

Demonstrating crop resilience through agro-biodiversity

The Organic Research Centre will be bringing its expertise on intercropping, cereal diversity, use of on-farm woody resources, and measuring the life in your soil to [NOCC 2017](#) - National Organic Combinable Crops - [OF&G](#)'s flagship event, hosted by Fullerton Farms Partnership, near Andover, on Thursday 6th July.

We all know about the importance of soil biology and soil organic matter to our cropping systems, but how do you assess the life in your soil? [ORC](#) researcher [Anja Vieweger](#) and Simon Parfey of [SoilBioLab](#) will demonstrate practical soil assessment tools in the field, including earthworm counts and looking at mycorrhiza under the microscope. There will be a chance to discuss the pros and cons of commonly used approaches.

Here at ORC, we believe passionately in building farm resilience through diversity. This is backed up by sound science. Alongside the demonstrations of the latest commercial varieties, ORC with crops researcher Ambrogio Costanzo will showcase new highly diverse crops, including the ORC Wakelyns Population of wheat (where each individual in a crop is bred to be genetically distinct from every other one, making the whole crop more resilient to changes in weather conditions and pest and disease pressures), and ancient wheats; Emmer, Einkorn and Rivet, to widen the horizons of cereal production. We will explore a wide phenotypic diversity and discuss how to improve field performance on marginal land and diversify cropping and market opportunities for cereal growing.

Old wheat cultivars, as well as diverse populations, are often reported to be not as suitable as commercial pure lines for conventional bread making. But what about alternative bread making processes? Baker Kimberley Bell has been exploring processes to make bread from ORC Wakelyns Population flour, with excellent results. There will be a chance for attendees to taste a slice of diversity for themselves.

Intercropping can improve sustainability, resilience and productivity. There are many examples of advantageous combinations of cereals and legumes but results are often unpredictable and practices are not yet widely adopted. Plots will display mixtures of different wheat and bean varieties. Our researchers Dominic Amos and Charlotte Bickler will explore which traits are required for successful intercropping, and discuss how we can develop them.

Trees and hedges can present management challenges for farmers, but could be an untapped resource. Researchers Sally Westaway and Kevin Waldie from the agroforestry team at the ORC will be joined by William Hamer, forestry consultant and director of Hampshire Woodfuel Cooperative, to discuss the pros and cons of managing on-farm woody resources including hedges and small woodlands as a productive part of the farm enterprise.

ENDS



Notes to Editors

- The Organic Research Centre (ORC), established in 1980, is the UK's leading independent research centre for the development of organic/agroecological food production and land management solutions to key global issues including climate change, soil and biodiversity conservation, and food security.
- NOCC is OF&G's flagship event, the largest UK on-farm event in the organic calendar, with ORC as a lead partner. NOCC17 will be hosted by innovative organic arable farmers James Liddell and sons Tom and Hugh at Fullerton Farms, near Andover on Thursday 6 July. Visitors will have the chance to learn about the farm and its operations during an extensive farm walk. There will also be panel discussions with experienced industry professionals talking crop varieties, latest agricultural equipment, weeds, seeds, soils, product quality, routes to market, and more.
- More information in our NOCC17 Special Bulletin <https://tinyurl.com/ORC-at-NOCC17>
- For photos of the 2016 event see <https://flic.kr/s/aHskCSwcTN> For photos from the day itself, contact Phil Sumption +44 (0)1488 658298 Ext:533 or email: phil.s@organicresearchcentre.com
- To interview ORC Executive Director Prof. Nic Lampkin call +44 (0)1488 658298 Ext:521 or email: nic.l@organicresearchcentre.com