Scottish Organic Forum Event - Organics: Going Forward

Wednesday 3rd October 2012 - Report by Caroline Mohamed Shahin, SAC Consulting

Richard Huxtable - SAC Consulting

In his role as Chairman of the Scottish Organic Forum [SOF] Richard welcomed everyone to the first SOF event at Falkland Village Hall and provided an interesting overview of the raison d'être and achievements of the Forum. He also outlined how organics contribute to different Scottish Government policies and invited the attendees to respond to the proposed new actions for the update of the Organic Action Plan. They can be found at: http://www.scottishorganicforum.co.uk/views.html.

Laura Stewart - Soil Association Scotland

Laura opened by arguing that access to good food is a right not a privilege and introduced the extended Food for Life [FFL] Scotland Programme. This is an established programme which has recently received funding of £772,000.

The <u>Catering Mark</u> is an independently audited scheme, which supports stepwise change, encouraging more fresh, seasonal, local and organic food on menus. She acknowledged that there is a lot of work to do; for example in some areas, school kitchens will need better equipment and catering staff may need more training on food preparation and cooking. A pilot scheme in Edinburgh involving NHS Lothian, the University of Edinburgh and City of Edinburgh Council is underway with the aim of using the FFL Catering Mark to make 'step-by-stepchanges' in catering outlets and to assess the impact of these changes.

A <u>short film</u> on why Stirling Council went for the Bronze Catering Mark was shown.

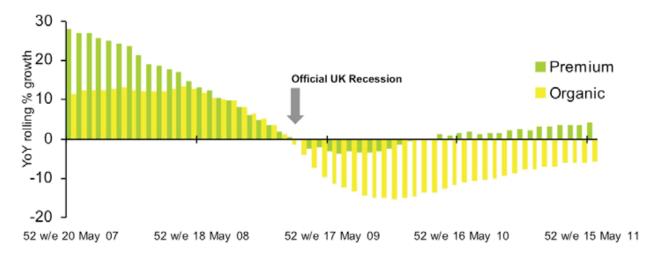
Laura spoke about Copenhagen as a best practice case study – they already use 75% organic ingredients in all their public sector catering, and have inspired the Danish Government to set national targets of 60% of ingredient spend to be organic, with really interesting opportunities resulting for the sector, which is still growing. An estimated 20,000 extra hectares of organic agriculture in Denmark would be the result of a 75% increase in organic food in public sector meals. "Organic food in public sector canteens is a win-win-win solution: Healthier food and better meals, growth in organic agriculture as well as protection of our nature and drinking water resources. We encourage politicians to implement this collective food, health, environmental and political business initiative. The result would be a drastic improvement in service and effectiveness in the public sector because the food would be both healthier and more environmentally friendly without causing an increase in running costs", says Paul Holmbeck, director of Økologisk Landsforening (the National Organic Association).

Laura issued an invitation to organic producers who wished to become suppliers and encouraged them to contact Soil Association Scotland to discuss further.

James Withers - Scotland Food & Drink

James gave an overview of Scotland's success story and the role of organics; stating that the Scottish Food and Drink sector has grown by 24% over the last three years and stood at £12.4bn [at the end of 2010]. The target for 2017 was £12.5bn and by the end of 2011 this had been well and truly surpassed. The Export target of £5.1bn has also been achieved; whisky exports alone are at £4.3bn and food exports are currently higher than £1bn which is a 62% increase since 2007.

James spoke about the current challenges in the organic sector and posed the question - Is price the problem? The Soil Association Organic Market Report 2012 stated that 91% of respondents who did not buy organic food perceived it to be far too expensive. He argued that during the official UK Recession both Premium and Organic Food suffered but since mid 2010 Premium food is slowly regaining its foothold in the market [see graph below – Courtesy of Scotland Food & Drink]



James suggested that consumers are looking for 'best value' rather than the cheapest price – furthermore maybe they are questioning what exactly the organic label means. He further suggested that the media are often not very helpful too in this respect and gave examples of negative headlines about organics.

The opportunities which are most apparent at present are export opportunities. The organic market in other countries is expanding phenomenally; China has quadrupled during the last 5 years; Brazil reports a 40% growth rate and it is predicted that organic sales in Asia will increase 20% year on year for the next three years. The drivers in these countries are premium, provenance and health; all germane to Scotland. The Chinese notoriously distrust their own food and with their one child policy there is no limit to what Chinese families are wiling to invest in this one child; this is an opportunity which could be exploited by Scotland's producers through SDI who have an office in Shanghai.

