The latest in organic R&D news

Red Earth lamb trials get backing

THE RED Organics group of lamb producers had its first meeting to initiate its feed trial on February 20 in Broken Hill, NSW.

Group members and relations manager for Commonwealth Agribusiness, a major sponsor of the trial, attended the meeting.

San Jolly of Productive Nutrition, Adelaide, ran a nutrition workshop and will be the contracted nutritionist for the trial.

Topics covered included the following:

- protein and energy requirements for different stages of pre-joining, joining and lambing in ewes and rams;
- required intakes to produce a healthy, productive reproductive system in young ewe lambs;
- how the trial will be operated for the next two years on the five different properties across western NSW to produce credible results;

Meredith Tothil, of Rural Solutions, SA, ran a workshop on native plant identification;

Growers were tested on finer aspects of identifying plants so they can produce a plant list for their individual properties. They will then be able to list the species on offer to the stock at the time of grain supplementation.

Plant ID with Meredith Tothil. Around the table (from left) are Joe Hughes, Matt Jackson, Andrew Foster, Shane Gardiner,Marie Pope and Ralph Pope.

This is important as protein and energy levels of these plants will eventually determine when and what grain are required for supplementation.

The day was considered a great success and all are eager for the trial to begin in the next few weeks. The trial has been put together by the group and has attracted an immense amount of interest across Queensland, SA and WA.

Sponsors are Meat and Livestock Australia, the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), Commonwealth Agribusiness, and Bromar Engineering of Grenfel, who are supplying feeding equipment and technical support.

Further sponsorship is welcome.

Contact: Joe Hughes, phone (02) 6837 3983 or 0408 886 223, email <bundaleer.pastoral@bigpond.com>.

DPI WANTS HELP ON CLIMATE

THE NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has received a $246,000 climate action project grant from the NSW Government to study the role of pastures in locking up carbon under a range of management practices in central and southern NSW.

The NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, says the project is part of a wider $2.5 million climate research program that will help the State Government achieve its aim of cutting greenhouse emissions by 60% by 2050.

A member of the project team, NSW DPI soil physics technical officer Albert Oates, says with the wider community becoming increasingly aware of greenhouse gases and potential climate change, it is important the positive role of pastures in sequestering carbon within the soil be better understood and measured.

"Keeping carbon in the soil as organic material reduces the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere," he says. "And increasing soil organic material improves the physical, chemical and biological properties of the soil."

Mr Oates says Australian farmed soils were generally relatively low in soil organic carbon.

"It ís not easy to accumulate organic material in a hot, dry climate under continuous cropping," he says. "The pasture

phase provides the opportunity to rebuild organic matter levels in the soil. Soils under permanent pasture may have the greatest potential to lock up carbon dioxide as soil organic matter."

The three-year project will be led by soil physicist Dr Yin Chan with input from soil chemist Dr Mark Conyers, modeller Dr Deli Liu, research agronomist Dr Guangdi Li, soil scientist Dr Brian Murphy of DNR, and Mr Oates.

A number of district agronomists from NSW DPI will collaborate in the project, along with newly recruited technical officer Ms Ros Prangnell. The researchers are keen to hear from farmers who may have paddocks with a known history suitable for inclusion in the study.

"Of particular interest would be paired paddocks, which allow comparisons to be made," Mr Oates says. "Examples include cropped versus old perennial pasture, annual pasture versus perennial, and set-stocked versus rotationally grazed.

"If a farmer has a paddock likely to be of very high organic carbon status, that would also be of interest."

Contact: Dr Chan, phone (02) 4588 2108; Mr Oates, phone (02) 6938 1874; website <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/news/recent-news/agriculture-news-releases/climate-action-grant>.

OCEANIA PACIFIC SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL CALLS FOR PAPERS

Journal of Organic Systems
www.organic-systems.org

THE WEB-BASED publication *Journal of Organic Systems* launched last July provides the first opportunity for those committed to organic approaches to publish their work in English in a Southern Hemisphere refereed journal. It is a significant step in the maturity of organics in the Oceania Pacific region.

