

Young organic farmer recognised with launch of new award

The inaugural Young Organic Farmer/Grower of the Year award was launched by the Organic Research Centre ('ORC') at its 40th anniversary event.

The Organic Research Centre has launched its inaugural Young Organic Farmer/Grower of the Year award, which was presented to Devon growers, Ashley Wheeler and Kate Norman of Trill Farm Garden, Musbury, Devon.

The judges recognised Ashley and Kate's commitment to organic principles and how their attention to good soil management and biodiversity has helped them deliver quality vegetable production despite a farm with a high water table and poor drainage. They were also commended for their commitment to ongoing training, including their support for the Landworkers' Alliance. Ashley and Kate win a donated prize of £1,500 and a trophy.



Winners Ashley and Kate with the YOFY judges Photo: Kay Ransom

Highly commended nominees included Juno Norman, The Wicton Farm Team and Rosa Holt.

Commenting on his success, Young Organic Farmer of the Year, Ashley Wheeler, said:

“It is fantastic to get this recognition, which reinforces the value of our focus on soil management, seed sovereignty and organic production methods in our business. Now, more than ever before, organic farming principles offer an opportunity for mainstream agriculture and horticulture to embrace nature-friendly farming and deliver sustainable and resilient food production across the UK. That's why we've been focused on supporting training schemes and mentoring young people as they embark on their careers in the industry.”

The award was presented at an event to celebrate ORC's 40-year contribution to farming and agri-policy, held at the FarmED centre in the Cotswolds. More than 100 members of the industry attended the event, with presentations on current ORC work, a panel discussion on *the future of organic farming and priorities for research*, and a presentation celebrating the retirement of long-standing ORC employee, Mark Measures.

Originally established as the Elm Farm Research Centre in 1981, over the last forty years the organisation has delivered pioneering research that has helped transform the organic sector in the UK and beyond. During this time, it has collaborated with some of the world's leading scientists on applied research into issues as diverse as public goods assessment, wheat populations, genetics and agroforestry.



YOFY trophy and Mark Measures' retirement gift

Photo: Kay Ransom

In addition, ORC has worked with farmers in converting to organic production and helped them to access value-added markets, supporting the formation of organisations such as OMSCo and Organic Arable. It has also created innovative information hubs such as Agricollogy to share research widely across the industry and has influenced policy, helping ensure Defra supported organic production within environmental stewardship schemes.

Commenting on the milestone, Lucy MacLennan, Chief Executive, said:

“This year is a pivotal one for British agriculture, as we adapt to life post-Brexit and an agricultural policy framework focused on delivering environmental benefits. Low input and regenerative agriculture have become buzzwords in recent times, but our work doesn't just seek solutions for low input agriculture, we push the boundaries by exploring **no** input agricultural practices to deliver truly sustainable food production for the whole agricultural community.

“We'll do this by leading change in nature-positive farming, bringing new thinking to the mainstream, empowering people to embrace different agricultural approaches and by demonstrating the economic as well as environmental benefits available. By working together with our partners, industry stakeholders and the farming community, we'll deliver the transition to naturally healthy and resilient farming systems that is needed