

Ten minutes with Pip Robb

Would you like to get to know the ORC staff, learn more about what they are working on at the moment and find out what inspired them to pursue a career in organic research?

To help celebrate our 40th anniversary year and throughout 2021 we will be releasing short 'ten minutes with' interviews to let you do just that!

What is your job role at the ORC?

I am the (Interim) Project Manager for [Agricology](#) and took over from [Lydia Lishman](#) while she is on maternity leave.

How long have you worked at the ORC?

Since February 2021.

Where are you from/ where are you based?

I grew up in a small town in South Somerset from the age of 7. Although we didn't live on a farm, we had many friends who did and I have fond memories of summers surrounded by beef and dairy cattle, sheep and tractors, and jumping the straw bales on our ponies before they were loaded onto the trailers and stored (they still had square bales in those days!). 'Yesterday's Farming' shows were also a regular highlight of our school holidays.

I spent my college years in Plymouth and now live on the side of a National Trust common in Gloucestershire. I feel very privileged to have been able to walk my children to their primary school through wildflower meadows and herds of Friesians, Longhorns and Highland cattle on the common, developing their own appreciation and love of the countryside in the process.

What is your background, how did you get involved in the organic industry?

I loved the fact that the secondary school I went to in Crewkerne had a school farm (although it is now a housing estate), so we had 'rural science' on the timetable and were able to get 'hands on' experience of pigs, cows, chickens and horticulture.

Not long after we moved to Gloucestershire my husband and I took on the challenge of restoring a unique retail plant nursery with 2 majestic vineries and 5 beautiful free standing Foster & Pearson glasshouses. We propagated a large percentage of our herbaceous stock ourselves and became very interested in how to manage pests, such as aphids and vine weevil, without chemicals.

I continued to work in marketing and communications whilst my husband grew the business, and jumped at any opportunity to work with environmental and sustainable causes, as well as spending a year managing the membership of the Soil Association which had me hooked on the Organic sector.

Having worked with a number of the Wildlife Trusts and other environmental charities in the SouthWest, I am aware of and saddened by the decline in our natural landscapes and species in recent years and am keen to have some influence on society's response to the challenges our environment faces.



At ORC I can use my communications experience to help different farming communities learn more about farming with nature and the benefits of adopting practical, sustainable farm and food systems.

What does your job role entail?

My role is to project manage the Agricology knowledge exchange platform, established in 2015 as a collaboration between [ORC](#), the [GWCT Allerton project](#) and the [Daylesford Foundation](#).

Agricology is an independent platform, combining scientific research findings with relevant farmer experiences of agroecology for use in all farming enterprises (livestock, arable, horticulture), and relevant for farmers using all approaches, including organic and conventional systems

We have over [40 partner organisations](#), and my role involves developing collaboration opportunities with these partners to ensure we are providing a wide range of useful information and guidance to farmers and advisors who regularly access Agricology.

I measure ongoing audience engagement with the resources published, and the [monthly newsletter](#), and work closely with our content editor and knowledge exchange team to identify any gaps in the shared resources, developing plans for filling those gaps wherever possible.



What are you working on at the moment?

I am currently involved in developing funding streams for Agricology, to replace the start-up funding received during the first 5 years of the project. Building relationships with partners seeking knowledge exchange services for their planned projects, and approaching environmental funders with innovative ideas for additional knowledge exchange opportunities they may be interested in funding has been key.

Our current website will become unsupported by the end of next year so I am also looking at how the site structure and content can be enhanced in line with user feedback generated by our recent user survey, and identifying potential funding opportunities to allow this to happen!

What do you enjoy about working at the ORC?

I am surrounded by colleagues who are passionate about making positive change to the way UK land is farmed, and finding ways to improve the biodiversity and natural resources we rely on for our food, health and wellbeing.

No two days are the same, and the more I learn about ORC's research and farmer collaborations, the more I am filled with hope for the future of our farmed environment.

What do you think the ORC's biggest achievement over the last 40 years has been?

I would say the strength of the farmer relationships they have built up over the years, to demonstrate longer term impact and sustainability, and the collaborative nature of their innovative research agenda.

What do you see as the future of farming and what role does the ORC play in this?

All the signs are that farming is taking a more protective role in the future of our natural environment – and ORC are playing a central role in providing the research, knowledge and tools for this to happen.

Is there anything exciting we should keep our eyes out for over the next couple of months?

Fingers crossed we will be able to launch an enhanced Agricology website and resource library early in 2022, if we are successful in our funding bids!

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