

## **Partners to build soil fertility**

The Organic Research Centre – Elm Farm is one of the key partners in a new Defra - funded project to help growers improve the ways in which they build soil fertility.

The project, which will look at fertility management strategies inorganic arable and vegetable production, will be run in collaboration with HDRA/Garden Organic, Warwick HRI, ABACUS Organic Associates and the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research. It aims to look at different techniques and fill in some of the knowledge gaps in this area so the range of options for fertility building can be expanded.

An initial stakeholder day on Thursday 3 April 2007 is planned at Garden Organic, Ryton, near Coventry for growers, researchers, advisors, policy makers and members of the seed industry to share knowledge on green manures.

Francis Rayns, soil scientist at HDRA/Garden Organic says - "Fertility building crops have always been a crucial part of organic rotations but, with the rising costs of nitrogen fertilizer, they are now attracting growing interest from conventional farmers too.

"However, the current range used in the UK is very limited; it is unusual to see anything other than red or white clover used. We have preliminary evidence that other, less-known species such as fenugreek, trefoil, medic, lupins and lucerne may perform well, but more research needs to be done.

"We want to start by identifying where the knowledge gaps are to ensure the outcome of the project is useful for the industry so we are inviting interested parties to this initial meeting."

As part of the project, farmers and growers will have the opportunity to trial some of the novel fertility building crops in simple on farm trials in real farm situations. The project will also continue an existing trial that is comparing a number of contrasting fertility building strategies over ten years. Such work is essential for examining the long-term effects of different practices.

If you who would like to be part of the project process, either by attending the meeting or trying out novel legumes on your farm, please contact Anton Rosenfeld at HDRA/Garden Organic on 02476 303517.

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