

## **Organic Farm New Zealand (OFNZ)**

‘An organic certification scheme for small growers administered in the Wairarapa by Wairarapa Organic’s’.

OFNZ was developed specifically for smaller growers who wish to supply local markets with certified organic produce.

OFNZ uses the well-respected BioGro production rules, in conjunction with compliance procedures developed by OFNZ, as a model for certified production with OFNZ. The scheme is ideal for those who wish to market in their local area or within New Zealand, but is not an export standard. The process through to full certification takes three years to complete.

Key to the OFNZ certification process is the belief that organic certification ensures the integrity of organic produce sold in New Zealand and can provide a mechanism where individuals can co-operate to enhance their communities wellbeing.

Overall governance of OFNZ is undertaken by Soil and Health Association Incorporated within which the National Co-ordinating Committee of OFNZ functions semi-autonomously. There are three levels of OFNZ structure being:

- National Co-ordinating Committee
- Regional Body, in our area being Wairarapa Organic’s.
- Producer groups (pods) or individual producers.

Producer groups or pods are integral to OFNZ. They are a group of 3 – 8 producers who work together to secure their organic certification through a peer review process. Each pod selects a pod leader annually on a rotation basis. The pod leaders job is to co-ordinate the certification compliance requirements for their pod and is the focal point for contact between pod members and Wairarapa Organic’s.

The pod system provides a way for people within a community who produce different products to come together and share a collective focus. It also provides a network of support for growers and an opportunity for growers to share resources, machinery and knowledge.

Pod members complete an application form and management plan with supporting documents. It is necessary that all those seeking OFNZ be a current financial member of Wairarapa Organic’s.

The Peer review process requires the pod members to visit each property to work through a comprehensive checklist. The process is designed to ensure cross-referencing the Management plan with observations seen on a visit. This must also be referenced against the OFNZ standards and the BioGro production rules relevant to each properties production. This means that each individual pod member must be responsible for understanding the standards and production rules.

All the documentation is then delivered to a Certification Administrator who organises an audit of all the documentation to take place. This audit will involve a visit to one of the properties within a pod.

Alternately, there is an opportunity for individual properties to register for certification with OFNZ. This differs in that the auditor completes an audit of the property annually which necessitates a higher cost structure.

Wairarapa Organic’s offers those interested in pursuing OFNZ certification a complete package to support them through the conversion process.

The certification administrator (Heather Atkinson) has been appointed to support individual growers and pods through the conversion process and is available to provide practical assistance including:

- management plan completion
- on-site visits
- pod meetings and facilitating the appointment of pod leaders
- organise soil testing
- organisation of audits
- facilitate sharing of resource's, equipment and knowledge between growers
- contact person for support and queries

Supporting the Certification administrator is the Wairarapa Organic's facilitator ( Esther Dijkstra) whose role is to produce the newsletter for Wairarapa Organic's, organise events and provide advisory and administrative support to the Board. Esther is also a partner in EcoAgiLogic's with Frank Van Steensil who are a Wairarapa Organic Consultancy firm, able to assist in a technical and advisory capacity to any of the members.

A marketing specialist (Brent Skinnon) will commence work in May 2004 to develop the production base of organic produce in the Wairarapa by securing strong markets for growers.

The support package provided by OFNZ and Wairarapa Organic's for those wishing to certify under OFNZ creates a recipe for success and you are invited to contact Heather Atkinson for more information.

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