

The Organic Food & Farming Targets Bill Campaign Update

Issue 2, May 2000

The campaign for organic targets grows in strength... In Parliament over 200 MPs have now signed Early Day Motion 51, the Parliamentary petition that supports the Bill. Our target is 400 MPs by November 2000, when the new parliamentary session starts. We also have over 60 national organisations signed up in support of the Bill including supermarkets, health charities, environmental groups and consumer organisations. Your continued support for the campaign will be invaluable in the coming months, especially in the run up to the MPs ballot in November – take a look on the inside pages of this newsletter for ideas about how to get involved, or contact the Sustain office (*details on the back page*).

Organic Targets – a Strategy for Change

The Organic Targets Bill aims to have a strategy in place to ensure 30% of land is in organic production and 20% of the food we eat is organic by 2010.

Demand for organic food is growing at 40% each year, but around 70% of organic food is imported. So UK farmers are losing out on a great opportunity to grow and sell organic food. Targets will spur Government action to encourage the increased organic production needed to reduce imports.

The targets were calculated by looking at the current growth in demand for organic food, and by studying the progress of other European countries such as Sweden and Denmark, which set organic targets during the 1990s. They are realistic and achievable targets for the Government to work towards.

To achieve the targets, the Government would need to develop a strategy to help farmers, processors, distributors and retailers work towards increasing organic production and consumption. The Bill does not limit the policy changes to be used, and there are many useful pieces of research to help

government develop its strategy. In developing a strategy, the government would have its attention focused on practical measures to put organic farming centre-stage.

Research shows that many farmers would consider converting to organic methods, but there are currently barriers to this. Organisations such as the Soil Association and Elm Farm Research Centre recommend some practical measures to encourage more organic farming, for instance:

- Regional organic centres to give information and training to farmers about suitable crops, methods of pest control, and how to market organic foods;
- Regional organic processing centres, where segregation of organic and non-organic (including GM) produce can be guaranteed;
- Targeting research funding on finding plant varieties best suited to organic production, and on techniques to enhance production without artificial fertilisers and pesticides;
- Supporting the availability of organic seed & animal feed.

The Life Cycle of a Parliamentary Bill

On the way through the labyrinth of the British legislative system, the Organic Targets Bill was chosen in “the Ballot”, is due for its “Second Reading”, will go to “Report”, and it will also find itself scrutinised by the House of Lords. But what does it all *mean*?

STAGE 1: Adoption of the Bill by an MP

At the beginning of each parliamentary session a Ballot takes place to select the 20 MPs with a good chance of getting a Bill into law - the top seven have the best chance. In November 1999 Paul Tyler MP came 16th in the Ballot and adopted the Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill.

STAGE 2: The House of Commons

First Reading: usually a formality - the title of the Bill is read out and a date is set for the Second Reading.

Second Reading: a debate on the *principle* of the Bill, not the detail. On March 3rd the Bill was due for a Second Reading but because the Bills preceding the Organic Targets Bill took up all available time, no debate was held. The Bill could still have had a Second Reading without debate but this was blocked by a Government spokesperson. The Bill is now scheduled for another debate on July 21st, though it is likely to run out of time again. If the Bill does not get through during this session, the campaign must continue to lobby MPs so that in November 2000 the Bill is taken up again by an MP drawn in the Ballot.

Standing Committee: if the Bill passes its Second Reading it goes to a Standing Committee of about 17 MPs. The Bill is debated in detail, line-by-line and amendments made.

Report Stage: the Standing Committee reports back to the whole House. Bills can often fail at this stage as amendments tabled have to be debated at length, and the House has to agree on each individual amendment. If an opposing MP decides to delay or “filibuster” this may result in the Bill running out of time and failing to become law.

The Third Reading: a debate on the principle of the Bill.

STAGE 3: House of Lords

After passage through the Commons, the Bill goes through the same process in the Lords. The only change in procedure is that the Standing Committee is usually the whole House and amendments can be tabled at the Third Reading.

