



Canolfan Organig Cymru
Organic Centre Wales

A review of the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) in Wales (1996 – 2001)

October 2001

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Executive summary

The Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) has been operational in Wales since 1996 and is funded from the National Assembly for Wales. It provides technical information and support to farmers who wish to find out more about the implications of converting to organic farming. The current funding arrangements for OCIS will end in March 2001. This review has two closely linked aims:

- To evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the service over the last 5 years.
- To canvas farmer opinion to inform the next phase of development of OCIS.

The service has 3 main components; a *telephone help-line*; an *information pack*; on *farm advisory visits*. There are two other services/ items, which, while not administratively part of OCIS, have been linked into it. These are: a *one- day course on planning the conversion*, and a '*Handbook of Organic Farm Management*'.

A bilingual questionnaire was mailed out to everyone who had contacted the OCIS help-line from January 1996 to September 2001. A total of 2732 questionnaires were sent out, and 272 responses (10%) were received before the closing date.

There was considerable variation in the holding size of the respondents, ranging from 0.4 ha to 955 ha (average= 85 ha). The majority identified beef/and or sheep as their main enterprise. Other key enterprises included diary, arable and vegetables.

Levels satisfaction with all components of the service were generally high. A number of issues were raised, which need to be addressed including:

- More marketing information
- Greater relevance for smallholders
- More specific information on grants
- Certification issues
- Enterprise specific technical information
- Record keeping/ form filling
- Animal health and welfare
- Environmental information

With regard to the future direction of the service some clear indications emerged from the review:

- There was strong support for the inclusion of experienced growers, on the basis that most farmers will find it easier to relate to, and have more confidence in, someone with a practical background.
- Some form of group training in addition to one to one on farm advisory visits is desirable
- There is a need for detailed planning advice and support
- There is a need to strengthen the marketing, financial, animal health/ welfare and environmental elements of OCIS
- There is a need to provide 'post OCIS' support, through activities planned under farming connect, and/or through 'post OCIS surgeries'.

Introduction

The Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) has been operational in Wales since 1996 and is funded from the National Assembly for Wales. It provides technical information and support to farmers who wish to find out more about the implications of converting to organic farming and is managed by ADAS. The service has 3 main components:

- *A telephone help-line.* From 1996 to December 2000, Soil Association managed the helpline. Since January 2001 this role has been taken over by Organic Centre Wales (OCW). The help-line provides the first point of contact for farmers considering conversion.
- *An information pack.* The information pack is sent out after contact with the help line. It outlines the conversion process and the support services available to farmers during the conversion period.
- *On farm advisory visits.* The service provides 2 on farm visits, free of charge: a half day visit outlining the general principles of Organic Farming, and a follow up visit that focuses more the in the individuals options, priorities and concerns. Further details of the visits are available in Appendix I. Up until December 1999, the Organic Advisory Service (OAS) and the Agricultural Development and Advisory Services (ADAS) carried out these visits. Since January 2000, they have been carried out mainly by ADAS.

There are 2 other services/ items, which, while not administratively part of OCIS, have been linked into it. These are:

- *A One- day course on planning the conversion,* managed by ADAS and funded through Objective 5b. This course is held between the half day and the full day visits.
- *An 'Organic Farm Management Handbook'* also funded under Objective 5b and included in the information pack from January 2001.

The current funding arrangements for OCIS will end in March 2001. This review had closely linked aims:

- To evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the service over the last 5 years
- To canvas farmer opinion to inform the next phase of development of OCIS

The survey

A bilingual questionnaire (Appendix II) was mailed out to everyone who had contacted the OCIS help-line from January 1996 to September 2001. A total of 2732 questionnaires were sent out, and 272 responses (10%) were received before the closing date (9th October 2001).

The questionnaire contained both closed and open questions, and provided opportunity for further comment on issues raised at the end of the survey booklet. Not all respondents answered all questions, and where percentages are given in the following text, the number of respondents answering that particular question is quoted as 'n = x'.

Results

Farm Profiles

There was considerable variation in the holding size of the respondents, ranging from 0.4 ha to 955 ha (mean = 85 ha, mode = 53). The majority identified beef/and or sheep as their main enterprise. Many farmers who did not have beef and/or sheep as their main enterprise identified them as their secondary enterprise (Figure 1). Other key enterprises included dairy, arable and vegetables.

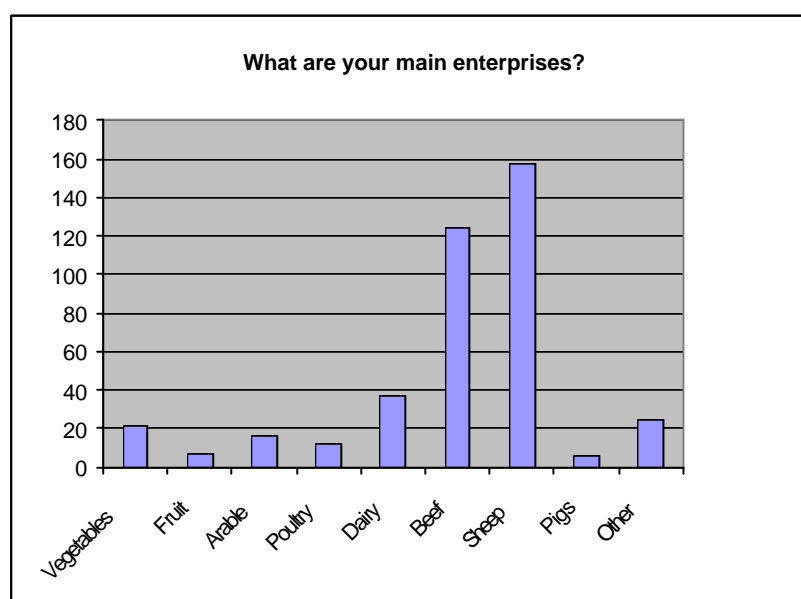


Figure 1

Extent of knowledge prior to contacting helpline

Prior to the initial contact with the help line, most respondents described their knowledge of organic farming, from a technical or 'practical point of view, as 'Fair' (37%) or 'Limited' (40.8%) (n=267) (Figure 2). In terms of business opportunities, the situation was similar with 30.8% describing their knowledge as 'Fair', and 45.5% as 'Limited' (n=266) (Figure 3).

Key sources of information, other than OCIS included¹:

- Certification bodies (61)
- Books/ magazines/ press (30)
- Other organic farmers (21)
- Producer/ Marketing groups (COG, Graig farm, OMSCo) (19)
- Institutions (OCW, Universities, IGER, Elm Fram, HDRA Etc.) (9)
- Consultants (e.g. ADAS (non OCIS), OAS (non OCIS), Promar) (9)
- Government departments and agencies (MAFF/ DEFRA, NAWAD, WDA) (3)
- Internet (2)
- Environmental organisations (2)

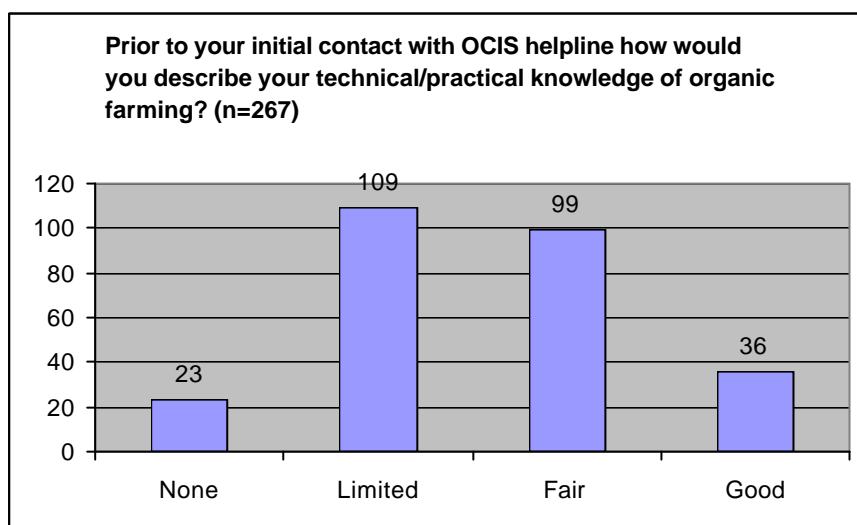


Figure 2

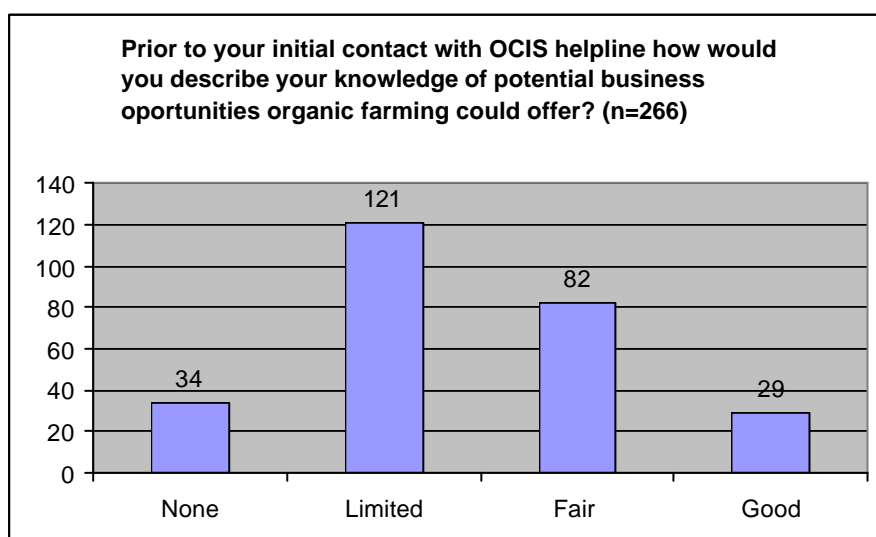


Figure 3

¹ Figures in brackets refer to the number of farmers who cited that particular source. Most farmers identified more than one source of information.

Awareness of OCIS

Producers first heard about OCIS through a variety of sources including (Figure 4):

(n= 263)

- Farming press (29.5%)
- Organic Groups (17.5%)
- Friends and colleagues (17.5%)
- Agricultural Shows (12%)
- National press (4.5%)
- Others (10.5%), including farmer unions, consultants, Tir Gofal officers, conferences, marketing groups, service providers.

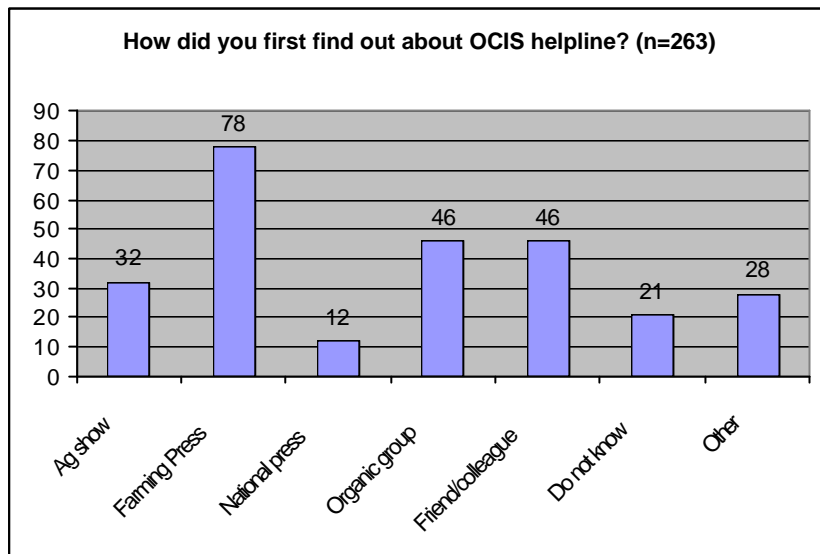


Figure 4

Telephone conversation

The initial conversation was generally found satisfactory, and 95.5 % (n=242) of respondents said they were happy with their first contact. Of the 11 respondents who were dissatisfied, reasons for this included:

- The help line officer was unable to supply relevant information (3)
- The call was not answered (2)
- No follow up action after the initial call (2)
- The initial conversation felt like a sales pitch (1)

The data was also analysed to take account of the differences under management by the Soil Association (1996- 2000), and OCW (2001) (Figure 5). However, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions because of the difference in the size of the two samples.

