

THE ORGANIC  
RESEARCH  
CENTRE



ELM FARM



Our  
impact  
review  
2018



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# Why ORC's work matters

Recent months have seen the publication of alarming research into the threats to our food and farming system. This is the context in which our work is carried out.

## Our focus, as always, is on practical, robust solutions.

During 2018 ORC has been a major contributor to over 30 UK and international projects, collaborating with over 200 organisations at home and abroad. In particular, our pioneering work on crop breeding and testing, on agroforestry, and on farm sustainability assessment came to the fore.

We believe in the importance of demonstrating the impact of our activities and our aspirations for the future. This can be challenging. Much of our work, particularly in the field of research, is steadily adding to the development of a knowledge base, which through a network of partnerships, can provide effective solutions.

One way I like to assess our overall impact is to ask the question "Who is listening and why do they care?". With this in mind, I want to highlight two important examples of ORC's impact in 2018 detailed in this review:

**Agriculture:** An inspirational and informative website promoting agroecological farming practices for farmers, growers and researchers.

**The English Organic Forum:** Under ORC's leadership, the organic movement was able to speak with one voice in response to the UK government's 'Health and Harmony' consultation on the future for food, farming and the environment post-Brexit.

I am immensely proud of the dedication of the ORC team and their efforts to deliver fantastic work for the sector. The future looks challenging for UK food and agriculture, but also presents many opportunities. ORC is ready and willing to play an important part, but we cannot do this without your support.

**Mike Turnbull – Chair of Trustees**



“Plummeting insect numbers ‘threaten collapse of nature’”

“World’s food supply under ‘severe threat’ from loss of biodiversity”

“European farms could grow green and still be able to feed population”

The Guardian





# About ORC

A charity established in 1980, the Organic Research Centre (ORC) is the UK's leading independent research organisation dedicated to research focussed on organic and other agroecological approaches to farming and food.

## Our mission

To work, nationally and internationally to:

Research and develop practical, sustainable land management and food production systems based on organic and agroecological principles.

Foster knowledge exchange with and between current and future producers, food businesses and related professionals.

Influence policy and public debates on the future of food and farming based on sound evidence.

## Our drivers & approaches



### Environment

...reduce impact on and enhance the environment through improving soils, biodiversity and carbon capture.



### Food Security

...ensure there is sufficient, nutritious and a varied supply of food.



### Sustainability

...environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

### Integration

Research that recognises that farming systems are integrated, with a multidisciplinary team making recommendations that impact on multiple parts of the farming system.

### Diversification

Realising the benefits of diversity in farming through developing genetically diverse crop varieties, integrating livestock and cropping systems, or redesigning farms or landscapes using approaches such as agroforestry.

### Participation

Field-based research on commercial farms, working with farmers to identify problems and offer solutions. Developing recommendations that are relevant, valued and widely used by our community of farmers.





# Our work in 2018



© Small Food Bakery



## Driving change

Through our research and knowledge exchange work we are influencing farm practice and driving change within organic and non-organic farming businesses. ORC wants to mitigate climate change, improve food security and increase sustainability.

### Better crop varieties

Diversifying the genetic makeup of crops will lead to more sustainable food systems. With leading scientists and plant breeders throughout Europe we are trialling new cereal types. The diverse wheat 'variety' that we developed, ORC Wakelyns Population, is available on the market, grown throughout the UK and undergoing transformation by forward looking millers and bakers into successful products.

Organic farmers need to be able to identify the varieties that best fit their farms. We have developed new, scientifically robust approaches to on-farm variety testing, working with a network of farmers throughout the UK. The results are used not only by organic farmers but also by conventional farmers that are keen to reduce their use of chemicals.

We need to change the laws around seed sales. To deliver this we are working with UK and EU policy makers to ensure that the rules around seed production and marketing allow for the diversity needed within crop varieties for a sustainable and healthy farming system.

### Promoting agroforestry

Diversification can also include integrating new aspects to the farming system such as trees. We have the UK's leading team of agroforestry researchers, providing practical, tested advice to farmers and growers. Over the last 12 months we produced a series of practical, farmer friendly technical guides and delivered 7 over-subscribed farmer workshops on how to design, implement and maintain agroforestry systems.

An important new research focus includes Ramial Chipped Wood (RCW) – woodchips made from small to medium-sized branches, usually harvested from farm hedges and tree trimming. Farmers and growers are adding it to their soils to improve the quality, increasing the productivity of their systems and reducing the use of external inputs. As well as turning a waste product into a valuable resource, it provides an incentive to plant more trees, thus aiding diversification and helping mitigate climate change.