Lords amendments: If a Bill is not amended in the Lords it goes straight for **Royal Assent**. However if the Lords make amendments the Bill goes back to the Commons, where only the Lords’ amendments may be discussed.

What you can do to get involved

1. Write a letter... to your MP and to Minister Elliot Morley

The Organic Targets Bill will only become law if MPs and the Government are convinced that we – their voters – want it to. It is up to us to put pressure on them to back the Bill, so please act on the suggestions below.

Has your MP signed? Below is a list of the 217 MPs who have shown they support the Bill (by signing EDM 51 - see next page). Please write to your own MP encouraging them to sign up and to support the Bill. Suggested content for the letter is opposite. Ministers, Shadow Ministers and the Front Bench do not usually sign EDMs so, if your MP is one of these, ask him/her to tell you if they support the Bill. Remember you are entitled to a straight yes or no answer to this – as a voter you should know your MP's views.

Contact the Minister. Elliot Morley, Minister for Fisheries and the Countryside, is also responsible for organic farming. He needs to know how much support there is for the Organic Targets Bill. Write to him asking him why the Bill was blocked at its Second Reading.

Keep us informed. Please send us a copy of any replies you receive from MPs, Ministers or organisations. We can advise you on how to respond. Gathering responses will also help us to monitor and publicise the progress of the campaign.

2. Distribute campaign postcards

Contact Sustain for copies of the campaign postcard "Aim for Organic". They're designed for sending to MPs to encourage them to support the Bill. Can you distribute these postcards? Or do you belong to an organisation that could?

MPs signed up to EDM 51 as at April 25th

Labour (152)	David Crausby	Win Griffiths	Kevin McNamara	Dari Taylor	Lib Democrat (39)	Robert Smith
Irene Adams	Ann Cryer	John Gunnell	Tony McWalter	David Taylor	Paddy Ashdown	Andrew Stunell
Candy Atherton	John Cryer	Doug Henderson	John McWilliam	Peter Temple-Morris	Norman Baker	Matthew Taylor
John Austin	John Cummings	Ivan Henderson	Alan Meale	Gareth Thomas	Jackie Ballard	Paul Tyler
Harry Barnes	Lawrence Cunliffe	Stephen Hepburn	Bill Michie	Paul Truswell	Alan Beith	Steve Webb
Anne Begg	Jim Cunningham	Stephen Hesford	Andrew Miller	Desmond Turner	Thomas Brake	Phil Willis
Hilary Benn	Tam Dalyell	Jimmy Hood	Austin Mitchell	Neil Turner	Peter Brand	
Tony Benn	Keith Darvill	Kelvin Hopkins	Laura Moffatt	Rudolph Vis	Colin Breed	SDLP (1)
Gerry Bermingham	Valerie Davey	Lindsay Hoyle	Doug Naysmith	Joan Walley	John Burnett	John Hume
Roger Berry	Denzil Davies	Brian Iddon	Eddie O'Hara	Robert N Wareing	Paul Burstow	
Harold Best	Geraint Davies	Eric Illsley	Bill Olnier	Brian White	Vincent Cable	SLP (1)
David Borrow	Ron Davies	Glenda Jackson	Diana Organ	Betty Williams	Menzies Campbell	Thomas Graham
Peter Bradley	Terry Davis	Barry Jones	Peter Pike	Mike Wood	David Chidgey	
Ben Bradshaw	Hilton Dawson	Jon Owen Jones	Kerry Pollard	Shaun Woodward	Brian Cotter	SNP (1)
Helen Brinton	Janet Dean	Lynne Jones	Gordon Prentice	Tony Worthington	Edward Davey	Alasdair Morgan
Russell Brown	Andrew Dismore	Martyn Jones	Gwyn Prosser	Jimmy Wray	Ronnie Fearn	
Karen Buck	Jim Dobbin	Ann Keen	Lawrie Quinn	Tony Wright	Don Foster	UDUP (1)
Colin Burgon	David Drew	Piara Khabra	Syd Rapson BEM	Derek Wyatt	Andrew George	Peter Robinson
Christine Butler	Julia Drown	Andy King	Andrew Reed		Donald Gorrie	
DN Campbell-Savours	Huw Edwards	Tess Kingham	Chris Ruane	Conservative (13)	Mike Hancock	UKUP (1)
Dennis Canavan	Clive Efford	Stephen Ladyman	Joan Ruddock	Richard Body	Nick Harvey	Robert McCartney
Roger Casale	Jeff Ennis	Jackie Lawrence	Christine Russell	Peter Bottomley	David Heath	
Martin Caton	Bill Etherington	Martin Lepper	Martin Salter	James Gray	Simon Hughes	UUP (5)
David Chaytor	Paul Flynn	Terry Lewis	Phil Sawford	Dominic Grieve	Nigel Jones	Roy Beggs
Malcolm Chisholm	Derek Foster	Martin Linton	Brian Sedgeman	John Horam	Paul Keetch	Jeffrey Donaldson
Michael Clapham	Michael J Foster	Alice Mahon	Barry Sheerman	Robert Jackson	Archy Kirkwood	Clifford Forsythe
Eric Clarke	Michael Jz Foster	Gordon Marsden	Debra Shipley	Tom King	Richard Livsey	John Taylor
Harry Cohen	Barry Gardiner	Paul Marsden	Marsha Singh	Andrew Robathan	Ray Michie	William Thompson
Iain Coleman	Neil Gerrard	Jim Marshall	Dennis Skinner	Laurence Robertson	Michael Moore	
Michael Connarty	Ian Gibson	Robert Marshall-	Gerry Steinberg	Desmond Swayne	Mark Oaten	Plaid Cymru (3)
Frank Cook	Linda Gilroy	Andrews	David Stewart	Teddy Taylor	Lembit Opik	Ieuan Jones
Robin Corbett	Norman Godman	John McAllion	Ian Stewart	John Wilkinson	David Rendel	Ellyn Llwyd
Jeremy Corbyn	Roger Godsiff	Chris McCafferty	Paul Stinchcombe	Nicholas Winterton	Bob Russell	Dafydd Wigley
Tom Cox	Jane Griffiths	John McDonnell	Howard Stoate		Adrian Sanders	