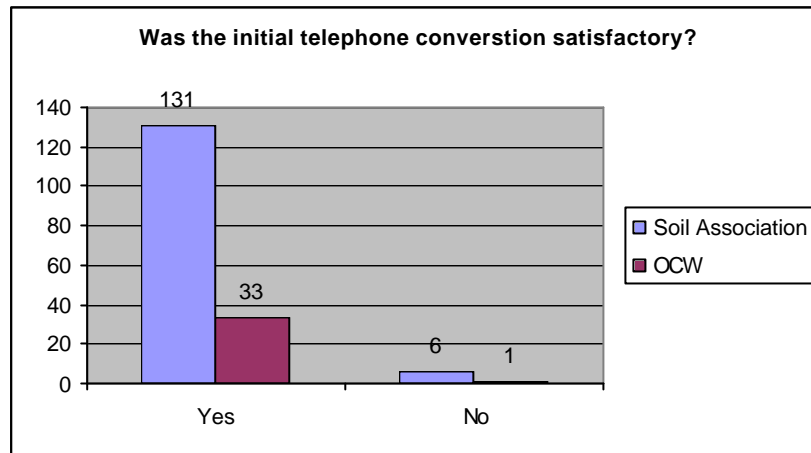


Figure 5

Information Pack

Many farmers commented that they found all elements of the pack useful, while a few said that they did not recall ever reading it. Many left the question unanswered. Specific areas that were identified as particularly useful included:

- The Organic Farm Management Handbook (8)
- The step-by-step guide (7)
- General information (7)
- Contacts (5)
- Technical information (crop rotation, pest management, animal health etc) (4)
- Grant information (6)
- Details of events (2)

Twenty eight respondents identified specific areas that they felt were not adequately covered by the pack, including:

- Marketing information (6)
- Relevance for smallholders (4)
- Specific information on grants (4)
- Enterprise specific technical information (4)
- Animal health and welfare (3)
- Record keeping/ form filling (3)
- Environmental information (2)
- Risks involved in conversion (1)

Advisory visits

Eighty five percent of farmers received a half-day visit (n=257), and of these, 92.4% had subsequently received a full day visit. The level of satisfaction for the half-day visit was generally high, in terms of the relevance (Figure 6), adequacy of the information (Figure 7), and the overall quality of the advisor (Figure 8).

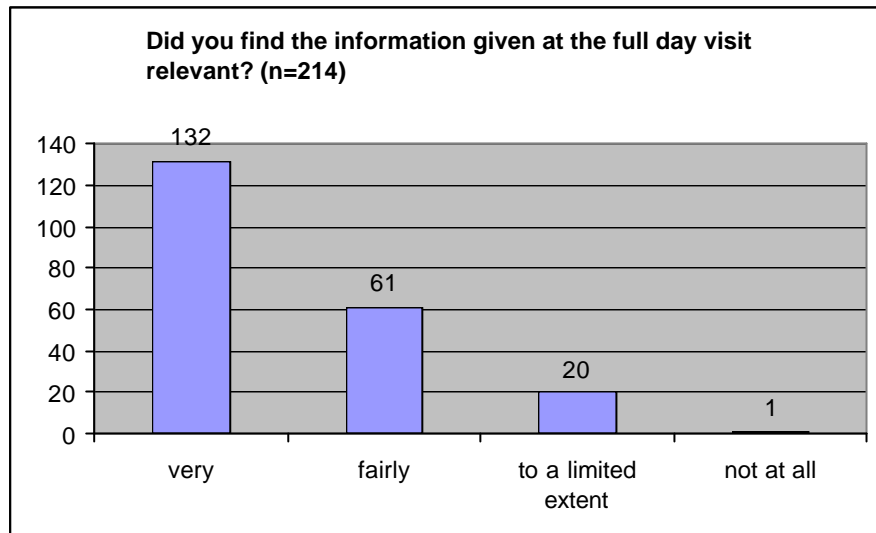


Figure 6

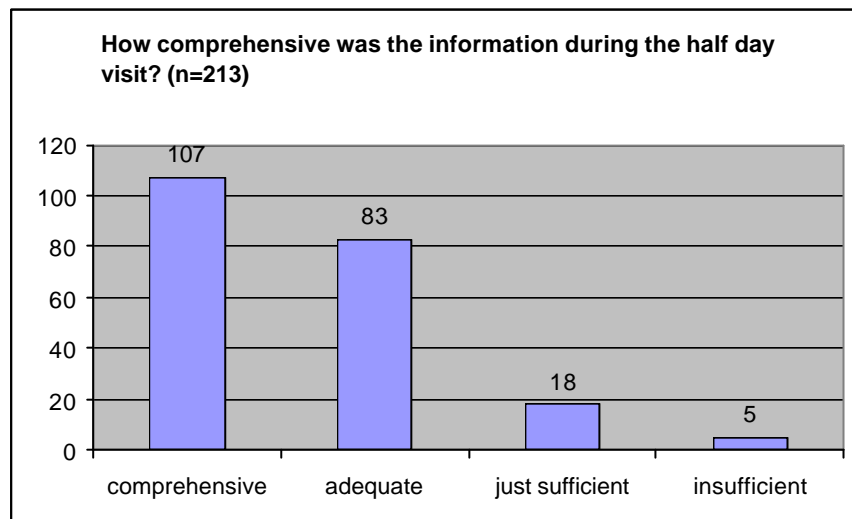


Figure 7



Figure 8

A similar pattern was also observed for full day visits (Figures 9, 10 and 11).

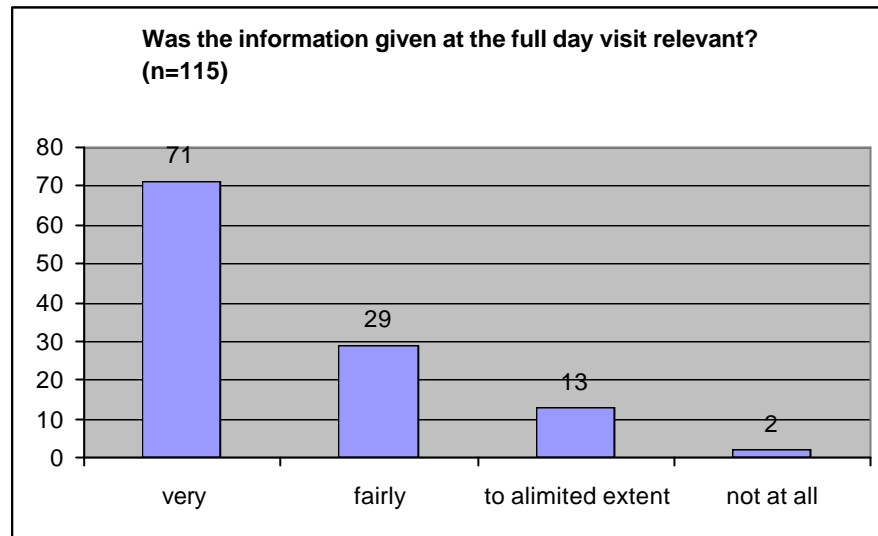


Figure 9

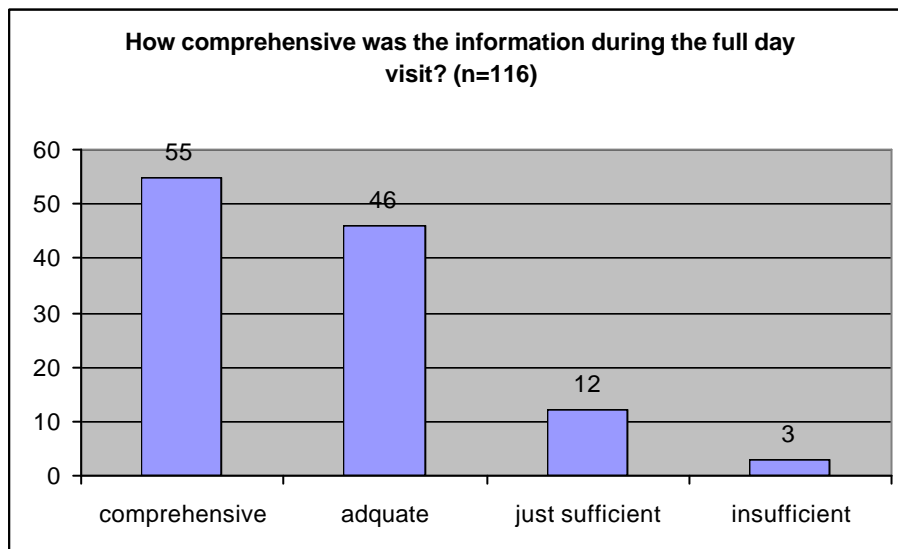


Figure 10

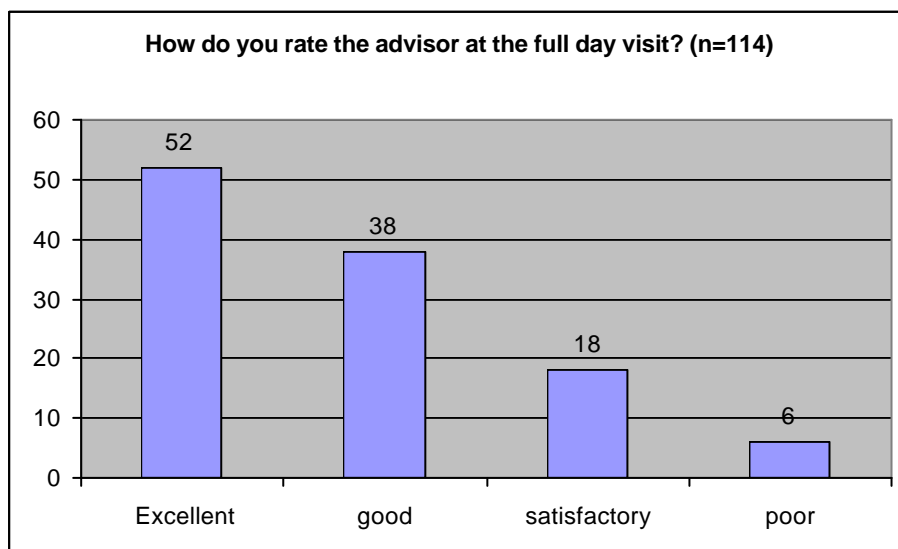


Figure 11

A number of farmers identified problem areas, including:

- Timing (long wait for 1st visit or a too long a gap between visits) (7)
- Lack of technical knowledge of advisors in specific enterprises (6)
- Lack of financial/ business knowledge of advisors (5)
- Impractical advice given (3)
- Information was too general (3)
- Farmers' ideas and priorities not taken into account (2)
- Lack of Welsh speaking advisors (1)

The questionnaire included questions specifically on advisor impartiality and the quality of the report after the full day visit. Most farmers (88%) of were satisfied that the advisor was impartial (n= 204). Seventy seven percent (n= 130), of respondents rated the report and 'excellent' or 'good' and 6% felt it was poor (Figure 12).

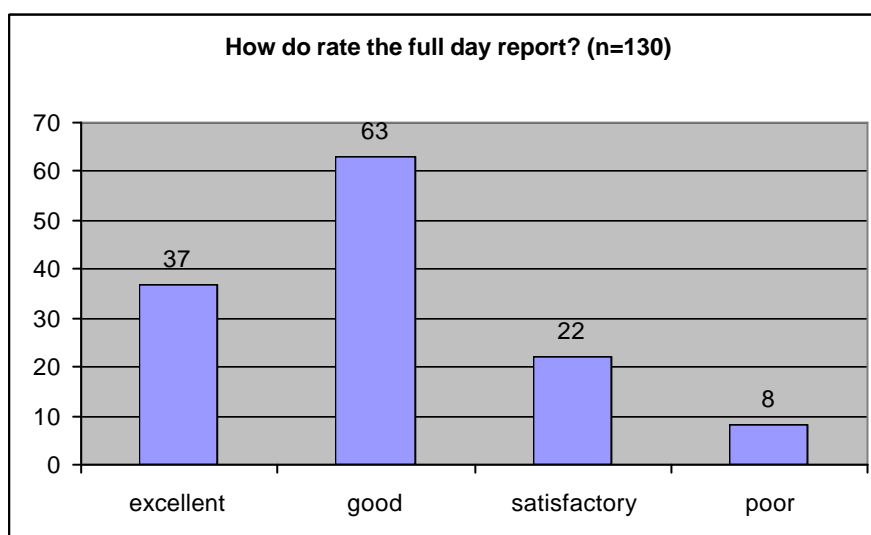


Figure 12

The data was also analysed to compare farmer satisfaction with the advisory visits over two periods:

- 1996-1999. During this period, most of the half day visits were undertaken by ADAS, and most of the full day visits by OAS
- 2000-2001. During this period, both the half day and the full day visits were undertaken by ADAS

Although it is certain more visits were undertaken between 1996 and 1999, the sample sizes for the half-day visits are similar, probably because the farmers who were visited in this period have a less clear recollection of the visit, and did not answer the question asking for the approximate dates of the visit.