**200+**  
**farmers**  
attended  
**seven**  
**workshops**

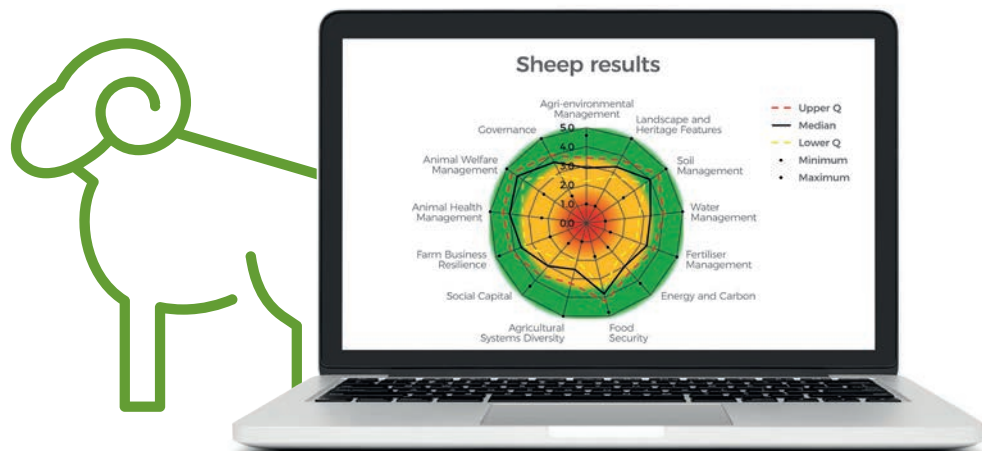
### Improving soils

Working with both organic and non-organic growers, we successfully delivered a major programme on soils. This brought together scientists and practitioners to devise recommendations on how to measure and improve soil health for horticultural systems, from vegetables to perennial fruit. With a better understanding of soil health, growers can better manage inputs to their systems, improving sustainability and optimising food production.



### Improving livestock systems

Using our innovative and flexible farm sustainability assessment Public Goods Tool we led this activity, within a multi-national project, working with 236 sheep and goat farmers, across seven European countries to assess the sustainability of their farms. Farmers can now better understand and measure how their management practices score against criteria such as animal health and welfare, soil and water management and food security so as to improve the environmental impact of their farms and optimise production. Leveraging the training and expertise of ORC's livestock and sustainability teams, the sheep and goat industry is better able to target their efforts and ensure more viable business models.



## Empowering farmers

We empower farmers to understand their systems better and know how to make necessary changes. Our research and information teams know who the users of their work are and understand their needs. Whether it's a website, technical guide or a workshop, we provide the information to make farms and businesses more sustainable and resilient.

**8 field labs in 2018**  
with 50 farmers attending our field lab meetings

### Enabling farmers to find their own solutions

ORC is a major stakeholder in the Innovative Farmers Programme, supported by the Prince of Wales's Charitable Fund. We work with farmers to solve their problems using good science. We recently led on the development and honing of the participatory 'Field Lab' approach. Field labs are a way for farmers to access researchers to support and enhance on-farm science and learning, improving farm practice. We don't just work with organic farmers, but with all farmers willing to improve their sustainability.

**Field labs have helped organic arable farmers make more informed decisions on the type of wheat they grow.**

**Field labs have enabled non-organic vegetable producers to reduce their reliance on synthetic nitrogen and nutrient leaching (while improving their soil health) by using green manures.**

**Field labs have shown that hot water seed treatment works, helping organic vegetable producers in the short-term and, potentially, helping the industry as a whole to find an alternative to conventional chemical seed dressings.**

Testing these approaches on organic farms can feed into the rest of farming, encouraging non-organic farmers to make a change to more sustainable practices. Field labs also empower farmers to improve and gain confidence in their own innovative approaches to food production.



## Our work in 2018

### Digital impact

Led by our information team, with funding provided by the Daylesford Foundation, **Agricology** is an inspirational and informative website that promotes agroecological farming practices for a fast-growing community of farmers, growers and researchers. We collaborate with over 20 of the UK's foremost organisations working on sustainable agriculture. Content takes the form of technical guides, blogs, videos, farmer and grower profiles, and newsletters. Combined with on-farm events and workshops, this initiative helps to make farming more resource-efficient, resilient and profitable. During 2018 the number of followers rose by 26,000 to a total of 49,000 across the digital platforms.

ORC's own website also communicates a wealth of information about who we are, our research and knowledge exchange activities, policy briefings and how to support us. Our monthly e-bulletin subscribers and social media sites Twitter, Facebook, Flickr are continuously growing, ensuring that our messages are disseminated to a new and widening audience.