3. Meet your MP face to face

Some MPs hold 'surgeries' in their constituencies. Find out when these are and ask your MP why they have not supported the Bill, or why they are not being more active in promoting the Bill if they do support it.

Dear _____ MP

I am writing to urge you to support the Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill currently being proposed by Paul Tyler, MP. Please could you also show your support by signing EDM No. 51.

This Bill aims to have 30% of farmland in England and Wales in organic production by 2010. Organic farming has proven benefits for the environment as well as providing food grown without chemical residues or GM ingredients. Demand for organic food is at an all time high, yet we currently import around 70% of the organic food we buy. This represents a missed opportunity for the environment, growers, rural communities and consumers.

The money for the level of organic conversion required in the Bill represents only a small percentage (5%) of the total spending on agriculture (£3 billion).

Your support for the Bill and EDM will help persuade the Government not to miss the opportunity to boost the organic market in order to achieve essential environmental, economic development and health objectives.

Who is your MP? Find out your MP's name through the House of Commons Public Information Office (Tel: 020 7219 4272) or via the **website**: <http://www.locata.co.uk/commons>.

Letters should be sent to (Your MP), House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. Use a separate envelope for each letter.

Early Day Motion No. 51

Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill 1999

That this House supports the Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill which would require the drawing up of policies to ensure that by 2010, at least 30 per cent of UK farmland will be organic and that at least 20 per cent of the food consumed in the UK will be organic; notes that such an increase in organic farming will provide innumerable benefits for consumers, farmers, the environment, and animal welfare; further notes that demand for organic production is increasing by at least 40 per cent each year, but that 70 per cent of the food consumed in the UK is imported; and notes approvingly the inclusion in the Bill of the clauses concerning the need to implement measures to ensure all sections of society have access to affordable organic food and that the market demand is met by the new UK production.

