

T H E

NEW

ORGANIC FOOD GUIDE

Including a list of over 600 outlets
throughout Britain and Ireland



A L A N G E A R



THE NEW ORGANIC FOOD GUIDE

Alan Gear

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London and Melbourne

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The information given in *The New Organic Food Guide* was believed to be correct at the time of publication, but the author regrets that he cannot be held responsible for any mistakes, or change in circumstances, that may have occurred.

Furthermore, although all of the individuals and shops who have supplied information have indicated that their produce is grown according to organic principles, the author and publishers cannot offer any further guarantee.

If any supplier of organic produce is known to you, and is not listed here, please contact us so that we can include them in the next edition.

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

For anyone looking back over the four years since the appearance of the first edition of *The Organic Food Guide*, it is astonishing to view the amount of progress that has been made in the acceptance and availability of organic food.

Then there were very few shops selling fresh organic produce. These were usually wholefood stores which stocked only a few lines. Quality was indifferent and supply infrequent. With few exceptions it would have been quite impossible to buy organically grown vegetables with any consistency. Supplies of organic fruit were virtually non-existent.

Indeed, when the various organizations concerned with organic growing decided to put out the first Guide there was a good deal of debate as to whether or not this would be a good thing. Growers were few and widely scattered. No distribution network for fresh produce existed. Farmers had no option but to sell from home. The only way for the consumer to get organic vegetables was simply to trek out into the country. Growers were unwilling to expand because they were unsure of demand. Yet there was a real worry that by writing the book we might create a demand that could not be met. It was a gamble, but it paid off.

The entries that go to make up this edition are by contrast mostly based in towns. Farmers and growers have to a large extent disappeared from its pages. This does not mean that they have gone out of business; quite the reverse, in fact. They are working flat out to meet demand. All of their produce is sold direct to shops, supermarkets or the wholesalers who are springing up. Although most do not have either the produce or time to cater for farm gate sales, a number still like to keep in direct touch with their customers.

Coverage of the country is getting better all the time. Almost all the major cities and most of the main towns now have places where you can buy organic dried goods and organically grown fresh produce all the year round. In response to the demand, especially from the multiple stores, for better quality you will find organic vegetables produced and packaged every bit as well as their chemically grown counterparts. Organic fruit, including citrus fruit, is now widely available, though almost all of it is grown abroad. Vast quantities of fresh organic produce are currently imported and it is to be hoped that many more home producers will step in to fill the gap.

This, then, could even be the last *Organic Food Guide* I write, for the strength of public demand for wholesome products suggests that stores selling organic food may soon be as commonplace as post offices. Without a doubt, the way forward is organic.

January 1987

Alan Gear
Executive Director
Henry Doubleday Research Association

INTRODUCTION

Farming in Britain today is an industry under siege. Battered by accusations that it is simultaneously destroying the countryside whilst milking the taxpayer, it reels from crisis to crisis. What has happened to the image of what has consistently been heralded as our most successful enterprise? The ever-increasing output, achieved with a declining workforce – a miracle of productivity – has foundered on a sea of surpluses. Like a suspect modern drug, all that we ever hear about nowadays are the undesirable side-effects. This week nitrates in drinking water or pesticide poisoning of wildlife. Next week grubbing of hedgerows or draining of wetlands. Animal rights campaigners draw attention to the miserable existence of factory-farmed livestock. High summer sees the opening of the straw-burning season, hardly guaranteed to increase goodwill towards the farming fraternity. The list is endless. Indeed, apart from the nuclear industry it is hard to think of any other economic activity that has a worse public image – this despite the best efforts of the National Farmers' Union, often described as the most effective political lobby in the country.

During a consumer survey carried out in 1985 amongst 500 high-street shoppers in three Berkshire towns, the following somewhat perjorative statement was put: 'The countryside and the environment are being *destroyed* by today's farming methods.' Over 60 per cent of those interviewed agreed, and almost 25 per cent strongly agreed, that this was indeed the case. A further 28 per cent had no opinion on the subject whilst a mere 10 per cent disagreed, with an additional 0.9 per cent strongly disagreeing. The important word to note here is the highly emotive term *destroying*. We are not talking about

changing, or even damaging, the countryside. As far as a representative majority of the inhabitants of these Berkshire towns are concerned, their environment is being destroyed by farmers. One wonders at the response had the question been put in Cambridgeshire, or some of the other eastern counties which have borne the brunt of 'prairie-ization'.