**57 new resources published**

(technical guides, research papers, videos, audio, apps, e-books etc)



**36 blogs**



**12 video blogs**



**6 farmer & grower profiles**



**49,000 followers**

(23k in 2017)



### Practical technical guides

Although our information is always accessible online, it can be difficult to read from a screen and some users are still battling with poor rural broadband. During this year we have produced 20 printed guides covering the range of our research. We also produce a Bulletin 3-4 times a year that summarises key outputs, gives highlights from key guides and other technical support.

### Face to face works

To get our message out we need to use a wide range of approaches. Face to face is one of the best that there is. During the year we have led and participated in 168 workshops, events, field days and conferences, including the **IFOAM World Congress** in India. Closer to home we organised and delivered a very successful **Winter Organic Cereals** event and the first **UK Organic Congress**, as well as supporting Organic Farmers and Growers (OF&G) to deliver the equally successful **National Organic Combinable Crops** event.

We also undertook a series of workshops for farmers covering agroforestry, inter-cropping, soil health and crop production. This created a platform for farmers to come together to learn more about our work, understand how they can apply it to their farms and improve their businesses. They also had a forum to talk to each other (and us) to swap best practice and pose questions that they need answers to.



**168 events**  
attended  
by **9,421 people**





## Influencing the future

Influencing and shaping the future is also an important role for ORC through our policy work, input into panels and advisory committees, teaching and training.

### Shaping policy

We coordinated and chaired the **English Organic Forum (EOF)**, which brings together key organisations within the English organic movement and speaks with authority on their behalf. In particular, we provided a concerted “organic” response to the UK government’s ‘Health and Harmony’ consultation on the future for food, farming and the environment post-Brexit. In partnership with other Forum members, ORC played a leading role in the on-going development of an **Organic Action Plan for England**.

Our efforts to shape the future of UK and EU seed policy continue, working closely with UK governmental actors and actively engaging in the Seed Marketing Experiment: our ORC Wakelyns Population is showing that an alternative, diverse and more sustainable approach to seed production and marketing is possible.

Our Agroforestry team organised an agroforestry summit with the **Country Land & Business Association (CLA)**, **Royal Forestry Society (RFS)**, **Soil Association** and **Woodland Trust**, and also collaborated on an agroforestry policy briefing that was launched at an All-Party Parliamentary Group meeting in Westminster.

### Advising key international organisations & advisory bodies

ORC staff sit on numerous national and international panels and committees, bringing our unique insight and skills to the table. These include UK research councils, Defra, the European Commission, Natural England, GM Freeze, European Agroforestry Federation (EURAF), TP Organics, IFOAM Animal Husbandry Alliance, HedgeLINK and the Farm Woodland Forum.

### Training future food and farming leaders

In partnership with **Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC)**, we delivered the **Organic Farming PGDip/MSc course**. This part-time distance learning course, completed by 2 MSc graduates and 17 PGDips in 2018, enables students to build on their existing expertise and aspirations, and to give them enhanced career opportunities as practitioners, promoters and facilitators within the organic sector. ORC teaches across a range of topics, supervised student projects and hosted field visits.

At an international level, we also are part of the Exam Commission for the MSc in ‘**Mediterranean Organic Agriculture**’ at Bari, Italy that trained 9 students in 2018 to be leaders in organic farming in their own countries.



## Our work in 2018

### Supporting small-scale businesses

2018 saw the launch of the expanded Dean Organic Fund, now run by ORC following the death of Jennie Bone who originally established it on a smaller scale in 1993. The Fund provides interest-free, unsecured loans to small-scale organic/ecological producers and food businesses, for investment in equipment, stock or other working capital, of between £5,000 – £25,000 and repayable over periods of up to 5 years. In the first two funding rounds the Fund has disbursed £365,000 to 20 borrowers including several dairies, a conservation grazing business and a vineyard.



“The Dean Organic Fund gave us a once in a lifetime opportunity to secure investment to grow our business in a way that promotes the values our croft is based on – healthy soils = healthy land = healthy animals = healthy food = healthy people.”

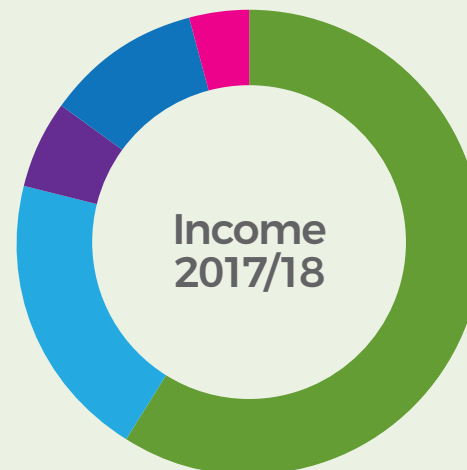
Lynn Cassell & Sandra Baer – Lynbreck Croft, Scotland



“Being awarded a loan from the Dean Organic Fund has enabled us to buy a much needed tractor without which we would have struggled to feed our cows over the winter period. The tractor also enabled us to spread more muck than we have done for years which in turn should result in a much higher silage crop for next year. Having this loan has enabled us to continue farming and keep up with the inspection processes that we have to adhere to.”

