

Ten minutes with Lindsay Whistance

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!

Find out more about ORC's Senior Livestock Researcher, Lindsay, below.

What is your job role at the ORC?

Senior Livestock Researcher

How long have you worked at the ORC?

I've been working at ORC since April 2017



Where are you from/ where are you based?

I grew up in Herefordshire though I've moved around quite a lot since then including spending fourteen years in Denmark. I'm currently living in Hungerford though I plan to move to Mid-Wales soon.

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

I grew up in an extended farming family and was always drawn to the animals, spending as much time as I could with the dairy herd when not messing around with horses and pets. After leaving school, I worked on a local dairy farm milking 60 British Friesians. It's strange now to think that there were two full time stockmen for 60 cows on 100 acres of grass but there was so much time to enjoy the work and be good to the cows; I loved every minute of every day. After that, I moved around milking full time and, later, relief milking along with sheep work including lambing.

My route away from being a stockman and into research came from being disillusioned by the ever increasing herd sizes leaving less time to interact with the animals in any meaningful way. This led to an animal science degree and a PhD in cow behaviour. My choice to combine organic and research came from the explicit aim of the organic movement to promote farming systems that give the animals space to be themselves through natural behaviour patterns. Organic as a way of life, came from a childhood experience when, ignoring the signs saying not to, I picked and ate an apple that had been sprayed. I still remember the awful fever it caused and the realisation then that we must learn to farm with and not against nature.

What does your job role entail?

My role is quite diverse and may include research which focusses on the animals themselves, the systems they live in along with management practices, as well as supporting industries including feed. At times, it might involve different animal categories (ruminant or monogastric) and specific areas of interest related to them. Another area of research is the reduction and replacement of contentious inputs in organic agriculture, so for livestock, this includes antibiotics and chemical based treatments such as anthelmintics and how we can minimise their use through optimal animal - and system - health and resilience. Knowledge exchange is also key to my role since learning and sharing are two sides of the same coin. An interest in silvopasture is now growing beyond the pioneer farmers and I am currently enjoying engaging with open-minded farmers and other groups on the multiple benefits that trees can bring to livestock.

What are you working on at the moment?

At the moment, I am working on the Organic Plus project for which we are trialling some herbs for dairy cow and calf health around calving time. In the [DiverIMPACTS](#) project, I'm engaging with a group of farmers including herbal leys in their rotations, investigating their experiences of this approach. For livestock and trees, I am currently working on two projects. One is the [Devon Silvopasture field lab](#) where, in collaboration with the farmers, I am focussing on the animal behaviour and welfare measures and the other is the Optimum Shelter Belt project in the Cotswolds where, along with biodiversity, animal and crop productivity measures are included.

What do you enjoy about working at the ORC?

There are lots of things I enjoy. From a research side, I like that our work does not take a reductionist approach and that animals are afforded more relevance beyond any value as units of production. I enjoy working with a group of researchers (friends) who constantly add perspective to my own understanding of the wider picture and philosophical growth. A big part of my enjoyment comes from the participatory nature of much of our research where time and space is made for the interests and expertise of farmers and other stakeholders.

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

Developing a strong and respected international reputation for quality research.

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

Not sure when it will be aired but keep an eye out for the Devon Silvopasture Field Lab on Countryfile.