With reference to the half day visit, there was no discernible difference between the two periods in terms of the relevance (Figure 13) and adequacy (Figure 14) of the information and the quality of the advisor (Figure 15)

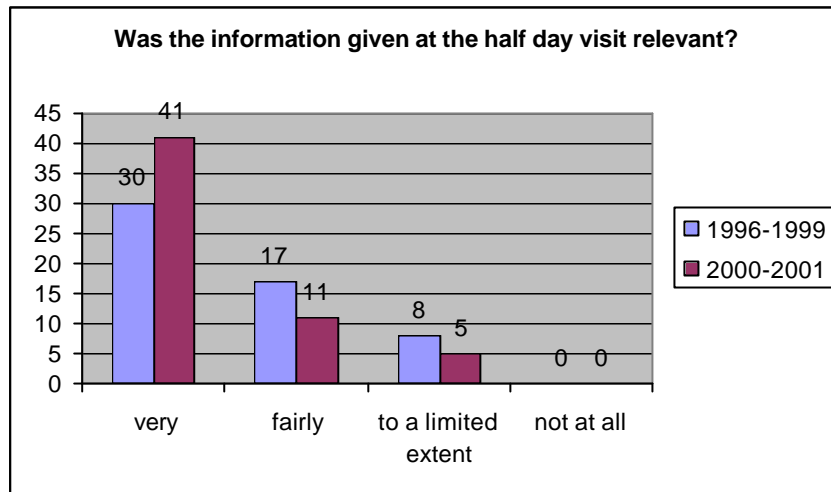


Figure 13

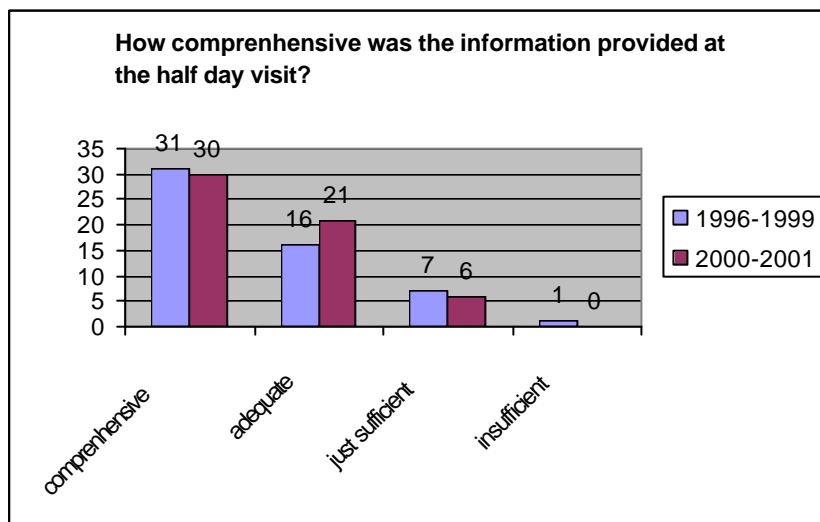


Figure 14

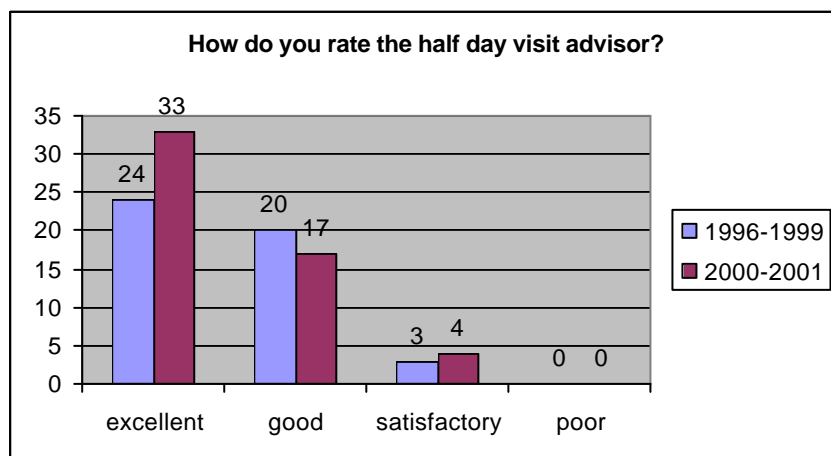


Figure 15

With reference to the full day visit (Figures 16, 17 and 18), the data is harder to interpret because of the large difference in sample size. However, it appears that a significant number of farmers rated the adequacy of in the information as 'Just Sufficient' (Figure 17, n= 56), and the advisor as 'satisfactory (Figure 18, n= 53), for the period 1996 – 1999. This compares with the period 2000-2001, during which all farmers who responded rated the adequacy of in the information as 'comprehensive' or 'adequate' (Figure 17, n= 38), and the advisors as either excellent or good (Figure 18, n= 19).

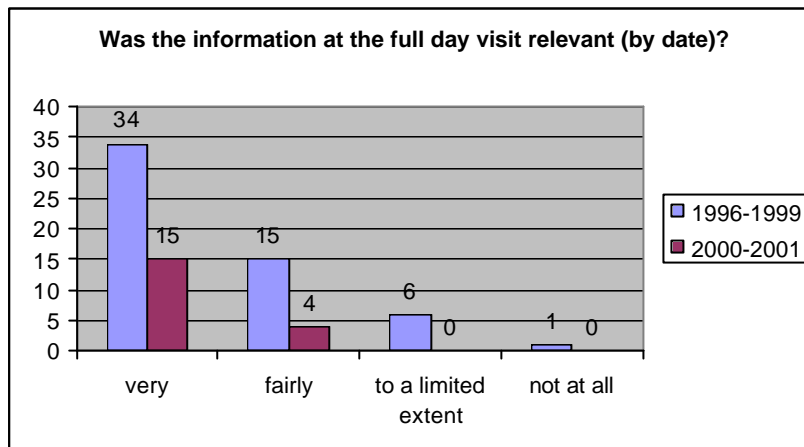


Figure 16

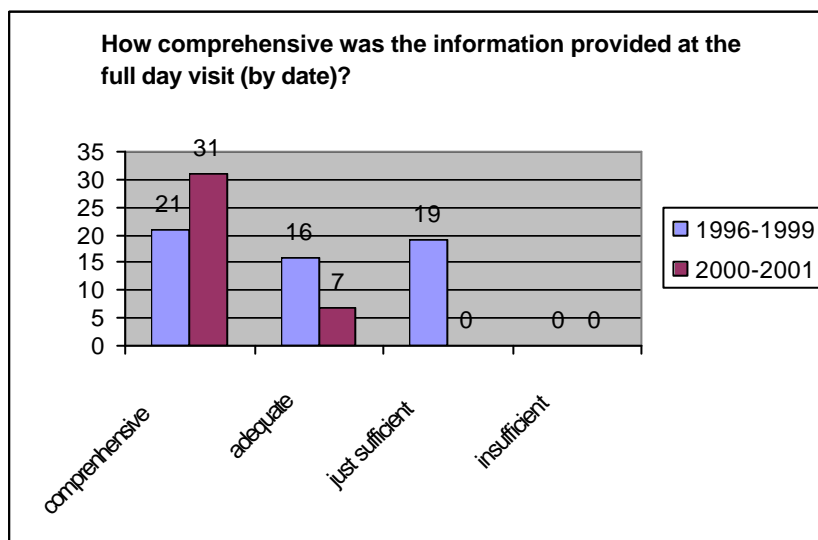


Figure 17

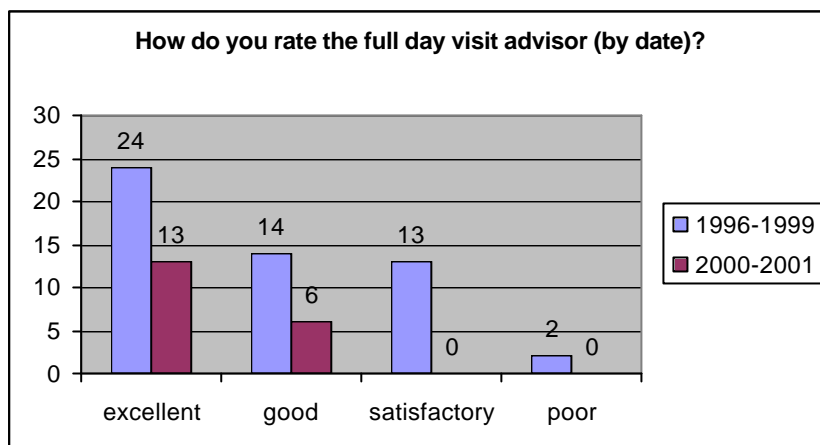


Figure 18

Planning the conversion course

This course was not administratively part of OCIS, and was funded from Objective 5b. However, it was closely linked to OCIS, and was designed for farmers 'between visits'. Also, since including this course in OCIS is an option in the future, questions relating to this course were included in the review. Eighty farmers responding took the course. Eighty six percent (n=78) found the course very or fairly useful (Figure 19).

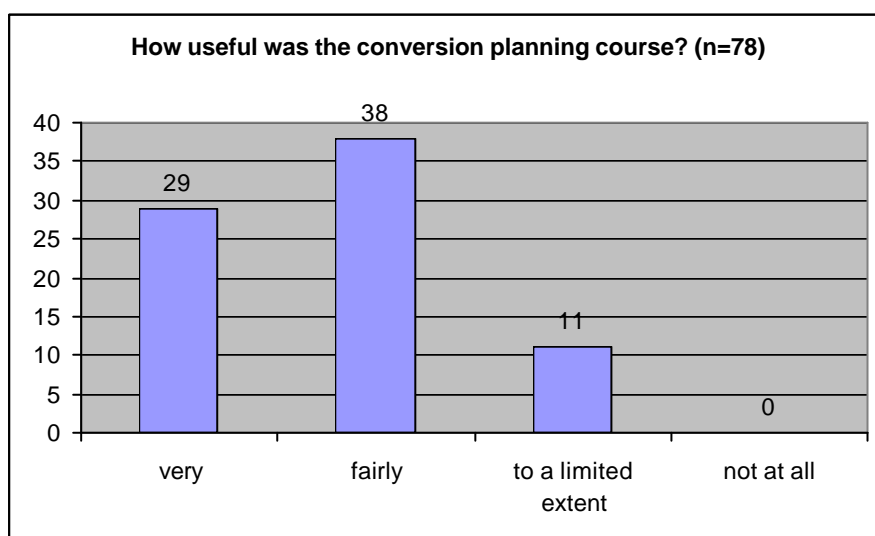


Figure 19

Suggestions for future improvement included:

- Less general and more focused on individual cases (5)
- More use of 'real life' examples/ visits to organic farms. (2)
- Include a session on form filling (2)
- Run separate courses for small holders and larger farmers (4)
- Hold courses in Welsh (1)
- Faster pace to cover more ground (1)
- Build more on farmers' experience (1)
- Provide follow up notes (1)
- Less focus on specific certifying bodies (1)

Conversion decision

Sixty one percent of respondents had decided to convert, or had already started or completed the conversion process (n= 241). Farmers who had not converted chose not to for a number of reasons including:

- Cost of certification, particularly for smallholders (14)
- Doubts about stability of the organic market (13)
- Still considering (11)
- Technical constraints (6)
- Tenancy issues/ let grazing (6)
- Bureaucracy (4)
- Low OFS payments (4)
- Dissatisfaction with OCIS services (3)
- Lack of support services (e.g. organic feed) (3)

Of those that had decided to convert, 55.7% (n=147) said that that OCIS was very or fairly instrumental in their decision to convert (Figure 20). Many of the farmers, who said that OCIS was not at all instrumental in their decision, or to a limited extent, had already made decision the convert prior to the first contact with OCIS. Others had also received information and advice from other sources previously identified.