"Researchers and practitioners of organic approaches can publish their findings and ideas," Australian co-founding editor, Professor Stuart Hill says.

"These may relate to the design and management of production systems, their problem-proofing and problem-solving, produce handling and marketing, policy issues and associated organisational and technological issues, and supportive approaches to education, research and development."

Prof Stuart Hill is Founding Chair of Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney, Australia, and is founding co-editor of the journal together with Professor Neil Macgregor, a retired soil ecologist from Massey University, New Zealand.

The initiative has been fully supported by the organic community throughout Oceania and the Pacific region and by the international research community. The journal is free, electronic-based and available on <www.organic-systems.org>.

Contact: Prof Stuart Hill, phone 61 (02) 4736 0799 (wk); 61 (02) 4753-1158 (h), email <s.hill@uws.edu.au>.

MOSTLY FREE LITERATURE

THE NATIONAL organisation Land and Water Australia (LWA) — dedicated to investing and managing research and development of sustainable resource use and land management — recently released **The Mostly Free Publication Catalogue.**

With more than 600 publications available, The Mostly Free Publication Catalogue presents topics in landscape, sustainable primary industries, sustainable irrigation, land, water and wool, and the National Land and Water Resources Audit.

As information is available in brochure and CD-ROM format, much of the information is free, except for some reports and booklets that cost $20-$30.

The information sheets are an excellent reference tool for organic growers, land managers and interested parties to glean information on sustainable land management.

With "a vision for the future of sustainable use and management of natural resources for the benefit of primary industries and the Australian community", we welcome more publications from LWA.

The catalogue can be downloaded free from website <www.lwa.gov.au/catalogue>, or phone 1800 776 616, or order by fax (02) 6293 8388.

LWA is a statutory R&D corporation within the Australian Government Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio.

EXPERT ADVICE KEEPS ORGANIC R&D ON TRACK

THE RURAL Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) Organic Systems R&D Program relies on advice from a committee of experts to ensure its R&D investments meet the needs of the rapidly expanding organics industry.

A carefully selected new Advisory Committee for 2006-2009 has been announced, including four new members and four ongoing members representing a range of skills relevant to the program's priorities for research for the organic industry.

"Between them, the members of the Organic Systems Advisory Committee hold valuable skills across the industry, covering organic production, processing, retail and wholesale, scientific research, natural resource management, extension, business development, certification and policy," Dr Caroline Lemerle, RIRDC general manager for research said in announcing the committee.

New members of the committee are:

- R&D joint ventures and collaboration specialist Eric Love;
- organic researcher and economist Dr Els Wynen;
- Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries food policy and safety manager;
- Richard Souness; and
- Victorian Organic Dairy Farmers Cooperative chairman, Terry Hehir.

They join the following ongoing members:

- current chair of the Organic Systems Advisory Committee Don Fraser;
- organic tropical fruit farmer and Organic Federation of Australia (OFA) chair, Andre Leu;
- organic farming systems research scientist for the Victorian Dept of Primary Industries Ms Viv Burnett; and
- Professor of Agriculture (Farming Systems) at the University of Western Sydney, Prof Peter Cornish.

The Organic Systems R&D program is managed by Dr Caroline Lemerle. A current focus of the RIRDC Organic Systems R&D Program is removing constraints to the industry's growth.

"The Committee will help to direct R&D for the industry to meet the Organic Systems Program's three key objectives," Dr Lemerle says. These are:

- to improve the performance of organic farming systems;
- to address supply-chain and food safety issues; and
- to assess the ecological performance of organic farming systems.

"These objectives are clearly laid out in the program's recently released five-year R&D Plan for 2006-2011," Dr Lemerle says. ■

Details of the R&D Plan as well as current and completed R&D projects for the organic industry are available on the RIRDC website <www.rirdc.gov.au>.