James stated that we have huge opportunities both home and abroad – Scotland is the land of food and drink. We have a great reputation born from the Scottish Landscape which the Food and Drink Industry has played a part in shaping and attracts 15 - 20 million visitors each year. Next year is the Year of Natural Scotland and the ambition is to create new benchmarks at a variety of sporting events

http://www.eventscotland.org/scotland-the-perfect-stage/scotlands-years-of-focus/natural-scotland/events-programme/.





It is acknowledged that there will be the usual corporate sponsors but there will also be support for SME's to allow them to be part of this legacy.

During the Q&A section James reiterated that price is not the problem, research clearly shows that premium product is recovering so people are not afraid to pay for quality food.

He also confirmed that he sits on the Steering Group of the Scottish Government Food, Land and People Programme http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Research/About/EBAR/StrategicResearch/future-research-strategy/Themes and is working to encourage more research.

Other sectors to consider for export markets were red meat, venison and oats. He also noted that with regard to export we have all our eggs in too few baskets; 80% of export to only 10 countries and we need to broaden these horizons.

In addition, James said there were further opportunities for Scotland's food and drink sector. Early in September 2012 Scottish food and drink producers received a £1 million boost to ensure they are ready to make 2014 an unforgettable year for Scottish food and drink. Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead told a conference that producers must ensure they are ready to reap the rewards offered by the Commonwealth Games, Ryder Cup and Year of Homecoming in 2014. James acknowledged that once again the catering contracts are likely to go to the bigger catering companies but reminded the audience that these companies will need suppliers and this is where the opportunities lie.

James rounded off his interesting and informative talk when he reminded producers that there was going to be a significant shake up with regard to health benefit claims with regard to food. There will have to be demonstrable health benefits and health claims such as increased Omega 3 and low fat.

Martin Davies - Soil Association

Martin spoke about his current project The Duchy Originals Future Farming programme http://www.soilassociation.org/fieldlabs which supports innovation in sustainable agriculture. The programme will help British farmers identify and adopt practices that improve their productivity in an environmentally responsible way.

The programme will involve farmers across the country in developing innovative techniques aimed at improving yields and nutritional performance in organic and low-input agriculture. At the heart of this activity will be a network of on-farm events called Field Labs, led by farmers and growers, where they can share their know-how, design field experiments and pinpoint practical challenges. These will shape the priorities for a new research fund, which will target key barriers to sustainable farming and food systems.

The programme will focus on ecological farming, especially approaches that reduce farmers' reliance on external inputs. It will therefore be particularly relevant to producers who farm to organic standards, yet open to all.

The programme is funded by the Prince of Wales's Charitable Foundation and will be delivered by the Soil Association in partnership with Duchy Originals from Waitrose and the Organic Research Centre (ORC). The programme will comprise six strands of activity, which will be fully integrated with the Soil Association's existing best practice programmes, standards and producer support, and with the Organic Research Centre's (ORC) Participatory Research and Demonstration Network. The aim of this programme is to 'make a big contribution to human health through sustainable food and farming'.

At the heart of the programme are farmer-led learning events, open to all (both organic and non-organic), which will appraise innovative agroecological approaches; share existing best practice and sharpen participants' problem-solving skills. Taking inspiration from the farmer field school approach, pioneered among low-input farmers in Asia and Africa, these will help farmers address the practical challenges they face and identify where research could help. The field labs will be hosted by farms that are already trialling new practices, and will see the same group of farmers meet several times through the production season to monitor progress and discuss alternative approaches.

Martin urged producers to get involved in this project; the inaugural event in Scotland will be **Dairy Farming: A new option?** on Tuesday 13th November at Castle Douglas. A short morning session covering, management of a novel system, market update, an introduction to field labs. Speakers are David Keiley and Richard Huxtable, SAC, Martin Davies, Soil Association and David Finlay [farmer]. Lunch will be followed by a tour of Rainton Farms new modern dairy unit. This event will be free and open to all – For more information or to book a place please contact Richard Huxtable on 01224 711072 / Richard.huxtable@sac.co.uk.

Debs Roberts - SOPA and Murray Cooper - Mains of Thornton Organic Monitor Farm

Debs gave an overview of Scotland's Monitor Farm Programme <a href="http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=720<emid=96">http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=720<emid=96. The Monitor Farm Programme states that when you change some part of your farm business – herd size, breed of tup, animal handling, disease management, cropping and fertilising – the change doesn't come about through simply reading about it or being told you should do it. As with most aspects of life, it comes from seeing something in action or discussing options with someone you trust or from hearing recommendations from several different sources.