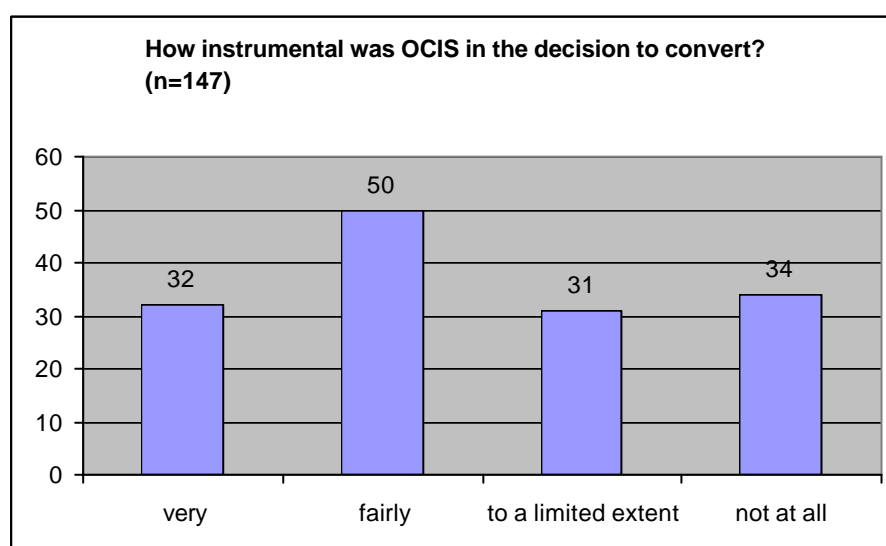


Figure 20

Future of OCIS

The final section of the questionnaire was designed to canvas farmer opinion on the following points:

- Should OCIS rely solely on professional consultants, or continue to use some trained, experienced producers?
- Is there a place for group activities or 'surgeries', as well as or instead of one- to one activities to deliver training and information?
- Should an outline financial assessment be provided as a standard part of OCIS?

- To what extent should environmental, and animal health and welfare information be included?
- Should farmers wishing to apply for Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) grants available from the national assembly, be required or encouraged to participate in OCIS?
- Should training on planning the conversion become part of OCIS?

There was overwhelming support (92.8%, n=237) for the inclusion of trained, experienced growers, rather than relying solely on professional consultants for the advisory visits.

There was less support for the idea of replacing the half-day visits with group meetings or surgery type activities. Seventy five percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea of replacing the visit with a group meeting (Figure 21), and 67% (n= 245) disagreed or strongly disagreed with using a surgery approach (Figure 22).

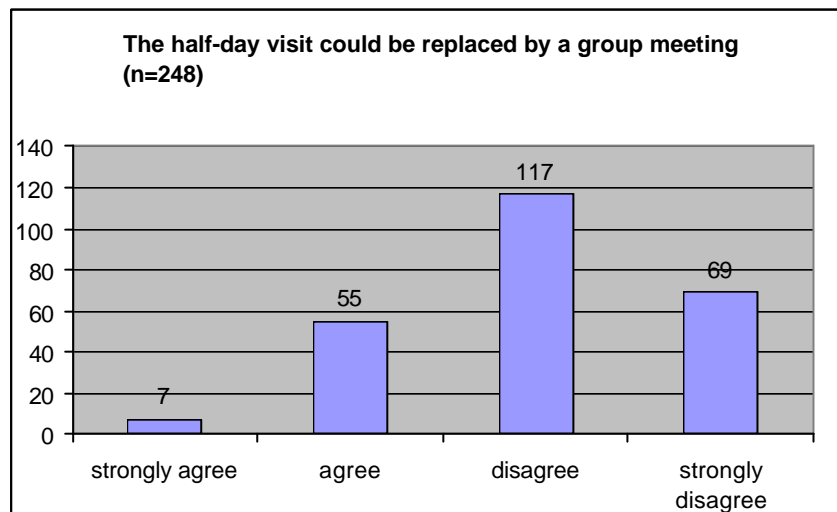


Figure 21

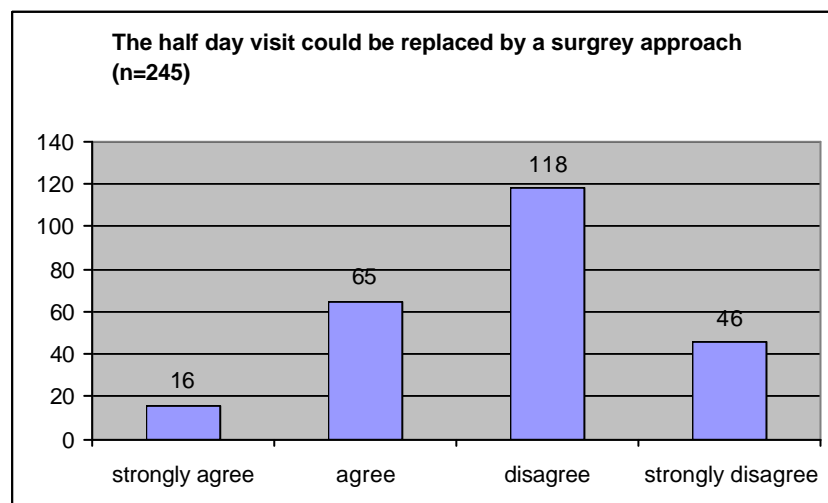


Figure 22

There was, however, support for the idea of closer links between OCIS and the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). Ninety three percent (n=243) agreed or strongly agreed that farmers should be encouraged to participate in OCIS before applying for OFS grants (Figure 23). Sixty percent (n= 238) agreed or strongly agreed that OCIS participation should a requirement for entry into OFS (Figure 24).

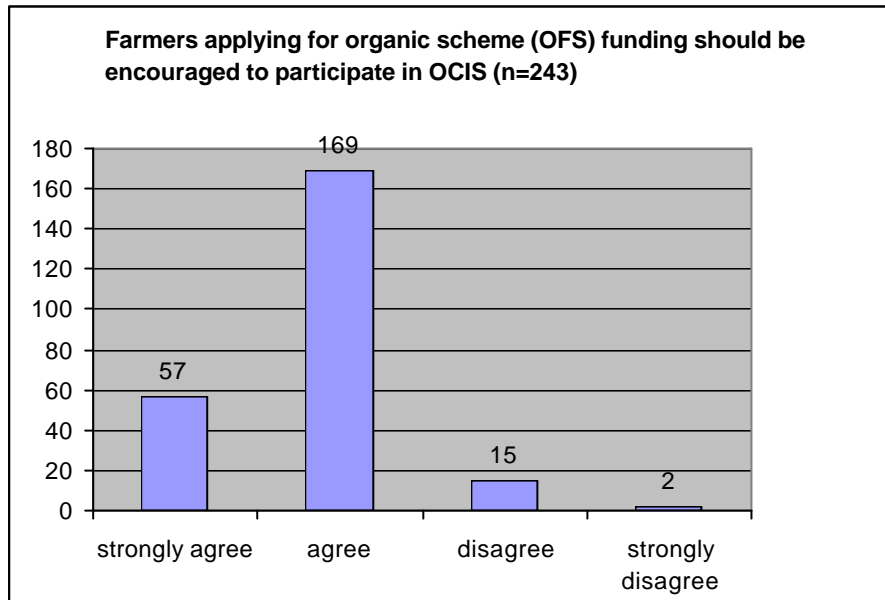


Figure 23

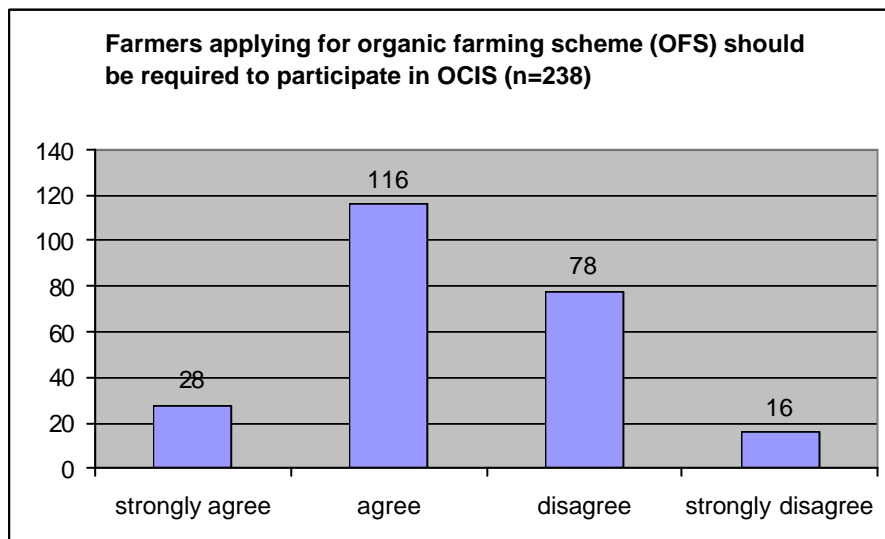


Figure 24

Eighty eight percent (n= 246) of farmers agreed or strongly agreed that an outline financial assessment should be included in OCIS (Figure 25). The inclusion of the planning the conversion course OCIS would be welcomed by most farmers, with 86.7% (n= 238) strongly agreeing or agreeing with its inclusion (Figure 26).

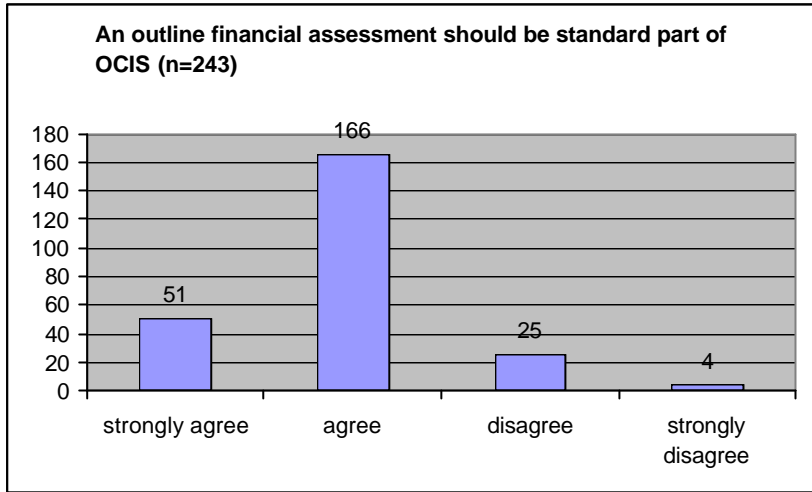


Figure 25

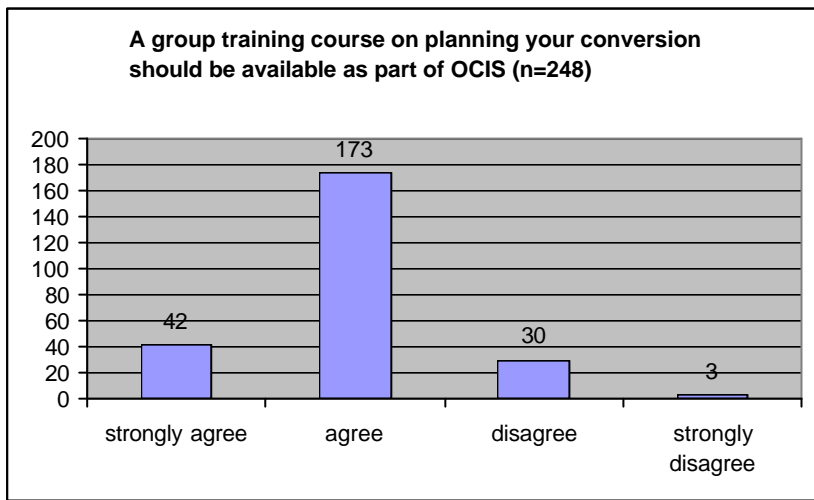


Figure 26

There was also strong support for the inclusion of environmental (Figure 27) and animal health and welfare information (Figure 28) in the service.