Even the much-heralded productivity and efficiency of our farmers has been questioned of late. Spurred on by a system of grants, subsidies and Government exhortations, the farmers have responded magnificently. There is no place for market forces here, no limits or market saturation. Just keep on producing and pile up the surpluses in Europe. When the mountains become embarrassingly visible they can be sold off cheap to the Eastern Bloc, or some politically acceptable scheme devised for giving them away. Alternatively, the food can simply be destroyed.

It is quite remarkable that this 'Alice in Wonderland' situation has persisted for as long as it has. The reason can only be put down to public ignorance. However, in 1982 Tory MP Richard Body turned the spotlight on the grant and subsidy structure. Using official statistics, Body calculated that during 1983 for every £100 net earned by the farmer a further £200 was spent by Government or EEC agencies on agricultural support of one sort or another. The figure has almost certainly risen in the intervening period, and this at a time when public expenditure in every other direction is under attack. Is it any wonder that the public is becoming increasingly vocal in its condemnation of a system which on the one hand encourages massive surpluses at the taxpayer's expense whilst at the same time it assaults the countryside? This is without even mentioning the stockpiling and wasting of food whilst millions around the globe go hungry.

However, times are changing, as the dairy farmers now know to their cost. For the last three years there has been a quota on milk production. Farmers are being forced to cut back – often with disastrous financial consequences. Next it will be the turn of cereal producers, though at the time of writing it is not certain exactly what form the restrictions will take. Everywhere among farmers there is gloom and despondency – a feeling that they are trapped on a treadmill of ever-rising input

costs set against declining returns for their products. Squeezed at both ends, many farmers who borrowed heavily during the heady days of agricultural expansion in the 1970s are now staring bankruptcy in the face. The only option open is to sell their farms, yet with plummeting land prices what can they get for them, and more importantly who would want to buy?

Various solutions to these problems are currently being peddled but in most cases it is symptoms rather than root causes that are being addressed. Countryside campaigners want to see a re-orientation of grants, so that they favour conservation rather than intensive husbandry methods. There is talk of taking land out of cultivation altogether, as currently happens in the USA, or adopting 'low input' methods of agriculture in which less fertilizer and pesticides are used, resulting in lower yields and consequently smaller surpluses.

A top official in the Ministry of Agriculture has even speculated on the likely emergence of a divided Britain: 'You could get two distinct parts of the country. In one part, mainly in the eastern half of the country, mainly on the better land, there would be very intensive agriculture, high input, high output, as much being grown on one acre as used to be grown on two acres; and in much of the rest of the country – particularly much of the western and northern part of the country – there would really be little economic basis for agriculture and, therefore, those parts would possibly have to become a pleasure park.' This is a prospect which is likely to alienate everyone save the prosperous large cereal producers in the east.

Whilst the conservationists are leading the consumer movement against the effects of modern farming methods on the countryside, there is an even larger lobby at work on the quality of food. No longer is it only the 'crank' and 'health food freak' who stops to think about the food he or she is eating. The message that 'we are what we eat' and that the food we consume has a great deal to do with whether or not we stay healthy has at last been taken up by the population at large. You only have to walk around any supermarket to notice the intense interest being taken in the small print on the labels. Does it contain E this or that? If it does, indeed if it contains any artificial colouring or preservatives at all, then for many people out it goes. It matters not that the food processors insist there is no

possible danger to health. Alternatives exist which don't contain additives so why take the risk? This consumer backlash against adulterated food is now so great that food manufacturers are falling over backwards in their keenness to eliminate additives from their products.