This approach to sharing ideas lies at the heart of the Monitor Farms Programme, a Scotland-wide network of livestock and arable farms, led by farmers, for farmers to help improve productivity and, critically, farm business profitability. The Monitor Farmer, aided by a facilitator and a community group of farmers, sets an agenda that over three years aims to improve the profitability, productivity and sustainability of the farm business. Each farm holds six meetings a year for farmers and an open day for all. It means that, instead of the usual single event, showing off some general farm practice – grassland management, a spraying regime, some new gizmo, etc. – your local Monitor Farm can adopt and run with an idea for the three years of the programme (and beyond).

An independent review for Scottish Enterprise of the monitor farms has highlighted the part the project plays in nurturing the future leaders of Scottish agriculture. The research shows that 70% of monitor farmers progressed to undertake off-farm leadership positions, with the majority of these individuals attributing their new roles to their experience as a monitor farmer.

There are currently 16 farms on the Monitor Farm Programme although Mains of Thornton is unique as it is the only organic one. Being a Monitor farm is a three year commitment which begun for Murray in January 2011 and the overall aim of the project is to improve farm productivity <a href="http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/index.php?option=com_zoo&view=item&layout=item<emid=162&retired=false&item_id=43">http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/index.php?option=com_zoo&view=item&layout=item<emid=162&retired=false&item_id=43

Murray gave an overview of Mains of Thornton and its enterprises and described the benefits of the Monitor Farm group discussions which include:

- Trying new ideas
- Meeting a wide variety of people who all contribute something different to the event
- Lots of lessons both for conventional and organic farmers
 - Money saving for conventional farmers if they adopt organic practices such as clover leys in their rotation
- Share knowledge and learn from each other
- Can be time consuming but this is outweighed by the benefits definitely time well spent

Murray is running a Multi Cropping Trial at present; growing two crops at the same time. The crops are wholecrop silage and a hybrid brassica [cross between kale and rape]; after the silage is harvested the brassica grows through the aftermath providing autumn grazing for lambs and winter cover.

When asked what would be a good Blackie x, Murray responded by stating he was presently using Logie Hybrid tups from Ingram's of Inverurie as they resulted in keen lambs which were up quickly and sucking and also had good growth rates,

Murray stated "I can recommend being a monitor farm if opportunity presents itself to you in the future"

The next meeting at Mains of Thornton will be 8th November 2012 and for more information please contact Debs on 07733 228701 / Deborah.roberts@sfqc.co.uk

Alyn Smith - MEP

Alyn Smith MEP, Scottish full member of the European Parliament's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee outlined his role in the context of the CAP Reform and what it means for Scotland's organic farmers and argued that it is important to encourage short supply chains.

He spoke about the importance of recognition of Food Security and used the example of the Arab Spring [also known as the Arab Revolution is a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protest occurring in the Arab world that began on 18 December 2010] which he said were a response to rises in food prices and issues over food security.

The rest of his talk was exclusively about CAP reform:

Alyn highlighted Article 30 of the proposed Rural Development Regulation which will establish organics as a distinct measure. He has tabled an amendment to this article aiming to make it mandatory for each EU state to offer organic support [although it will remain voluntary for a producer to join the scheme]. Each EU state will have to provide 5-7 years financial support to allow the 'new' farming system to develop adequately. In Scotland the Organic Schemes will remain as competitive entry level schemes.

Within the CAP it is recognised that organic farming is already green and so there will be opportunities under the 'greening' proposals.

In response to a question about will the CAP reform result in a better deal for Scotland Alyn responded that there should be a better deal on the budget which has been historically low since the 1984 Fontainebleau Agreement, and stated that the primary focus of himself and Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Environment was to acquire a better budgetary allocation for Scotland.

In response to a question about having the CAP negotiations finished timeously Alyn outlined Plan B: in the absence of a new budget arrangement being available in time the present schemes will simply continue to roll over.

There will also be short supply chain amendments and Alyn explained how EU rules are often misinterpreted with regard to procurement. Need to promote / support more Scottish procurement and this is being considered at the moment.

Organic vegetable growers are often small scale with no IACS entitlements – will there be any support for them? Alyn stated that the commission is warming to this and have suggested that if they can prove they are farming though QMS membership or SEPA paperwork for example then these producers can get brought into support schemes. This is in the process of being developed as are measures to reward collaborative working; both with regard to marketing and production.

Alyn noted concerns about the threat of double funding as organics will have automatic eligibility for greening and finished his talk by stating that simplification is coming with regard to Rural Development packages. He acknowledged that at present SRDP is far too complicated meaning people are often walking away from potential opportunities and gave the reassurance that the new measures should dovetail nicely into the existing good aspects.