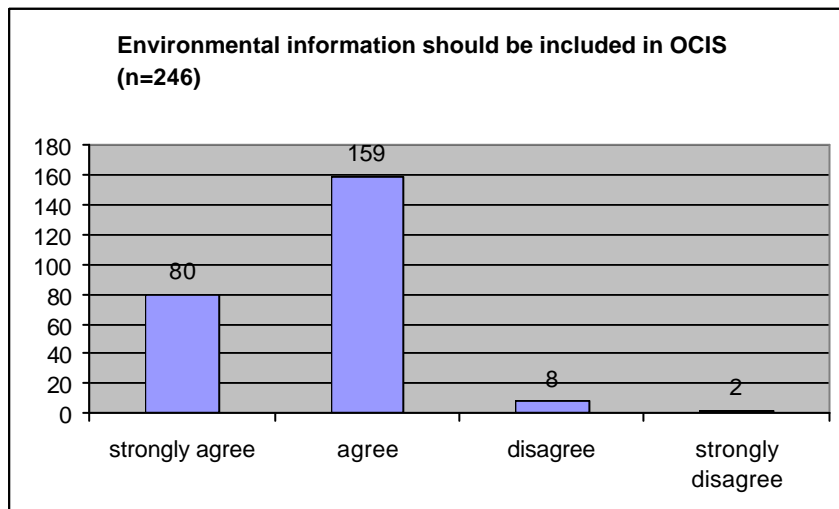


Figure 27

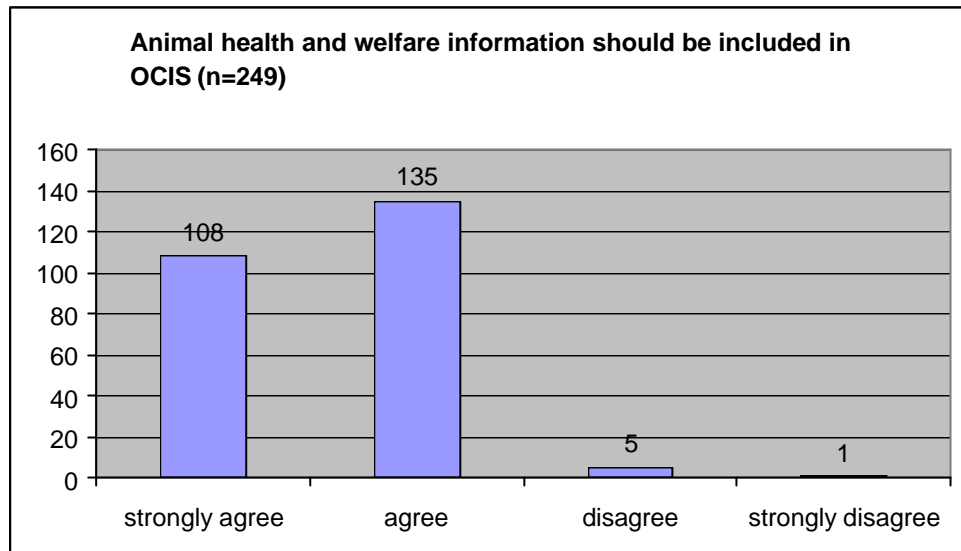


Figure 28

Additional comments

Farmers were invited to comment on any issues relating to OCIS that were not raised in the survey. While many comments were made and concerns raised, only a minority were directly related to OCIS. The full text of comments is available in Appendix III

Of the issues directly relating to OCIS, the most frequently raised was a call for better communication with other organisations such as the Cambrian Organic Group (COG), and a strong case was made for co-ordinating all support to organic farmers through one organisation. However, since ADAS manage both OCIS and COG, it is hard to see how this could be better achieved in practice.

- Three farmers said they had been 'put off' converting by advisors. It was not clear from the comments whether this was really the intention of the advisor, or whether it was his or her considered opinion that in the particular circumstances, conversion was not in the best interests of the farmer.
- One farmer was concerned by the consultant's approach, which seemed to be 'pile on the artificial fertilisers to correct the problems/ deficiencies before the conversion period begins.'
- Advice on procedure and regulations should be separate from practical farming advice.
- Two farmers also questioned the relevance, and cost effectiveness of OCIS in the current marketing and financial climate.

Other issues raised/ comments included:

- High cost of certification for small holders

- Low OFS payments, making conversion unviable.
- Closer co-ordination with environmental schemes, in particular Tir Gofal
- Environmental schemes pay more than OFS, and therefore there is less incentive for farmers to convert.
- Support systems for organic farmers must be more demand driven and 'bottom up', designed to fit in with farmers' priorities.
- The current marketing situation, particularly with regard to organic lamb and milk is putting farmers of converting, and causing severe disruption to organic farmers generally.
- Lack of post conversion support
- Large amount of paperwork involved in certification.

Prior to mailing out of the survey, a document entitled the 'The future of OCIS in Wales' (Appendix IV) was circulated to members of the Organic Strategy Group, and the Organic Centre Steering Group. Comments are summarised as follows:

- There was broad agreement that OCIS should be primarily an information, rather than an advisory service.
- OCIS needs to be closely linked to other support available e.g. Farming Connect.
- Group activities could play an important role in OCIS as they promote the exchange of ideas. However, there still a need for 1 to 1 advice and interaction, and the service should aim to encompass both approaches.
- OCIS should act as 'information hub', linking farmers to other sources of available information
- Environmental and animal health and welfare should be included, but the focus should be on how this impacts on farmer ability to convert.
- Using producers trained as advisers has many advantages, however, consultancy skills, in particular and the ability to deliver a lot of information clearly and concisely in a very short space of time, are essential for effective delivery of the service.
- More frequent updating to advisers is needed on changes to standards etc., information coming out from OCW etc.
- More feed back to advisers would be welcome on quality of reports, and also the opportunity for advisers to benefit more from each other's experience

The full text of comments is available in Appendix V.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, the results of the review indicate that the contribution of OCIS in Wales has been positive. Levels of satisfaction with the helpline, information pack, subsequent advisory visits and the planning the conversion course were generally high. However, the fact that 64% of farmers had received both half day and full day visits, and 61% of respondents converted, indicates that the data is skewed towards those receiving the full service, or who have already converted. The views of those who did not use all the services available, for whatever reason, are not so well represented. To put this into context, up until September 2001, of the 2480 callers, 1348 (56%) had a half-day visit. Of these 750 (30%) had a full day visit, and only 284 (11%) went on to convert.

Helpline

The initial telephone conversation is important as it often 'colours' farmers' decision whether to convert or not. In general, the helpline provides a good service, and issues raised by farmers can be addressed through better management of the helpline itself, and ensuring all helpline officers are familiar with the resources, web based and printed, available to them.

Information pack

Many farmers commented that the information pack was generally useful, and a number of specific components were identified as being particularly useful. There are some difficulties in rigorously assessing the information pack because it has evolved over the years, and contained different elements at different times. Many of the farmers who identified specific areas where the pack had not completed the process, and therefore many of the concerns they raised will be addressed during the visits or at the planning conversion course. The inclusion of further details on the information/ issues that will be discussed at each stage of the process in the information pack will assist in giving farmers a clearer picture of what they can expect from the different components of the service. Areas identified by farmers who had completed the process included:

- Marketing
- Relevance for smallholders
- Certification issues
- Animal welfare

Marketing is a key area where farmers feel that there is insufficient information available. There is also a strong case for developing marketing options during the conversion process, and this should be covered by OCIS. Under Farming Connect, a Marketing Intelligence Officer will be appointed at OCW, who could play a role in developing marketing information appropriate for OCIS. However, due to the dynamic and complex nature of the market, it is difficult to address the issues in the context of an information pack. Marketing issues are addressed as part of the planning the conversion course, but evidently farmer feel there is a also need for more case specific information on marketing, more appropriate during the visits.

There is also a need for information that addresses the particular needs and problems faced by smallholders wishing to convert, particularly with regard to options for reducing the cost of certification, which was identified as a major constraint to conversion. A summary of the key issues and options for small holders could be a useful addition to the pack for smallholders.

The inclusion of appropriate enterprise specific bulletins or factsheets could address some of the specific technical problems presented by conversion. Veterinary care for livestock in organic systems was singled out by a number of respondents as an area in which further information was required.

A video, entitled 'Thinking of Going Organic?' which focuses on the conversion process from a farmer's point of view, and highlights many of the issues, has recently been produced by OCW will be distributed to all farmers who contacted the helpline in 2001 with the information packs

Advisory visits

Farmers generally valued the advisory visits, and most were satisfied with the service they received.

Problems caused by high levels of interest in 1999 with the reopening of the Organic Farming Scheme and FMD in 2001 have resulted in unavoidable delays in delivering the farm visits. The issues of lack of knowledge in specific areas can be addressed by better matching of the expertise of the advisors to the specific farm. The comment that some advisors may be promoting use of high levels of inorganic fertilisers to correct the problems/ deficiencies before the conversion period begins, raises some concerns about whether the philosophy behind organic systems is being given adequate attention.

Planning the conversion course

This review presents a good case for including this course in OCIS in the future. The majority of farmers who attended found it useful. Running separate courses for small holders and larger farmers, may be helpful in the future. However this would involve either increasing the number courses, or increasing the 'catchment areas', if it were to work in practice.

Courses could be improved by taking a more participatory approach, focusing on the specific circumstances of course participants and building on existing knowledge and experience.

Future of OCIS

Several possible directions for the future were identified in the final section of the questionnaire. It is clear that there is strong farmer support for the inclusion of producers trained as advisors. There may be a need for such producers to undertake training in order to gain the 'consultancy skills' necessary to take on this role. Some respondents may not have known if their advisor was in fact a trained farmer or a consultant, however, the key point is

that most farmers will find it easier to relate to, and have more confidence in, someone with a practical background.

There are advantages, from a cost efficiency and organizational point of view to including some group or surgery activities in OCIS. There are also many learning benefits to group work; sharing of ideas and experiences and build informal networks of farmers at similar stages of conversion. However, there is little farmer support for group or surgery approach, and many farmers commented that 1-1 advice was essential because no two situations are identical. It may not have been entirely clear from the question what was envisaged. One Stop Shops work on the 'surgery' principle, and are popular and useful for many farmers. Some form of group training in addition to the one – one on farm visits is desirable, and some consideration needs to be given as to what form it should take. There is some scope for using combining the two approaches, for instance, group approaches during an initial general awareness/promotional phase, providing general information to farmers and promoting the availability of one to one information. A second phase would be the provision of information directly relevant to the farmers' individual circumstances and as such needs to be on a one to one on farm basis.

Farmers supported closer links with OFS, although encouraging, rather than requiring farmers to participate in OCIS would be the preferred approach.

There is also a need to strengthen the financial, animal health/welfare and environmental elements of OCIS. While all these elements are currently an integral part of the service, there is scope to build on the information currently available.

Post OCIS support

There is need for continuing support for farmers who have completed the OCIS process. Under Farming Connect, there is provision for detailed conversion planning advice under the Farm Business Development Plan, if farmers opt for a detailed assessment of the conversion option. There is also the opportunity for farmers to receive other technical support, for example specialist technical advice days, both during and after conversion.

'Post – OCIS surgeries', or 'One Stop Shop' type activities could also provide valuable technical support to farmers at different stages of conversion. Support could include technical information and help with form filling and record keeping and marketing information.

Comparison with OCIS in England

This review has a number of areas in common with the review of the service carried out in England in September 1997. Many of the same issues were raised with respect to the advisors, and similar comments were received with regard to the need for information about animal health and veterinary care under organic systems, and the availability of organic feeds and fertilisers. Marketing did not emerge from the English review as an area that need strengthening, but the need for financial planning support was raised.

Appendix I Details of OCIS advisory visits

First visit (half day)

The half-day visit consists of approximately 3 hours on farm, including, if possible, a limited amount of time outside 'walking the farm'. Areas covered include:

- Reasons for farmer considering organic conversion
- Collection of basic information, such as stocking and cropping and productivity of enterprises
- Recording and discussion of relevant physical features, e.g. soil type
- Recording and discussion of management practices, particularly those that would not be appropriate in an organic system
- Organic management in general, specific standards issues, and information on appropriate inputs
- Markets and marketing, including information on organic prices
- Availability of further visit, the 'planning the conversion' course, training, etc.

