitors were intrigued with the 'loos with a view' and a bathroom block which is attached to one of the buildings on the property.

The final stop, Vynfields the property of John Bell and Kaye McAulay, was a perfect way to finish the day. Vynfields is a boutique operation, located 3 minutes from the Martinborough town square, offering self contained accommodation options and a 5.3 hectare organic vineyard. The main variety grown is Pinot Noir with some Riesling and vines known as 'Mad Red' which produce a bull blood coloured wine.

John and Kaye's goal is to produce premium wines using organic and biodynamic viticulture practices. Recent success's include a Gold medal at the NZ Royal Easter Show Wine awards for their 2003 Reserve Pinot Noir, and four and a half stars from Bob Campbell for their 2003 Classic Riesling.

Growing grapes organically is not an easy option but this couple are testament to the fact if you know what you want, stick to your philosophy and are willing to experiment and give things a go you too can achieve a lifestyle you want.

They say you don't plant a vineyard to get rich. You need to be rich to plant a vineyard. It has been estimated that it costs \$100,000 per hectare set-up costs to establish a vineyard and over \$10,000 per hectare , per annum to maintain it. So for most of us sitting on the verandah of the historic 'Marunui' Homestead at Vynfields , sipping award winning vines is as close to vineyard gazing as we can afford.

For many of the visitors from Wellington, Havelock North, Palmerston or Kapiti Coast this was the end of the Good Life Trail day but for some there was an evening of organic food, wine and entertainment to follow.

This was hosted at Salute restaurant in Greytown with guest speaker Sue Kedgely and acclaimed food writer and stylist Margaret Brooker in attendance.

Guests enjoyed a four course dinner with food sourced from local certified organic growers in the region. Introducing each course was Margaret Brooker who shared the rationale behind the food and wine choices for the evening giving an added dimension to the meal.

Sue Kedgely, a member of parliament for the Green Party and well known safe food campaigner, spoke on the value of eating local, seasonal preferably organic foods as a means of minimising food miles and the use of fossil fuels. She also brought to the attention of the guests the manner in which 'conventional' farmers do not pay for the environmental effects of their production and the lack of support for organic producers in New Zealand.

The evening was accompanied by 'B-side' a talented group of four local musicians. Bolly, Miles, Bob and Kate specialise in Blues and country music and provided a great background sound for the evening.

Lets hope we see a repeat of this hugely successful event on the Wairarapa calendars for next year giving us a chance to once again sample a taste of the Good Life.

From the Board Table

Peggy Duncan

I am the acting Chair of Wairarapa Organics until the next AGM which will be in August. At the moment we have a small committed group of people actively keeping the organisation going while we look for further funding.

As I do not know many members of Wairarapa Organics, and you do not know me, here is a brief background of my life. I was born in the Waikato, where my parents owned a Jersey stud farm. We moved to the hills of South Auckland area where they became sheep farmers as well as retaining the Jersey stud.

When I left school I trained as a Medical Laboratory technologist at Middlemore Hospital, Auckland specialising in bio-chemistry. With the birth of my son, I left paid employment to become a full-time mother. At the time of my daughter turning 4 years old, we moved to a 25 acre block just north of Whangarei. I left Whangarei to pursue my university career and I now have a Bachelors degree in Social Science and a Master of Arts in Social Science Research.

In 1984 I began working in developing countries and since that time I have lived in Pacific Island and African countries, as well as in Wellington. On our return to New Zealand in 2003 we needed to find somewhere to live so we bought a small bare block of land (2 hectares) to the west of Greytown on which we have built a house. My commitment to having an organic property began in 2005. At this moment most of my energy is being put into planting a variety of trees, mostly natives, but with enough fast growing exotics to establish wind shelters and to encourage native birds.

I am also starting on the process of growing vegetables, in small numbers, for selling at organic outlets. I have been able to supply my daughter and her family in Wellington and my step-daughter in Featherston with a range of vegetables over the summer season, but pickings are very small at this time of the year.

I have many ideas and dreams for developing our property and for the ongoing development of Wairarapa Organics.

Peggy Duncan

Thanks to Heather!