And in the meantime

You can always do your bit to support organic food and farming. Why not consider taking action on some of the following:

- Buy organic produce whenever you can and encourage friends to do the same;
- Try shopping at a Farmers' Market (many stock organic produce). To find your nearest one, visit www.farmersmarkets.net;
- Try growing your own organic fruit, vegetables and herbs, even if you only have a window box. Write to Grow your own organic fruit and vegetables campaign (OTB), HDRA, Ryton Organic Gardens, Coventry, CV8 3LG;
- Write to your local supermarket to ask why they aren't stocking more UK organic produce at a reasonable price. If they don't support the Bill, ask them why not;
- Photocopy this newsletter and give it to friends and colleagues;
- Join a local 'Vegetable Box' scheme and have organic food delivered to your door. Contact the Soil Association for details (0117 929 0661);
- Encourage your friends to write to their MPs about the Organic Food and Farming Targets Bill;
- Are you a member of a union, community group, church or other organisation? Encourage them to get involved with the campaign;
- Join a campaign group such as a Friends of the Earth local group (call: 020 7490 1555 for details) to work on all aspects of food production.

Campaign Diary

Oct 19 – Organic Food & Farming Targets Bill launched.

Oct 26 – Bill presented to House of Commons.

Nov – Joan Ruddock MP tables Early Day Motion (EDM) in support of the Bill.

Nov – Paul Tyler MP adopts Bill after he is drawn in the ballot.

Dec continuing – Steering Group of the Organic Targets Bill campaign contact MPs to encourage them to sign the EDM.

Jan 2000 – Presentations by Steering Group and Robin Harper MSP to Scottish MSPs leads to formation of Scottish Campaign.

Feb 1 – Tony Blair, speaking at the National Farmers Union AGM, calls for a trebling of organic production by 2006 – the first sign of a Government commitment to targets.

March 3 – The Bill is put forward for its Second Reading, backed by over 200 MPs. It does not take place as time runs out, but a new date is set.

April continuing – Over 60 organisations sign up to the Bill, including environmental and health charities, trades unions, research organisations and supermarkets.

May 5 – The Bill's Second Reading fails due to lack of time, but a new date is set.

Who supports the campaign?

- Arid Lands Initiative • ASDA • Association of Unpasteurised Milk Producers • Baby Milk Action • Biodynamic Agriculture Organisation • The Body Shop • Booths Supermarkets • Butterfly Conservation • Campaign for Real Ale • Centre for Alternative Technology • Centre for Food Policy • Christian Ecology Link • Common Ground • Common Work • Compassion in World Farming • Derbyshire County Council Sustainability Panel • Doves Farm Foods • East Anglia Food Link • Ecology Building Society • **Elm Farm Research Centre** • Family Farmers Assoc • Farm & Food Society • Farming & Livestock Concern UK • Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens • Find Your Feet • Flavours of Wales • Food Additives Campaign Team • Food Labelling Agenda • Fresh Food Co • **Friends of the Earth** • Gaia Foundation • Green Network • Green Party in Parliament • Guild of Fine Food Retailers • Health Education Trust • Help International Plant Protein Organisation • **HDRA – the Organic Organisation** • International Society for Ecology & Culture • Land Heritage • Longhouse Food Consultancy • Marks & Spencer • National Association of Teachers of Home Economics & Technology • National Federation of Consumer Groups • Neal's Yard Bakery • Neal's Yard Remedies • Northern Ireland Chest, Heart & Stroke Association • Organic Gardening • Organic Herb Trading Co • Organic Spirits Co • Out of this World • **Pesticides Action Network - UK** • Permaculture Association • Planet Organic • RSPB • Sainsbury's • **Soil Association** • Small Farms Association • **TGWU** • Triodos Bank • **UNISON** • Vinceremos Wines & Spirits Ltd • Waitrose • Welsh Consumer Council • West Country Graziers • Willing Workers on Organic Farms • Women's Environmental Network • WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF)

Organisations marked in bold are members of the campaign Steering Group.