The following information is provided to the farmer in written form:

- Calculation of stocking rate and consideration of farms potential to convert in light of above review
- Information on certification procedure and cost
- Calculation of OFS conversion aid, and adjustment if already in agri-environment scheme
- Advice on suitable start date and timetable of conversion
- Note of organic feed allowances and feeds not allowed
- Summary of pros and cons of conversion
- Summary of priority action points

Second visit (whole day)

The second visit consists of approximately 3 to 5 hours on farm, and the balance of time is spent preparing written report (balance of time by agreement with farmer)

- Inspection of land, stock and buildings
- Reaction to first visit, and clarification of any issues, new, or covered before
- Advice on conversion management, e.g. crop rotations
- Assistance to complete application forms, if required
- Availability of further advice
- Preparation of written report off farm which includes:
 - Brief description of farm and enterprises
 - The potential and implications for a change to organic management
 - Recommended timetable for conversion
- Recommendations for conversion to organic management under key headings, including, for example:
 - Land and crop management
 - Manure management
 - Animal management and health plan requirements
 - Conservation issues

Appendix II Survey Questionnaire

Survey on Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) activities in Wales, and the future direction of the service



Canolfan Organig Cymru
Organic Centre Wales

September 2001

This letter is being sent out by Organic Centre Wales (OCW) to everybody who has contacted the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) help-line during 1996 – 2001, and subsequently received information packs and advisory visits. OCIS has now been running for 5 years, providing technical information and support to farmers who wish to find out more about the implications of converting to organic farming. It is presently managed by ADAS and funded by the National Assembly for Wales, however in March 2002, the existing arrangements will end. We therefore need to consider what form OCIS should take in the future. The key issues under discussion are:

- Should OCIS be primarily a provider of information/ training or an advisory service?
- Should OCIS rely solely on professional consultants, or continue to use some trained, experienced producers?
- Is there a place for group activities or 'surgeries', as well as or instead of one- to one activities to deliver training and information?
- Should an outline financial assessment be provided as a standard part of OCIS?
- To what extent should environmental, and animal health and welfare information be included?
- Should farmers wishing to apply for Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) grants available from the national assembly, be required or encouraged to participate in OCIS?
- Should training on planning the conversion become part of OCIS?

The enclosed survey has two closely linked aims:

- To evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the service over the last 5 years.
- To canvas your opinion to inform the next phase of development of OCIS.

We would be grateful if you could spend a few minutes to respond to the enclosed questionnaire, and return it, using the enclosed pre-paid envelope by Friday 5th October.

A second survey will shortly be circulated to those of you who are members of the Cambrian Organic Group, concerning COG and Organic Centre Wales (OCW) activities. We would like to apologise for the close proximity of these two surveys and the extra burden this will place on you. The situation has arisen because OCIS and the COG/OCW activities are funded from separate sources (OCIS by the National Assembly and COG/OCW by the EU) and therefore need to be evaluated separately. We decided not to combine the two surveys, to avoid confusion as to which activities fall under which project. We ask you to bear with us, and urge you to complete both surveys. Your views on both are vital!

With thanks and best regards,

Tony Little

Advisory Services Co-ordinator
Organic Centre Wales.

In the interests of making the survey as quick and easy as possible to complete, the questions mostly require yes/no and 'multiple choice' answers. Please tick the boxes where appropriate. If you would like to comment in further detail on any of the issues raised in the survey, please use the space provided at the end of the survey, and/or enclose extra sheets. If you prefer, please feel free to ring us on 01970 621632, or alternatively let us have your phone number and we will be happy to call you back.

A. Introductory Section

The questions in this section are designed to give us an idea of your farm and enterprises.

- How much land do you farm? _____ac or _____ha
- What is your main enterprise?

Vegetables	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dairy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit	<input type="checkbox"/>	Beef	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sheep	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poultry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pigs	<input type="checkbox"/>

Others (please specify) _____

- What are your other enterprises?

Vegetables	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dairy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit	<input type="checkbox"/>	Beef	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sheep	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poultry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pigs	<input type="checkbox"/>

Others (please specify) _____

B. OCIS (Organic Conversion Information service) activities to date

The questions in this section are designed to help OCW evaluate the impact and effectiveness of OCIS to date, and identify areas where the service could be improved.

- Prior to your initial contact with the OCIS help line, how would you describe your technical/ practical knowledge of organic farming?

None Limited Fair Good

- Prior to your initial contact with the OCIS help line, how would you describe your knowledge of potential business opportunities organic farming could offer, e.g. premiums, niche markets?

None Limited Fair Good

- How did you first find out about the OCIS help line?

Ag show Farming press National press Organic group
 Friend/ colleague Don't know Other, Please specify _____

- When did you first contact the OCIS help line Month Year

- Was the initial telephone conversation satisfactory? Yes No

9. If you answered 'No' to Question 8, what problems did you encounter, or what additional information or advice would you like to have had at this stage?

10. Which elements of the information pack did you find most useful?

11. Are there any specific areas that the information pack did not cover adequately?

12. Since contacting the help line, have you had?

A half day advisory visit

Date

Month Year

Service provider (OAS, ADAS) if known

Name of advisor (if known)

A full day advisory visit

Date: (month/ year)

Month Year

Service provider (e.g. OAS ADAS) if known

Name of advisor (if known)

Neither (please tick if appropriate)

If you answered 'neither', please proceed to Question 18.

13. If you have had a half-day visit:

Was the information relevant?	Very <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly <input type="checkbox"/>	To a limited extent <input type="checkbox"/>	Not at all <input type="checkbox"/>
Was the information provided:	Comprehensive <input type="checkbox"/>	Adequate <input type="checkbox"/>	Just sufficient <input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficient <input type="checkbox"/>
How do you rate the advisor?	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>

14. If you have had a full day visit:

Was the information relevant?	Very <input type="checkbox"/>	Fairly <input type="checkbox"/>	To a limited extent <input type="checkbox"/>	Not at all <input type="checkbox"/>
Was the information provided?	Comprehensive <input type="checkbox"/>	Adequate <input type="checkbox"/>	Just sufficient <input type="checkbox"/>	Insufficient <input type="checkbox"/>
How do you rate the advisor?	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>

15. Were there any problems with either visit, or any specific areas in which the information from the visits was not adequate?

16. Was the report on the full-day visit:

Excellent Good Satisfactory Poor

17. Was the advisor impartial with regard to the choice of certifying body, marketing options and other issues?

Yes No

18. Have you decided to convert some, or all of your farm?
If you answered 'No', please proceed to Question 21.

Yes No

19. When did you start the conversion process? Month Year

20. How instrumental was OCIS in your decision to convert?

Very Fairly To a limited extent Not at all

Please proceed to Question 22

21. If you answered 'No' to Question 18, what were your main reasons for deciding not to convert?

22. Besides OCIS, which, if any, other sources of information and advice on organic farming have you used?

23. Did you attend a 'Planning the Conversion' training course Yes No
If you answered 'No', please proceed to Question 26.

24. When did you attend Month Year

25. How useful was it? Very Fairly Of limited use Not at all

26. Are there any areas in which the course could be improved?

C. The future of OCIS.

The questions in this section are designed to canvas your opinion on what direction OCIS should take in the future. Under Farming Connect, to be launched this month, detailed business and conversion planning advice will be available free of charge, following OCIS. Future options for OCIS need to be considered in this context.

27. Should OCIS:

Rely solely on professional consultants Include some experienced, specially trained producers.

What do you think of the following statements?

28. The half-day visit could be replaced by a group meeting.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

29. The half-day visit could be replaced by a surgery approach, where OCIS advisors are available at a specified times and places in local communities.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

30. 'Farmers applying for Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) funding should be encouraged to participate in OCIS

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

31. 'Farmers applying for Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) funding should be required to participate in OCIS

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

32. 'An outline financial assessment should be a standard part of OCIS'.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

33. 'A group training course on planning your conversion should be available as part of OCIS'

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

34. 'Environmental information should be included in OCIS'

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

35. 'Animal health and welfare information should be included in OCIS'

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree

Thank you for your time.

Arolwg ar weithgareddau y Gwasanaeth Gwybodaeth Trosiadau Organig (GGTO) yng Nghymru, ar sut i'w ddatblygu yn y dyfodol.



Medi 2001

Danfonir y llythyr hwn gan Canolfan Organig Cymru (COC) at bawb sydd wedi cysylltu â llinell gymorth GGTO oddi ar 1996, ac sydd wedi derbyn pecyn gwybodaeth ac ymweliad ymgynghorol. Mae GGTO wedi bod yn gweithredu am 5 mlynedd nawr, yn cynnig gwybodaeth technegol a chefnogaeth i ffermwyr sydd am ymchwilio i oblygiadau trosi i ddulliau organig o ffermio. Ar hyn o bryd gweinyddir y cynllun gan GYDA (ADAS), ac fe'i ariannir gan y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol, ond mi fydd y drefn yma yn gorffen ym mis Mawrth 2002. Oherwydd hyn, mae'n rhaid ystyried sut dylai GGTO weithredu yn y dyfodol. Y materion allweddol sydd angen eu trafod yw :

- A ddylsai GGTO gynnig yn benodol gwybodath /hyfforddiant neu wasanaeth ymgynghori ?
- A ddylsai GGTO ddefnyddio yn unig ymgynghorwyr proffesiynol, neu parhau i ddefnyddio ffermwyr profiadol sydd wedi derbyn hyfforddiant ?
- A oes angen gweithgareddau ar y cyd, a defnyddio dull 'meddygfa', ynghyd â, neu yn lle y dull o gyfarfod ac unigolion er mwyn darparu hyfforddiant a gwybodaeth?
- A oes angen darparu asesiad ariannol bras fel rhan annatod o'r GGTO?
- I ba raddau mae angen cynnwys gwybodaeth ar faterion amgylcheddol â lles a iechyd anifeiliaid?
- Pan bod ffermwyr yn gwneud cais i'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol i ymuno â'r Cynllun Ffermio Organig, a dylai fod rheidrwydd, neu anogaeth i ddefnyddio GGTO?
- A ddylsai'r hyfforddiant ar gynllunio'r trosiad fod yn rhan o'r GGTO?

Mae'r arolwg yma am gyflawni y ddau ddiben cysylltiedig hyn :

- I werthuso ansawdd ac effeithiolrwydd y gwasanaeth dros y 5 mlynedd diwethaf.
- I geisio eich barn ar ddatblygiad y GGTO.

Gwerthfawrogwn pe baech yn fodlon treulio peth amser yn ymateb i'r holiadur, a'i ddychwelyd yn yr amlen amgaeedig (mae'r gost eisioes wedi ei dalu) erbyn ddydd Gwener y 5af o Hydref.

Danfonir arolwg arall i chi sydd yn aelodau o'r Grwp Organig Cambriaidd (GOC) ynglyn â gweithgareddau GOC a Chanolfan Organig Cymru. Ymddiheurwn am eich llwytho mor fuan â gwaith ychwanegol, ond mae angen gwneud hyn oherwydd bod gweithgareddau GGTO a GOC/COC wedi eu hariannu o fynnonhellau gwahanol (GGTO gan y Cynulliad Cenedlaethol a GOC/COC gan y GE), a rhaid eu gwerthuso ar wahân. Penderfynwyd i beidio ag uno y ddau holiadur er mwyn osgoi cymhlethdod ynglyn â'r gweithgareddau gwahanol. Maddeuwch i ni am hyn, rydym yn eich annog i gwblhau y ddau arolwg. Mae eich barn yn holl bwysig!

Gyda diolchgarwch a dymuniadau da.

Tony Little.
Cydlynnydd Gwasanaethau Ymgynghorol.
Canolfan Organig Cymru

Er mwyn gwneud ateb yr arolwg mor syml a chyflym a phosib, dim ond atebion megis 'ye/na' neu 'aml ddewis' fydd eu hangen. Dodwch 'tic' yn y blychau perthnasol. Os hoffech wneud sylwadau ar rhai o'r pwyntiau, os gwelwch yn dda ysgrifennwch hwynt yn y gwagle sydd ar ddiwedd yr arolwg neu os oes angen lle amgen ychwanegwch taflen arall. Fe allwch rhoi eich sylwadau ini wrth ein ffonio ar 10970 621632 neu, rhowch I ni eich rhif ffôn ac fe wnewn ni eich ffonio chi.