Members of the Interim Board of Wairarapa Organics would like to officially thank Heather Atkinson for the excellent job she has done as Certification Manager over the past 2 years. Most of you will know or have corresponded with Heather and will be aware of the energy and enthusiasm she brought to this position. She met all the objectives required of her, except for the occasional item taken over by other people, and we have benefited from her knowledge of organic networks operating in other parts of New Zealand. Our lack of funds at present is the only reason we are unable to extend Heather's contract. She remains as a representative on the National Coordinating Committee of Organic Farm New Zealand.

To All Members of Wairarapa Organics

At the special meeting on April 8th, a number of decisions had to be made concerning the future of Wairarapa Organics.

Heather's contract finished at the end of March which meant that we were without someone to do all the work that she has been doing. Josje resigned from her position as she is expecting a baby anyday now and Esther is working longer hours at EcoAgriLogic. At the same time as all this was happening, our funding sources have finished their term.

An interim board was put in place to steer Wairarapa Organics to the next Annual General Meeting which will probably be in late July.

The new board consists of: Peggy Duncan (acting chair), Mary Zajkowski (treasurer), Jane Ough, Claire Bleakley, Barbara Turner, Derek Broadmore, Peter Campbell. Steve White has agreed to be our new Certification Manager and he takes on these responsibilities in the week beginning Monday 15 May.

All enquiries on Certification matters should be addressed to Steve, phone number: 06 306 8007, or email shootingbutts@xtra.co.nz.

General enquires should be addressed to Claire Bleakley 06 308 9842, email: p.bleakely@orcon.net.nz. All enquiries will be answered promptly.

Esther is publishing the newsletter and any enquiries on this should be addressed to her. At her home phone number 06 379 5622 or at ecoagrilogic 06 304 8116 or email esther@ecoagrilogic.co.nz.

If you have organic produce to sell, contact Glenis and Ron Cole, 06 379 8784 email: roncole@xtra.co.nz. Hilary and Don Baskerville, 06 378 9917, email: don.xadsl@baskerville.co.nz.

Peggy Duncan can be contacted on 06 304 8382 or 021 215 9464. email: peggyduncan@paradise.net.nz.

School visit to our almost (C1) organic apple orchard

We looked at all our beautiful (if slightly black spotty) Braeburns and thought, there are too many for us, the sheep and the horses...and we were not ready to try marketing them yet... so we invited Greytown school to come and visit and take back fruit for the school... 30 children from years 5 and 6 walked down, one glorious autumn day and here is their report:

- *The apples were nice because they hadn't been sprayed
- * You could eat the black spots and you couldn't even taste the spots, you tasted the apple.
- * I like Organic apples better because the spray is yuck!
- * The Organic apples made good apple pie
- * The spray is poison for the bugs
- * If you grow your own apples you don't have to pay for them.

and from one of the teachers:

Jane the children loved this visit and said they'd love to come again :) As teachers we were quite amazed by a few children who wouldn't touch the Apples because they had black spots in them and said there would be worms in the apples YET they were very happy to eat your wonderful apple cake.

This reminded us of the "little red hen" story...who will make the bread not I not I yet they wanted to eat the bread at the end :)

The children took apples home and made: apple pie, apple and walnut muffins, apple juice, apple sauce, apple pie, apple crumble and apple&blackberry crumble.

The next day at school they were most pleased to share what they had made with the rest of the children. Thank you! Reminded us of the good ole days - climbing apple trees and eating the apples then and there!

On the strength of this we have decided to call one small Braeburn paddock the "School paddock" and will invite the school down to pick their fill every year.

Jane Ough



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New to the small growers scheme, or struggling to manage your records?

We have developed a wonderful resource with our new OrganicFarmNZ folder complete with:

- OFNZ paperwork requirements
- BioGro annexes
- Management plan
- Soil testing information and costs
- Help list

All in a well presented folder for ease of management. These are available at a cost of \$25.00

Wairarapa Organics Incorporated aims to promote and support activities to increase the level of organic production and consumption of organic produce in the Wairarapa region. The vision of Wairarapa Organics is to support sustainable producers and consumers of safe, natural, quality produce and services. We are actively stimulating the production of organic produce and livestock within the Wairarapa.

Enjoyed the newsletter? Become a member of Wairarapa Organics and receive this newsletter six times per year. Annual Subscription to Wairarapa Organics: \$30.00 and \$15.00 for beneficiaries and students (inclusive of GST).

**Wairarapa Organics Inc.
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