#####

Campaigns cost money and every little helps! Please send a donation, however small, to Sustain at the address on the back page.

#####

And coming up in 2000...

May onwards - postcard campaign targeting MPs.

May 20 - Elm Farm Research Centre Open Day.

May 26 – June 5 – Whitsun Parliamentary recess.

June 17-24 - Friends of the Earth *Real Food Week*.

July 3 – Royal Agricultural Show.

July 21 – The Bill's third chance for a Second Reading

July 28 –30 – Organic Food and Wine Festival.

Sept 17 – Liberal Democrat Party Conference.

Sept 20 – Scottish National Party & Plaid Cymru Party Conference.

Sept 24 – Labour Party Conference.

Oct - Soil Association *Organic Harvest Month*.

Oct 2 – Conservative Party Conference.

Oct 7/8 - Potato Day at HDRA.

Oct 21 - Apple Day, Targets Bill Days of Action.

Ongoing – MPs will ask parliamentary questions to keep the issue on the parliamentary agenda.

Organic food and farming under the spotlight

“Organic food is just too expensive. How can I justify the extra cost?”

Chemical farming has many hidden costs, which we pay for through our taxes and utility bills. For example, removing pesticides from drinking water costs water companies around £120 million per year. A recent study, by Professor Jules Pretty from Essex University, shows that food actually costs about three times more than the price you see on the supermarket shelf. Organic food appears to cost more, but as the farming method significantly reduces some of these hidden costs, we will pay less for our food overall. At the moment, the market for organic food is just getting off the ground, but as it grows, prices are expected to fall. However organic farmers need higher incomes to compensate for their current higher costs and the prices we pay now are also an incentive for farmers to consider organic farming.

Organic farmers need support as they cover some of the hidden costs of agriculture by, for example, decreasing the amount of money that needs to be spent on cleaning up water. Many farmers wanting to convert to organic farming are prevented for technical reasons so they need practical and financial support from Government to help them convert to organic methods. Organic farmers, for instance, have trouble finding local abattoirs that can separate organic and ‘conventional’ meat supplies. Changes in planning laws could also allow them to process their meat products on the farm.

“Why do organic farms need government support?”

“Are artificial farming chemicals really a threat to human health?”

We are all exposed to pesticides on a daily basis in our diet and the cumulative, long-term effects of this are unknown. Some pesticides used in the UK, like lindane and carbendazim are known to have hormone-disrupting effects. Lindane has been linked to breast cancer and is banned in many other countries. The UK Government recommends that parents should peel all fruit and vegetables for their children, to try get rid of pesticides left on the skin.

Organic farming uses the best of old and new technologies that respect human and animal health and the environment. Organic farmers welcome technologies that help manage the water, land and crops more effectively. Scientific organisations such as HDRA-The Organic Organisation and the Elm Farm Research Centre continue to do excellent work into modern techniques to improve organic food and production methods, and to share this knowledge with farmers all over the world. Farmers and researchers would like to be able to progress faster with this work, but organic farming only receives a tiny percentage of the agricultural research budget.

“Doesn’t organic farming deny the progress brought about by science & technology?”

“Without herbicides & pesticides, can we grow enough food to feed the world?”

Yes we can. The main problem with the world’s food supply is that it isn’t distributed fairly. Often this is for political reasons, such as trade disputes or civil war. Food exists, but people can’t get access to it. These problems need to be addressed by governments and international organisations, urgently. In the West, the problem is overproduction, and to combat this, about 10% of farmland has to be set-aside each year to reduce production. When land is turned over to organic production, there is a decrease in the amount of food it produces. But over time (about four years), as the soil becomes more fertile, output increases.

Further information

For further information or more copies of this newsletter contact:
Organic Targets Bill, Sustain, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, UK.

Or Email: organictargetsbill@sustainweb.org

Please enclose an SAE with postal enquiries.

Tel: 020 7837 1228 Fax: 020 7837 1141 Website: www.sustainweb.org