A Adran Cefndirol

Mae'r cwestiynau yn yr adran hon wedi eu cynllunio l'n galluogi I gael syniad o'r math o ffarm sydd gennyh.

5. Beth yw arwynebedd eich tir ? _____ erw neu _____ ha

6. Beth yw eich prif ffynhonnell incwm

Llysiâu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ffrwythau	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tir âr	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dofednod	<input type="checkbox"/>

Llaeth	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eidionau	<input type="checkbox"/>
Defaid	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moch	<input type="checkbox"/>

Arall (manylwch) _____

7. Pa ffynhonnellau eraill y sydd?

Llysiâu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ffrwythau	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tir âr	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dofednod	<input type="checkbox"/>

Llaeth	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eidionau	<input type="checkbox"/>
Defaid	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moch	<input type="checkbox"/>

Arall (manylwch) _____

B. Gweithgareddau GGTO (Gwasanaeth Gwybodaeth Trosiadau Organig) hyd at yma

Cynlluniwyd y cwestiynau yn yr adran hon I gynorthwyo COC gwerthuso ergyd ac effeithiolrwydd GGTO hyd at yma, a darganfod adrannau lle gellir gwella'r gwasanaeth.

8. Cyn cysylltu a'r llinell gymorth GGTO, faint o wybodaeth technegol/ymarferol am ffarmio organig yr oeddech yn meddu?

Dim Bach iawn Rhywfaint Llawer

5. Cyn cysylltu a'r llinell gymorth GGTO, faint o wybodaeth o'r cyfleoedd busnes yr oedd gan ffermio organig I gynnig e.e. premiwm, marchnadoedd arbennigol oeddech yn meddu?

Dim Bach iawn Rhywfaint Llawer

6. Sut daethoch ar draws GGTO yn y lle cyntaf ?

Sioe Amaeth Wasg Amaeth Wasg Cenedlaethol Grwp Organig
Cyfaill/Cydweithydd Dw'n I ddim Arall (manylwch) _____

7. Pa bryd y gwnaethoch gysylltu a'r llinell gymorth am Mis Blwyddyn

y tro cyntaf? _____

8. A oedd yr alwad ffôn gyntaf yn foddhaol?

Oedd Na

9. Os mae 'na' oedd yr ateb I gwestiwn 8, pa anhawsterau a fu, neu, pa wybodaeth ychwanegol neu gyngor a fydddech wedi hoffi cael ar yr adeg honno ?

10. Beth ymlhith cynhwysion y pecyn gwybodaeth a oedd fwyaf o ddefnydd I chi ?

11. Oes yna ddiffygion yn y pecyn, a oedd yr wybodaeth yn brin?

15. Oddi ar I chi gysylltu a'r llinell gymorth, ydych chi wedi cael ?

Ymweliad ymgynghorol ½ diwrnod

Dyddiad

Month Year

Darparwr y gwasanaeth e.e. OAS(os a wyr)

Enw'r ymgynghorydd (os a wyr)

Diwrnod ymweliad ymgynghorol llawn

Dyddiad

Month Year

Darparwr y gwasanaeth e.e. ADAS(os a wyr)

Enw'r ymgynghorydd (os a wyr)

Dim(rhowch tic yn y blwch os yn berthnasol)

Os mae 'Dim' oedd yr ateb ewch I gwestiwn 18

16. Os ydych chi wedi cael ymweliad ½ diwrnod:

A oedd yr wybodaeth yn berthnasol?

Oedd

Gweddol

I raddau

Dim o gwbl

A oedd yr wybodaeth a ddarparwyd yn :

Gynhwysfawr

Purion

Digonol

Anigonol

A oedd yr Ymgynghorwr yn :

Rhagorol

Dda

Weddol

Wael

17. Os ydych chi wedi cael ymweliad llawn :

A oedd yr wybodaeth yn berthnasol ?

Oedd

Gweddol

I raddau

Dim o gwbl

A oedd yr wybodaeth a ddarparwyd yn :

Gynhwysfawr

Purion

Digonol

Anigonol

A oedd yr Ymgynghorwr yn :

Rhagorol

Dda

Weddol

Wael

15. A phrofwyd unrhyw anhawsterau yn yr ymweliadau, neu a oedd yna fylchau yn y cyngor ?

16. A oedd yr adroddiad ar yr ymweliad llawn yn :
Rhagorol Dda Weddol Wael

17. A oedd yr Ymgynghorydd yn dduduedd wrth son am y Cyrff Tystysgrifo, opsiynau marchnata, a phynciau eraill ?
Oedd Na

18. Ydych chi wedi penderfynu trosi darn neu'r ffarm yn gyfangwbl ? Ydw Nadw
Os mae 'na' oedd yr ateb ewch I Gwestiwn 21

19. Pa bryd cychwynwyd y trosiad? Mis Blwyddyn

20. Faint mor ddylanwadol oedd GGTO wrth ichi benderfynu trosi?
Llawer Dim llawer I raddau Dim o gwbl
Ewch I Gwestiwn 22

23. Os mae 'na' oedd yr ateb I gwestiwn 18 beth oedd y prif rhesymau dros beidio a throsi?

24. Ynghyd a'r GGTO, pa ffynhonnellau arall o wybodaeth a chyngor ar amaethyddiaeth organig yr ydych chi wedi eu ddefnyddio

23. A wnaethoch fynychu'r cwrs 'Cynllunio'r Trosiad@ Do Naddo
Os mae 'na' yw'r ateb ewch I gwestiwn 26

24. Pa bryd y gwnaethoch ei fynychu? Mis Blwyddyn

25. Pa mor ddefnyddiol oedd y cwrs?
Defnyddiol iawn Gweddol I raddau Dim o gwbl

26. Sut gellir gwella ar y cwrs?

C. Dyfodol GGTO

Diben holi'r cwestiynau yma yw ceisio eich barn ynglyn a sut dylid diwygio GGTO yn y dyfodol. Pan lansi'r 'Cyswllt Ffermio' yn hwyrach yn y mis, mi fydd cyngor cynllunio busnes a throsiadau ar gael yn rhad ac am ddim, yn dilyn galwadau GGTO. Rhaid ystyried dyfodol GGTO yn y cydestun hwn.

26. A ddylsai GGTO:
Ddibynu ar ymgynghorwyr Cynnwys rhai cynhyrchwyr profiadol, a fyddant wedi

Beth yw eich barn ar y datganiadau isod?

27. Gellir disodli'r ymweliad ½ diwrnod gan cyfarfodar y cyd.

Yn cytuno l'r dim Yn cytuno Yn anghytuno Yn anghytuno yn gryf

28. Yn hytrach na derbyn ymweliad ½ diwrnod, gellir defnyddio dull 'meddygfa', lle byddai ymgynghorwr GGTO ar gael ar amser penodedig mewn cymunedau lleol .

Yn cytuno l'r dim Yn cytuno Yn anghytuno Yn anghytuno yn gryf

29. Yn hytrach na derbyn ymweliad ½ diwrnod, gellir defnyddio dull 'meddygfa', lle byddai ymgynghorwr GGTO ar gael ar amser penodedig mewn cymunedau lleol .

Yn cytuno l'r dim Yn cytuno Yn anghytuno Yn anghytuno yn gryf

30. Dylid annog ffermwyr sydd yn gwneud cais am y Cynllun Ffermio Organig i ddefnyddio'r GGTO.

Yn cytuno i'r dim Yn cytuno Yn anghytuno Yn anghytuno yn gryf

31. Mi fyddai'n rheidrydd fod pob ffarmwr sydd yn gwneud cais am y Cynllun ffermio Organig yn defnyddio'r GGTO

Yn cytuno l'r dim Yn cytuno Yn anghytuno Yn anghytuno yn gryf

32. Dylid gwneud asesiad ariannol brâs fel rhan annatod o'r GGTO

Yn cytuno l'r dim Yn cytuno Yn anghytuno Yn anghytuno yn gryf

33. 'Dylai 'cyfarfod ar y cyd' ar Cynllunio'r Trosiad fod yn rhan o'r GGTO.

Yn cytuno l'r dim Yn cytuno Yn anghytuno Yn anghytuno yn gryf

34. Dylai fod gwybodaeth amgylcheddol fod yn rhan o'r GGTO.

Yn cytuno l'r dim Yn cytuno Yn anghytuno Yn anghytuno yn gryf

35. 'Dylai gwybodaeth am llês a iechyd anifeiliaid fod yn rhan o'r GGTO.

Yn cytuno l'r dim Yn cytuno Yn anghytuno Yn anghytuno yn gryf

Diolch yn fawr am eich cydweithrediad.

Appendix III Additional comments from farmers

Like hundreds of other hill and mountain farmers, I am by the very nature of the land as near to being fully organic as is possible with out actually converting. The main reason I have not officially joined the Organic Farming Scheme is that firstly the payments quoted after the half day visit were ridiculously low, 5052 over 5 years, considering I would have to change to a new system. After this I talked to other farmers who were also considering conversion, and they were talking about figures of 5 times this, on less land than I have. I have had more than half my sheep culled, and I now think it is time to look at the organic scheme again before I restock. But it would have to be financially viable as I am in farming to make a profit, however hard it is at the moment. I also think that the organic scheme should streamline its information and come more to the point. It should promote more of the end product, for example give lucrative scholarships for hundreds of young chefs to have the best training in catering colleges here, and abroad, and subsidise their wages for the first year in the best hotels and restaurants to spread the message, organic welsh hill lamb and beef. As with trout, wild trout are smaller, but taste far better than factory farmed ones. I also think that the OFS should work more closely with other schemes and agencies, e.g. Tir Gofal, Woodland Schemes, National Parks, CCW, so that the scheme don't overlap with each other, and everyone knows what the other goals and objectives are. Then farmers will have clearer idea of what is expected of them.

The OCIS help line was not up and running when I made the jump into organic farming. We ran our own self-help group with help from local CWYSI co-ordinators. It must be a bottom up approach where key members of the local farming community and local organisation which are involved, be thy YFC, unions old ATB groups. Those groups were so successful in the 70s and 80s because farmers felt they were in control – they invited the speakers, and paced their own learning curve. The courses must fit in with them, rather than being imposed on an already hectic/ bureaucratic/ nightmarish life, trying to keep our animals alive.

The reason we did not convert to organic was the financial cost. This, to small growers such as ourselves would take a large part of the profit away, on top of the expense of labour and machinery needed to make it possible for us convert. I also noticed that the Soil Association is a registered charity. I have been unable to find any details of accounts, or what the charity supports, which, if my memory serves me correctly, is a requirement in law. Annual accounts must be made public. As much as we would like to convert, we find the requirements to do so impossible, and this is the same for several people we know with smallholdings (4-10 acres). We hear form government that more organic produce in needed, yet this made impossible by red tape and financial burdens. We do have 1 ac organic, though not registered, and our customers know its organic and are quite happy.

We farm in an extensive way to try and improve the wildlife value of our farm (an RSPB reserve). We are in an ESA scheme. We feel that our present set up is probably not far off being organic, but have deferred conversion primarily because we produce a small number of lambs (approx 90) and only finish 2 cattle per year. The organic premium on the sales probably wouldn't cover the certification costs. As the pen pusher of the partnership, I am reluctant to take on any more paperwork. Having said that, since our 1 day visit was so negative, we would appreciate an on-farm analysis of the suitability of our farm for conversion and an assessment of the financial implications. With regard to environmental issues, conversion frequently results in increased ploughing to grow more clover/ grass leys, home grown feed crops or arable. Farmers and certification bodies should be made aware of the importance of avoiding damage to archaeological site, especially Scheduled Ancient Monuments, as well as habitats.

I think it would be very helpful for new applicants to be able to talk to converted producers with similar enterprises in the same area, either by phone, or at an organised group meeting.

One for the main reasons that small producers such as ourselves are put off converting is the high inspection fee charged by the certification bodies. Why is there not just one body, funded by NA or government? For small producers like ourselves, the extra money we can get for

some of our produce is almost off set by the cost of the fees. We feel we are working for the benefit of the Soil Association, and we do work very hard!

There are two types of people, I feel. Those that who know nothing of the philosophy, let alone the methods, and wish to find out more, and are in it often only for money. There are others who have practiced organic farming who inquire about the schemes and who would like access to current research methods. It would help to address these groups independently: one group is beginning, while the other wants to move up the gears.

