

Rushall Organic Farm case study

Farm owner	William Cumber.
Farm manager	John Bishop.
Address	Rushall Farm, Scratchface Lane, Bradfield, Berkshire RG7 6BP.
Phone /email	0118 9745061 / jst@rushallfarm.org.uk
Grid ref	SU588727.
Size	360 hectares.
Tenancy	Owner occupied / Tenancy & Grazing tenancies.
Date when farm competed organic conversion	1 st July 2002.
History	Mixed farm with sheep/cattle and rotational systems. Reliance on high clover leys. Herbage seed and oil seed rape as break crops. Sprays and fertilisers were used on all arable crops until introduction of organic methods. The farm has been under the same management for 28 years.

Physical features

General description	Most of the land is in the Pang Valley with farmed land combined with blocks of woodland.
Soil types	A variety of mixed soils including clay, sand, loams and alluvium. Some gravel tops. Bedrock is chalk.
Altitude	55 – 115m above sea level.
Rainfall	66cm per year.

Land use

Crops	Wheat (22 hectares), barley (18 hectares), beans (16 hectares), oats (28 hectares), triticale (a wheat / rye cross) (34 hectares).
Crops used in rotation	As above plus clover and grass.
Set a side	23 hectares (some longer term because of location).
Stewardship	72 hectares.
Woodland	44 hectares; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 hectares are ancient woodland. Main species are Oak, Ash and Cherry with hazel beneath. • 4 hectares of new planting (1993).

Animals

Cows	35 cows, 2 bulls and 10 heifers (young cows). The breed is 'Saler'.
Sheep	670 ewes and 180 ewe lambs. The breeds are Suffolk x Texel and Hartline.

Labour	1 manager shepherd; 1 tractor driver; 1 under shepherd, 1 part time arable worker.
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Machinery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 tractors • 1 materials handler • Combine Harvester • Seed drill • Pick up truck • Plough • Other farm implements
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Markets for farm produce

Cows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic beef is transported to Guildford for slaughter and sold to Marks & Spencers.
Sheep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic lamb is transported to Guildford for slaughter and sold to Waitrose Farmhouse lamb scheme. • Organic lamb also sold to Cow & Gates Baby foods. • A new home delivery scheme starts in July 2003.

Diversification

Alternative sources of income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracting (combining/baling/tractor hire) • Woodland management (Woodland Grant Scheme) • Rent of land for charcoal/furniture making business • Telecommunications mast • Storing grain for other farmers • Fishing rights
Other features / attractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The chalk pit at the farm is a RIGS (regionally important geological site) • Listed thatched barn built in 18th century • The John Simonds Trust for education in the countryside (20,000 visitors per year) • Open weekends (lambing weekend/bluebell walks) • Camping/bunkhouse facilities & barn for dances and community events.

Environmental benefits

Habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodlands • Pond • Lowland chalk stream • Hedges • Margins • Wildflower meadow
Wildlife	Red kites, barn owls, kestrels. Very good variety of plant species and bird species from kingfishers to buzzards.

Significant changes arising from organic conversion

Animals	Reduced ewe numbers from 825 (before organic) to 670.
Labour	Increased labour by 1 person (skilled).
Types of crops grown	Introduced beans / red clover / oats.
Change in balance of land use (arable v. animal)	Was 34% grassland, 66% arable. Now 60% grassland, 40% arable.
Income from produce / profitability of farm	2000 income = £10,000 before depreciation profit (pre organic) 2001 income = £35,000 before depreciation profit 2002 income = £27,000 before depreciation profit.
Noticeable changes in wildlife	Notable increase in ALL wildlife (including rooks, which ate all of our winter oats).
Other – eg personal outlook on farming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We now realise how little knowledge there is about how to farm sustainably. 2. Annoyed that we didn't make the change to organic farming years ago. 3. Impressed by the value of crops like red clover and beans (how well they grow and their ability to add nutrients to the soil). 4. Enjoying much better livestock performance as a result of better welfare standards and use of home-grown feed like beans, oats etc. 5. Farming organically is much more interesting.