

Case study: Duchy College Organic Studies Centre

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ABSTRACT

Coswinsawsin Organic Demonstration Farm supports a stockless vegetable and cereal rotation and achieved organic status in January 2001. Over 18 months 430 people attended 18 organic farming events. Work included trials and demonstration plots, monitoring of small mammal and bird populations and a green waste composting project which are ongoing. £972,199 Objective 1 funding was awarded to expand activity across all sectors of production and establish the Organic Studies Centre at Duchy College. The project will link organic research to demonstration, technology transfer and training. The emphasis will be on farmer participation and research will be taken onto commercial farms. 82% of respondents to a farmer survey were interested in participation in organic trials and demonstration. It is anticipated that dissemination of up to date information at farm level will improve competitiveness and financial viability of farm businesses.

Keywords: organic farming; research; demonstration; farmer participation

INTRODUCTION

Conversion to organic production was seen as an opportunity for Cornish agriculture to produce high value niche market produce. Through liaison with farmers and agricultural industry, Duchy College identified an organic 'information gap' in the South West. It was recognised that lack of knowledge would be a limiting production factor. To address this shortfall, Coswinsawsin Organic Demonstration Farm was established to capture and share practical information about the challenges of conversion using a commercial farm model. The aims of the two-year project were to provide a first point of contact for organic production queries, to facilitate technology transfer and to create a focus for organic trials and development in the unique growing conditions and climate of the far South West. Registered with the Soil Association, Coswinsawsin Farm achieved full organic status in January 2001. It supports a stockless rotation including potatoes, brassicas, cereals, sugar beet and fertility building leys. Farm walks, demonstrations and seminars are held regularly for farmers and others about all aspects of organic production. Between September 1999 and February 2001 a total of 430 people attended 18 organic events. Trials and demonstration included potato and brassica variety and comparative fertiliser studies, monitoring of triticale and a risk assessment of cropping and land management on soil erosion and run-off. Potato blight and cabbage root fly control demonstration plots were established. Monitoring of small mammal and bird populations and a green waste composting pilot project are ongoing at Coswinsawsin Farm. The granary barn

was converted into an on-farm Resource Centre and a farm trail with information points has been established. As a recognised Centre for Organic Agriculture the College contributed to the Strategic Plan for Organic Food and Farming under Objective 1, incorporated into the Task Force Strategy (Cornwall Agricultural Council 2000).

DUCHY COLLEGE ORGANIC STUDIES INITIATIVE

To build upon this success £972,199 Objective 1 funding was awarded to expand activity across all sectors of production and establish the Organic Studies Centre. Organic research supported by a specific budget allocation together with independently funded projects developed in collaboration with academic and private sector partners will be linked to demonstration, technology transfer and training. The Organic Studies Centre will react to both the requirements of organic producers and to research priorities identified by DEFRA and UKROFS. The emphasis will be on farmer participation in research on commercial farms. Farmers will be involved in trials and demonstration and results will be made accessible in an understandable format for dissemination at farm level. In a recent farmer survey 82% of respondents expressed interest in participation in organic trials and demonstration activities, whilst 84% were prepared to provide farm management information.

Information will be disseminated via technical bulletins, website, farm walks, demonstrations, specialist technical courses, scientific papers and technical publications. The Organic Studies Centre will contribute to the development of a knowledge-based organic agricultural sector and improved competitiveness and financial viability of farm businesses.

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REFERENCES

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