

Impacts of Organic Farming on the Rural Economy.

Organic farming has developed rapidly in recent years and now has a market value of over £802 million. Supporters of organic farming point to it producing a wide range of benefits including improved environmental management and a positive impact on employment. Others also argue that organic agriculture is well placed to support local and regional economies. For instance, it is claimed that organic farming can help local



rural development by contributing to tourism and leisure activities. As yet, however, there is little empirical evidence of these wider effects on rural economies and rural development. Against this background, this project will explore the key hypothesis that organic farming provides an additional benefit to the rural economy over and above conventional agriculture. The research will explore the extent to which organic farming gives rise to greater economic and socio-economic linkages within rural economies (and the local economy) and, as a result, contributes to rural development. It will also examine claims that organic farming is associated with qualitative as well as

quantitative differences in employment patterns and social networks in rural communities.



In collaboration with The University of Plymouth, the project will develop techniques to trace the 'socioeconomic footprint' of different types of farming. The concept of a socioeconomic footprint is broader than a conventional economic analysis. Data will be collected to explore the economic linkages

(networks of transactions which either contribute to income generation or leakages from the local economy) associated with both organic and conventional farming systems. Information will also be gathered on the professional and social networks of both types of producers. The Elm Farm Research Centre and the Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA) are expert advisers to the project and the research team expects to produce its report in January 2005.

For further information on this project contact Dr Matt Lobley m.lobley@exeter.ac.uk (01392 264539), or Matt Reed , m.j.reed@exeter.ac.uk (01392 262438)

Project Objectives

- Review the current state of knowledge of wider socio-economic impacts of organic farming through a review of literature and input of stakeholders via a panel of experts seminar.
- Examine differences in the socio-economic footprint between organic and conventional farming in terms of patterns of sales and input purchases, quantity and 'quality' of labour inputs, integration with local socio-economic networks (including co-operatives, local food networks, etc), contribution to local tourism and rural development.
- Investigate differences in socio-economic footprint between different types of organic and conventional farms (following the approach outlined above).
- Develop policy implications in consultation with DEFRA and other stakeholders



Picture credit: Henry Doubleday Research Association

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