As we understand it, animal health and welfare is quite specifically defined in the Organic regulation, and therefore must already be part of OCIS.

I was concerned by the consultant's approach, which seemed to be 'pile on the artificial fertilisers to correct the problems/ deficiencies before the conversion period begins.' Similarly to encourage red clover leys without thought for the amount of energy involved in ploughing and the loss of existing organic matter in the process. The whole process of advice giving, while it might be economically sound, seemed to me somewhat cynical, ignoring the sustainability issues. I feel it has encouraged farmers who are not necessarily committed on a philosophical level, but who have their eye on the 'bottom line', and may not be in it in the long term. While some economies of scale could benefit the organic market, the number of large producers encouraged to convert will put in jeopardy the survival of the smaller, more committed ones. Lack of environmental considerations in favour of technical fixes worried me. The assumption seems to be that organic farming is automatically better for wildlife etc. Large-scale re-seeding, intensive use of tined weeders or flame guns, and intensive pre conversion remediation of nutrient imbalances or weed problems are potentially disastrous for existing wildlife. I am worried that the organic movement has been hijacked by ruthless producers pursuing a better return in difficult times, and OCIS has played a crucial role by focussing on technical aspects during the conversion period, rather than the longer term management and problems likely to arise.

Advice on procedure and regulations should be separate from practical farming advice.

OCIS should paint a true picture to those that enquire about conversion. This year form instance, speaking from personal experience, it is impossible to sell organic lamb and beef. The situation is so dire that we are having to contemplate selling our organic lambs to the conventional market. This has happened only 2 years after a difficult conversion, resulting in lower stock numbers, reduced crop yields and welfare issues. I would be glad to hear the truth about the depressed organic market, being broadcast to show that organic farming is not the simple answer to the problems with in Agriculture.

Bearing in mind that one's understanding of the organic ethos is at best muddled when first one considers conversion, it is difficult to focus on all the questions/ areas of advice that are need. This can be especially so at the time of the half day visit, and even the full day visit. In my case, coming from a landscape gardening background, , and lacking knowledge/ experience in farming, identifying the right questions to ask was all the more difficult. I therefore feel that some form of follow up/ backup service would compliment the current service. In this respect, surgeries could provide a very valuable service in that they would address all those questions that one forgot to ask, or new questions that arise as a result of an evolving conversion plan. 'Internet surgeries' would be an excellent way of providing a cost effective service, bearing in mind the locations of both experts and growers.

OCIS has generally been useful as an advisor when considering conversion. Presumably its remit is not to support farmers once they are organic, but only to encourage conversion. The practicalities of the change are the greatest worries at the time of considering conversion and OCIS advice certainly helped with that. However, once conversion had been undertaken, marketing worries take over, and here the producers seem to be left on their own to seek their own markets, diversity, added value etc. many are duplicating their effort and finding it all impossible on an individual small scale. Little help is offered for this.

Thank you for OCIS

More co-ordination with Tir Gofal and Farming connect FDBPs.

Now that we are virtually organic and in Tir Gofal at the moment there is no real incentive to advance to certified organic production. We are so small a producer that (4-5 steers) it hardly seems to warrant the effort. Our buyers are friends who know how well the animals and the environment on our farm are. What about helping other folk who can't make the organic status/ not quite certified yet, if ever/ extensive category as a middle ground target. It is still in the right direction away from intensive farming.

It is important that the advisor has specific knowledge and practical experience in the enterprises relevant to the holding.

Farmers converting must be made aware of the recent and continuing problems in the milk sector. There is no room for anyone to sell organic lambs. Returns are under pressure because of over production.

I think that British Agriculture is in such a mess in terms of farm gate prices, conservation issues, farmer welfare and levels of red tape that OCIS is irrelevant and probably a terrible waste of taxpayers money.

Any farmer converting to organic must be made aware of the continuing problems in the milk sector. There is no room for anyone to organic lamb production. Returns are under pressure because of over production.

As yet I still haven't been able to generate start up funds to enable me to proceed with my organic Biodynamic medicinal herb farm due to pathetic red tape inflicted by the various agencies established to help people like myself, i.e. WDA etc.

No decisions should be made on this year's activities, as nothing has been able to proceed normally. We weren't able to benefit from any visits prior to converting – I'm sure they would have been helpful.

At the age of 63, with no family interest to follow up, I found the cost to be high, although I have not made my final decision because of foot and mouth.

Why do we have OCIS and COG. All these duplication cost taxpayers money. The most important function that OCIS could give is to act as a pressure group to press the case for on going payments after conversion (after OFS payments).

We cannot see that organic farming can be economic with out government support. In view of declining economic importance of this country, I cannot see that it would be prudent to support agriculture in this way. I like the idea of organic farming, but is it practical?

One to One contact is essential and should be available at all cost. It is the easiest and most successful method of dealing with individual cases. No two situations are the same.

I would have converted if the paper work had not been so great. A friend said that she is spending more time at her desk than farming, and would never have gone organic if she had known this.

I would prefer Wales to be under 1 organic organisation. There are far to many people telling farmer what to do.

Since starting my conversion, I have no regrets. The greatest change has been in my mental attitude – once the mindset has been focussed on the far horizon it went quite well. Everything takes much more time (which is not the same as taking much longer). We have totally refocused our systems. We now know exactly what eats what and when, and calculate things in advance. The FMD was a problem but not insurmountable The greatest worry at the moment is selling lambs. They seem very hard to shift as there is a surplus of conventional

lamb on the market (plus New Zealand lamb is here already). The various financial incentives have enabled us to update – we now regularly weigh the cattle to see how they are coming on. We also have a TMR feeder so we can weigh the feed ration. I think the next stage has got to be added value, but I haven't quite worked that out as yet. Record keeping in a logical retrievable useful form is something that could be refined. I would say an average of 8-10 Hrs/week is required to keep the paper work in order. I think that product labelling is an under controlled issue. We must be able to show loud and clear that we have British Organic produce. The government must be made to control the standards of imports, and if it can't control the imports themselves. How are we ever going to compete against produce produced in a cheaper, less controlled way?

My area is small and there has been no funding for such small concerns so there has been little point in my having much contact, but I have passed information on to others with larger areas.

We need more of welsh speaking advisors.

Appendix IV OCW discussion document: future of OCIS in Wales

The Organic Conversion Information Service was launched in October 1996 in Wales and is now 5 years old. During this time it has proved a successful means of providing conventional farmers with easy access to information on conversion. In March 2002, the existing arrangements will end, and consideration therefore needs to be given now as to what form OCIS should take in future.

As in England, the service consists of:

- telephone helpline
- free information pack
- free half-day visit to cover basic aspects of organic management
- free follow-on visit to identify organic management issues in the context of the individual farm

However, the funding and management of the service is different in Wales:

- the service is funded by the National Assembly in Wales, DEFRA in England
- the service is managed by ADAS in Wales, and by FRCA (now DEFRA) in England (FRCA was not contracted to supply any services under OCIS in England)
- the helpline was operated initially by the Soil Association as in England, but has now been integrated with Organic Centre Wales (since January 2001)
- the half-day visits are provided by ADAS in Wales and by the EFRC Organic Advisory Service (OAS) in England
- the follow-on visits were provided mainly by the EFRC OAS in Wales (on a sub-contract) as in England, but for the last two years have been provided mainly by ADAS. The OAS sub-contract was not renewed in April 2001 in the context of FMD
- as a result of 5b funding, it has been possible to offer 'planning the conversion' training courses between the half-day and follow-on visits.

There have been two formal reviews of the service in England, but none in Wales.

The most recent English study (by Entec for DEFRA), identified that farmers' most important reason for contacting OCIS was to find out whether their farm was appropriate for conversion and information on organic standards. The major complaint about this and other free advice services (on pollution and conservation) was that advisors sometimes showed a degree of naivety about farm economics and did not detail the financial implications of the advice that they gave.

About a third of farmers receiving the OCIS half-day visit go on to the follow-on visit. The most common reasons for not proceeding were the perceived expense and/or lack of grants (although the financial implications are not currently assessed in any detail). Loss of yield was also a concern and farmers expressed the lack of any follow up advice during their actual conversion period.

The Entec review of the scheme in England concluded that the range of vehicles for delivering advice should be extended, and that on-farm visits were only one option (although they should be maintained). More use could be made of leaflets, videos and CD-ROMs, and consideration should be given to trialling a telephone/internet sign-posting service (decision-tree format). The OCIS scheme half-day visit could benefit from some greater feedback between the help-line and the advisors, with the intention of ensuring the most appropriate advisor attended the half-day visit. Entec commented on the importance of the scheme in training advisors for the area of organic farming.

Key issues to consider:

- should the service be seen as an information or an advisory service and what are the implications in terms of integration with Farming Connect?
- should the service rely on professional consultants (as Farming Connect) or is the current practice of using trained, experienced organic producers worth continuing? If so, should a mentoring scheme be considered as part of OCIS?
- to what extent can group advice and training be used to deliver basic information and should this be integrated with the one-to-one advice on farm?
- DEFRA has funded the development of software for planning organic conversions, which is currently out for testing. One aim of developing software was to enable the financial implications of conversion to be assessed in broad terms as part of OCIS. Should a financial and resource use assessment be carried out as a standard part of OCIS?

- to what extent should environmental and animal health and welfare advice be included?
- what further information/advice is required before and particularly during conversion that is not currently provided for and how is this best delivered? How does this integrate with advice provided under other schemes (e.g Farming Connect Farm Business Development Plans/ organic conversion planning)?
- should eligibility for OFS funding be linked to OCIS and training participation?

Next steps

- Comments on the above questions welcome (by August 20th)
- Obtain further information on producer views in Wales (by September 15th)
- Revised document to be produced (by September 30th)

Appendix V Responses to the consultation from Organic Strategy Group and Organic Centre Steering Group members

To be added

Appendix VI OCW Farming Connect Fact Sheet



Organic Conversion Information and Advice and Farming Connect

Farming Connect, launched in September 2001, aims to deliver a broad range of services to support the farming community in Wales. Further details are given in the leaflets 'What is Farming Connect?', 'Farm Business Development Plan' and 'Capital Grants'.

Under Farming Connect, every eligible farm holding in Wales will be entitled to a free Farm Business Development Plan (FBDP) consultancy. This provides an opportunity for you to link advice on developing your farm businesses with information on organic conversion as well detailed conversion planning, certification and registration for the Organic Farming Scheme. This document is intended to outline how the various services available can be combined.

If you are interested in finding out more about conversion to organic systems, you should tell the Farming Connect helpline staff when you phone them, or your Farming Connect consultant during his/her first visit (the health/skillcheck visit). The consultant will then establish whether you have:

- Registered with the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS)
- Received the OCIS information pack
- Received the OCIS video
- Received an Organic Farm Management Handbook
- Received an initial OCIS half day visit
- Received second (follow-up) OCIS visit
- Attended the planning the conversion training course
- Received grant aid towards detailed conversion planning or advice from OCW.

If you have not yet contacted OCIS, the consultant will be able to do so this for you, and the FBDP will be put 'on hold' while you receive some or all of the above services. (The consultant will notify WDA to request an extension to the 30-day period to complete the FBDP to make allowance for this). Ideally, the OCIS visits and planning conversion training course options will use FBDP registered consultants to ensure continuity.

Having taken advantage of OCIS services, you should be in a position to decide whether or not you would like a full evaluation of the conversion option, and you should inform Farming Connect of this prior to the second FBDP visit. If you decide not to take it any further, then specialist organic input will stop at this point.

If you do decide to go ahead with the full evaluation, an appropriate FBDP consultant, either specialising in organic systems or working with a specialist organic consultant, will be assigned to you for your second FBDP visit, in order to develop an organic conversion plan as part of your detailed business plan. This will include one day of specialist technical advice on organic management and conversion issues. Opportunities for additional advice on livestock health, grassland management and other specialist areas of organic farming may also be available, and a list of available supplementary services will be drawn up. Advice on pollution control and environmental opportunities available under Farming Connect will also be identified and integrated where possible.

The final conversion/business plan will be available for discussion at the 3rd FBDP meeting. If you wish to proceed with the conversion, opportunities for additional assistance will be provided that could include completion of Organic Farming Scheme application, certification applications, Capital Grant applications and OCW one-stop shops and training courses.