

In 2010 we will be celebrating 10 years as a certified organic farm with the Organic Farmers & Growers Association & FABBL (The Little Red Tractor Scheme)

What does it mean to be 'organic' ?

The term organic is widely used these day but what does it actually mean? The organic approach to farming aims to work holistically with nature to produce food that is better for the local environment, our livestock and ultimately you as a consumer. We want to offer the freshest food we can with little or no food miles so you get the best produce we can offer with minimum impact on the environment. Our motto is 'Local Production for Local Consumption!'

Organic farmers and growers don't use chemicals and man-made fertilizers. Instead we use natural manures and weed and hoe manually so that the chemical imprint we have on the local soil, rivers and wildlife is negligible. Organic farming is fundamentally based on creating good soil and growing conditions for our crops, be it salads and vegetables or arable feed and grass for our cows and pigs. By understanding our heavy clay soil we only grow plants that are suited to the Peakhill environment so our crops are healthy and strong without the need for chemical intervention.

How do you become an 'organic' farm?

When becoming organic you first need to go through 'organic conversion'. This is a period of time required for all the conventional chemicals to leave the soil and for the soil to become 'organic'. This is done by sowing red clover which fixes nitrogen into the soil through it's roots and builds soil fertility. It also encourages all of the micro-

organisms and microbes to start working in harmony to produce a living soil. After 2 years the red clover is ploughed into the soil and we can start planting our crops.

What happens after organic conversion?

For the next 3 to 4 years we manage the crops on a careful rotation to ensure that no one crop takes too much out of the soil and maintains the delicate balance of fertility. By rotating the crops we also build the plant's ability to resist pests and disease. After 3-4 years of a field being used to grow plants for food we then plant clover again for a further 2 years so the soil can rest and regain its strength. This is a continual cycle and following the clover we start growing crops again for a further 3-4 years. This approach allows our plants to grow in fertile soil without the use of chemicals.

What do we grow at Peakhill Farm?

We have 3 main crops; cereals, grass and vegetables and salads. Our organic wheat provides our beautiful South Devon beef herd with straw for bedding during the winter months and our grass provides our cows with summer grazing and winter silage. Our cows are slow to mature and the beef is a purely grass-fed product making it very carbon-neutral!

Our vegetables range from potatoes and onions to greens and peas. Our salad garden operates all year round and is the source of our wonderful, ever-changing mixed seasonal salad. Our organic vegetables and salads have no chemical residues and can be eaten straight from the field.

What are the benefits of organic farming?

Conventional farming uses nitrates in the form of nitrogen spread onto the land to produce a lush high yielding crop. Such products consume a huge amount energy to produce and so by using organic methods we can help reduce energy consumption. The applied nitrogen is easily washed out of the soil into our rivers and water-ways and can cause pollution as aquatic plant growth is accelerated and clogs streams and upsets nature's delicate balance.

Chemicals used to get rid of 'harmful' diseases and insects are sprayed so many other organisms are killed or harmed in the process. Those that survive are often ingested by larger organisms and the chemicals become more concentrated in the predators bodies as you move up the food chain. Birds of prey, foxes and badgers ultimately are affected by pesticides and insecticides. Equally, 'useful' insects like ladybirds which can eat 'harmful' insects like greenfly are killed along with pollinating insects like bees.

So organic is better for the environment!

All our animals live as naturally as possible, spending as much time as possible outdoors in our beautiful Suffolk surroundings. The cattle enjoy a diet of organic silage in winter and organic grass in summer. We do not give our animals growth hormones or antibiotics in their feed. The cows live outdoors for most of the year and come in during the winter to have their calves. We keep the mothers and calves together over the summer so that they are less stressed, happier animals. We also keep 2 sows, Itchy and Scratchy which live on our home-produced organic grain-meal and any left-overs from the vegetable patch. They also spend their summer's outside where they are free to wallow in mud and forage in the ground, both activities pigs love! They are also very useful at getting rid of Dock leaf plant, an organic farmers worst

enemy! They search out, root up and consume the root with relish. All our animals are regularly moved around the farm fields so they have clean surroundings and fresh food supplies. All this extra effort means we have happy healthy animals that enjoy their time on the farm.

So organic is better for our livestock too

Finally we think that organic food is better for you as a consumer. The Food standards Association produced a report in July 2009 stating that organic food was no more nutritious than conventional produce.

However, this report failed to take into account any of the wider environmental benefits mentioned above and also overlooked the health benefits of eating food that has not been sprayed or treated with chemicals. We know that there will always need to be large food producing businesses and they will manage their crops with chemicals but buying organic produce from local producers has many environmental and health benefits for those of us who want our food without any chemical extras. By buying our produce you are assured of the provenance of the food you eat and know that it has not travelled any food miles. It's picked fresh everyday so you get the best!

So organic is better for you too!

So that's **THREE** good reasons to buy and eat organic produce.....but don't just take our word for it, why not take a trip out to the farm and see the animals in their natural surroundings, meet our pigs Itchy and Scratchy, stroll around specially selected farm walks*.. and take home some of our Peakhill Farm organic produce!! All our products are quality assured by the Organic Farmers and Growers Association.