It would be naive to assume that this awakened consumer awareness is going to stop once the question of additives has been settled. The next focus of concern will be that of contaminants. Regrettably, the products of our countryside fail to live up to the twin promises of purity and goodness so lovingly presented in television commercials. Crops subjected to a high pesticide regime in the fields leave the farm gate complete with residues of these substances. Livestock dosed with antibiotics, hormones and other substances pass on traces in the meat and dairy produce. If such chemicals are to be used then contamination is unavoidable.

As with food additives, the chemical industry insists that such low levels of pesticides, or antibiotics or other substances that persist in food are harmless. Given that until recently there was little alternative the public just had to put up with these assurances. Not any longer. Organically grown food, that is food which has been produced without recourse to artificial fertilizers and poisonous sprays, is becoming increasingly available. As with food containing additives, you are not obliged simply to trust the experts – you can buy organically grown instead.

It is my view that a major shift in agricultural practices towards organic methods would not only result in produce which satisfied the consumer demand for 'safe' and nutritious food but would also alleviate many of the environmental concerns expressed by conservationists. There would be a return to more traditional mixed farming with animals reared outdoors. This would reverse the trend of ever-larger featureless fields, for hedges would be required to keep the stock in. Agricultural pollution from fertilizers and animal slurry would be significantly reduced. Persistent pesticides would not be needed. Aerial crop-spraying and straw-burning would disappear. Furthermore, organic farming with its higher labour input would not only help stem the flow of labour from the countryside but would create new jobs.

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Such a solution to our agricultural dilemma may seem extreme and impossibly utopian. Yet I believe the attempt has to be made. Tinkering at the fringes is not sufficient. We have created, out of plentiful supplies of cheap energy, a polluting, dangerous and resource-wasting system of farming. As the twenty-first century approaches, we are moving into a world where resource and energy scarcity will assume a much more critical importance. Only those farming methods which take account of these constraints will survive. As conventional farming continues to dither, unable to offer any way forward, the time is ripe to turn to the now unorthodox, yet environmentally sound, biological methods of producing food.

This book then has two functions. The first is to supply a list of addresses where organic fresh food can be obtained. The other and perhaps main purpose is to address many of the questions sketched out here. Part I looks at the overall problems inherent in modern farming. Chapter 1 covers environmental issues such as pesticide and fertilizer abuse, straw and slurry disposal, soil erosion and genetic loss. In Chapter 2, I draw attention to the additives which are routinely fed to farm animals, from antibiotics to tranquillizing drugs. The final chapter in this section looks at the end-result of modern farming – the food we eat. Containing traces of pesticides, residues of this and that, nitrates from over-fertilization and so on – how safe is it?

The purpose of the second part of the book is to try and answer some of the questions that are asked about organic farming and organic food. Does it mean going back to the Dark Ages? Would we all starve if fertilizers and pesticides weren't used? Is organic food any better for us, indeed is there any difference at all? A chapter on practical examples highlights some of the successes and problems encountered by a number of British farmers and growers.

In both Parts I and II, I have tried not to make statements which cannot be backed up by scientific facts that can be checked. The numbers which appear throughout the text refer to the list of references to be found in Appendix 4.

Finally, Part III gives a region-by-region gazetteer of suppliers of organic fresh food, a chapter on the typical types and brand names of dried organic produce and a list of the

wholesalers dealing in organic food. From this it should be possible for almost everyone to find a suitable supplier not too far from their own home.

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PART I

MODERN FARMING – AN INDICTMENT

1 ASSAULT ON THE LAND



What Price Modern Agriculture?

The twentieth century has seen the total ascendancy of industrial technology in all walks of life and in all corners of the globe. By its standards 'progress' is measured. Anyone or anything which does not conform to this outlook is labelled 'Luddite'. Modern farming is yet one more example of this industrialization of society. Our countryside has become a huge outdoor food factory. Each farm, each region has its own speciality. In the warm and dry eastern side of the country monster machines range over huge featureless fields of wheat or barley. Over in the west where the climate is wetter and grass grows well, the dairy industry is based. As for pigs and chickens – it doesn't really matter where they are located, for being permanently confined indoors they are quite independent of geography.

This specialization and economy of scale has brought great benefits in terms of the amount of food produced from our land. Yields have rocketed and continue to rise, year by year. There