Michael Chandler & Kirsten Chandler-Ross  
– Carn Brae Farm, Devon

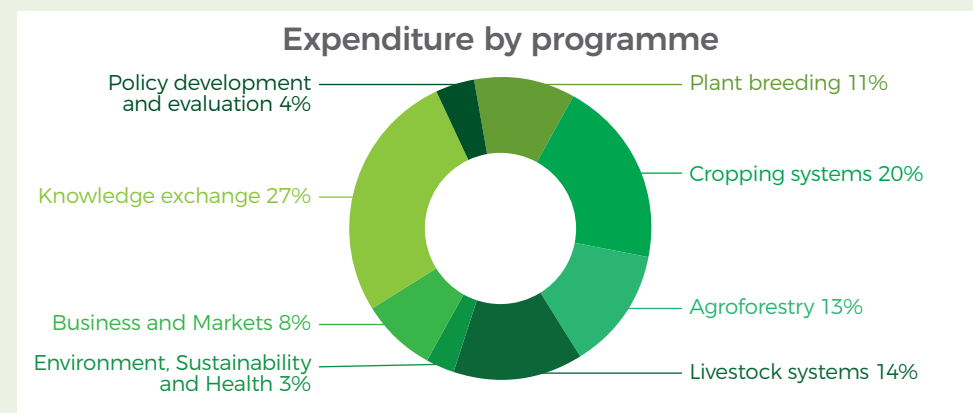
## Maximising our resources



**Research & Projects 59%**  
**Information Services 20%**  
**Donations 6%**  
**Legacies 11%**  
**Other activities 4%**  
 (including investment income)



**Research & Projects 60%**  
**Information Services 35%**  
**Fundraising 3%**  
**Other activities 2%**





# Our reach

## Our partners:

|               |    |
|---------------|----|
| Austria       | 5  |
| Belgium       | 8  |
| Bulgaria      | 1  |
| Cyprus        | 1  |
| Denmark       | 4  |
| Estonia       | 1  |
| Finland       | 4  |
| France        | 18 |
| Germany       | 23 |
| Greece        | 5  |
| Hungary       | 4  |
| Ireland       | 1  |
| Israel        | 2  |
| Italy         | 29 |
| Kenya         | 2  |
| Latvia        | 1  |
| Lebanon       | 1  |
| Liechtenstein | 1  |
| Mali          | 1  |
| Netherlands   | 6  |
| Norway        | 4  |
| Palestine     | 1  |
| Poland        | 2  |
| Portugal      | 8  |
| Romania       | 3  |
| Sierra Leone  | 1  |
| Spain         | 22 |
| Sweden        | 2  |
| Switzerland   | 7  |
| Turkey        | 7  |
| UK            | 53 |


**over 30** UK & international projects,  
**200** working with over organisations

## Our projects include:



**49 publications produced in 2018**  
 including fact sheets, technical guides,  
 peer reviewed journal articles.  
<https://tinyurl.com/ORC-pubs17-18>

# Thank you

We would like to say a huge thank you to all the individuals and organisations that have supported our work in 2017-18, we couldn't do it without you.



## Our major contributors and supporters including:

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**Not forgetting the generosity of all our regular individual donors and event sponsors.**

# We need your support



We are renewing our vision and strategy, ensuring that ORC remains a driving force in the growth of organics in the UK and overseas. To do this, we need to be in control and commissioning our own research that meets the emerging needs of the organic community we serve.

**Our top priority is to secure funding for new and exciting research projects that will have real impact. Talk to us about which ones you would like to support.**

We need at least £150,000 of unrestricted core funds every year to underpin all that we do. Key areas where your support is needed:

- Policy advocacy and making the case for organic
- Handbooks and guides
- Training and bursaries
- Sponsorship for events and conferences
- Developing our fundraising efforts
- Engaging with our participatory farmer network
- Improving the ORC website (Can you build us one?)

Why not join our Farmer and Business Supporters' Group or make a one-off or a regular donation? You can do this via the Donate button on our website **[www.organicresearchcentre.com](http://www.organicresearchcentre.com)**

To get involved with any of the above, please call us on **+44 (0)1488 658298** or email **[fundraising@organicresearchcentre.com](mailto:fundraising@organicresearchcentre.com)**

**We'd love to hear from you.**





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