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**ATTITUDES TOWARDS CONVERSION
TO ORGANIC PRODUCTION SYSTEMS:
A STUDY OF FARMERS IN ENGLAND**

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Susan Fowler and Nic Lampkin

March 2001

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Preface

This report is the outcome of a research project commissioned and financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The authors wish to acknowledge the advice and assistance of the officials in charge of the study. Thanks are also due to a number of others who contributed to this study. Tony Hyde and Marian Bennun carried out the telephone survey, and we also owe a debt of gratitude to the farmers who responded willingly and in detail to our questionnaire. We would also like to acknowledge helpful comments from Christopher Stopes. Nevertheless, the views expressed in this report, errors and omissions, are the sole responsibility of the authors.

March 2001

Executive Summary

- The recent rapid increase in the area of land and number of farms in conversion or under organic management mirrors growth elsewhere in the European Union. This growth has occurred as a result of problems in conventional management and markets, together with the increasing financial attractiveness of adopting the system. However, the greater part of conversions are within the livestock sector, and although there have been many inquiries to the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS), there has been significantly less take-up of conversion. This study has investigated farmer attitudes to conversion to explore what perceptual barriers to organic conversion exist, and whether they are changing in importance over time.
- Previous international and UK studies of farmer motivations to convert to organic production draw attention to concerns over technical issues, financial security, personal health and more general societal and ethical concerns, especially related to environmental conservation and food quality. Recently, the emphasis between these issues appears to have shifted more strongly to financial motivations, though it is unsafe to generalise; more contemporary studies also distinguish clusters of different attitude types within the organic sector. There is also evidence that large numbers of conventional farmers have considered conversion, although there are significant barriers that stop them from progressing the idea. These have included poor access to information and advice, concerns about technical issues such as weed and pest control, lack of confidence in the rate of development of markets, the continuance of premiums and the commitment of government to support the sector. There are also concerns about the level of investments and labour requirements needed to convert farming systems to organic production, and worries about restricting future development options for farms.
- This study carried out a telephone survey of three groups of farmers: those converting their farms within the existing Organic Farming Scheme (OFS); those who have contacted OCIS and had an initial half-day visit, but have not progressed conversion; and a sample of farmers drawn at random from MAFF holdings database. Due to data restrictions, farmers had to agree to participate. Usable responses were obtained from 58, 125 and 66 farms, respectively, from the three samples; they represented response rates of 16%, 25% and 15%.
- The results of the survey indicate that the main enterprises declared on OFS farms were predominantly of livestock; there is evidence of smaller size, greater representation of horticulture, and less participation in other agri-environmental schemes in the OCIS sample. The Census sample holdings were larger, on average, and more specialised in orientation. These structural differences may have been influential with regard to attitudes expressed by respondents.
- In response to a series of attitudinal statements, high overall credence was placed in the environmental benefits of organic farming. Nevertheless, farmers in the OCIS and Census samples displayed less confidence in being able to cope with pests and diseases without use of agrochemicals, and recognition of profitability and the importance of the premium for the financial success of organic production were limited. Worries about the practicality of organic standards were highest among those considering but not progressing conversion in the OCIS sample. The excitement of the challenge of conversion was most evident among the OFS

sample. Few among the three groups sampled perceived either personal characteristics or farm staff as obstructions to conversion. Overall, given certain assumptions, the OFS sample were somewhat better disposed towards the organic system than either of the other two samples; the OCIS sample is, in turn (only slightly) better inclined towards organic farming than the sample drawn randomly from the Census. 35% of the Census sample, and 60% of the OCIS sample, would consider organic conversion in the future (the former, if indicative of the general farming population, suggests that more farmers than those who have contacted the help line are potentially interested in conversion).

- The situation and development of markets do not appear to constitute an obstacle to organic conversion. Members of the OFS sample are a little more pessimistic than those of the other two samples about future prospects, possibly indicating greater in-depth knowledge. The vegetable and milk marketing channels are perceived as best developed, with less confidence in eggs, crops, and finally meat marketing channels, which were seen as little developed.
- Information and advice about organic conversion are perceived as being easy to obtain, although the OFS sample are much less inclined to perceive them as 'very easy' to access. Those in conversion, in the OFS sample, cited stopping use of agrochemicals as being a major motivation; the influence of spouse's interest was less important, and selling into local markets featured hardly at all.
- For those not converting their holdings in the OCIS and Census samples, influential factors favouring consideration were financial viability of the system, and improving environmental quality. For these groups, also, the OFS is an important factor in the decision to convert; for the OCIS sample, more answered that it would be one of the reasons, but in the sample drawn from the Census, more answered that it would be the main reason. The levels of payment available under the scheme were thought to be too low, and payment over a 5-year conversion period was favoured; there was strong support for a doubling of the payments.
- When provided with the option to comment on any issue raised by the questionnaire, a number of themes emerged. There were concerns about the quality, rather than the accessibility, of information and advice; difficulties relating to standards, including their consistency and stability; the structure of regulation of organic certification; access to markets; the availability of funding; and certification fees. These comments suggest, in some instances, that there is poor understanding of the nature of the organic system, and a need for better communication and involvement of farmers in the institutional framework of the organic sector.
- A statistical examination of the structure of attitudes in more depth showed few strong correlations between the attitudes expressed and other characteristics. A discriminant analysis suggested that the major alignment of attitudes across the sample segregates the more favourable set of attitudes to management problems and the profitability of the organic system held by the OFS sample with those of the other two groups; also, small size and negative perceptions about the level of premium distinguish the OCIS sample from the general sample drawn from the Agricultural Census.
- Although the number of responses to the survey were rather limited, the coherence of the results and their accordance with the intrinsic trends throughout previous studies suggest that valid conclusions may be drawn. The results

suggest that if farmers can be persuaded to embark on organic conversion, many of the apprehensions and misperceptions they have of the system fade rapidly; however, this depends on the adequate advisory support being available during, as well as prior to, the conversion period.

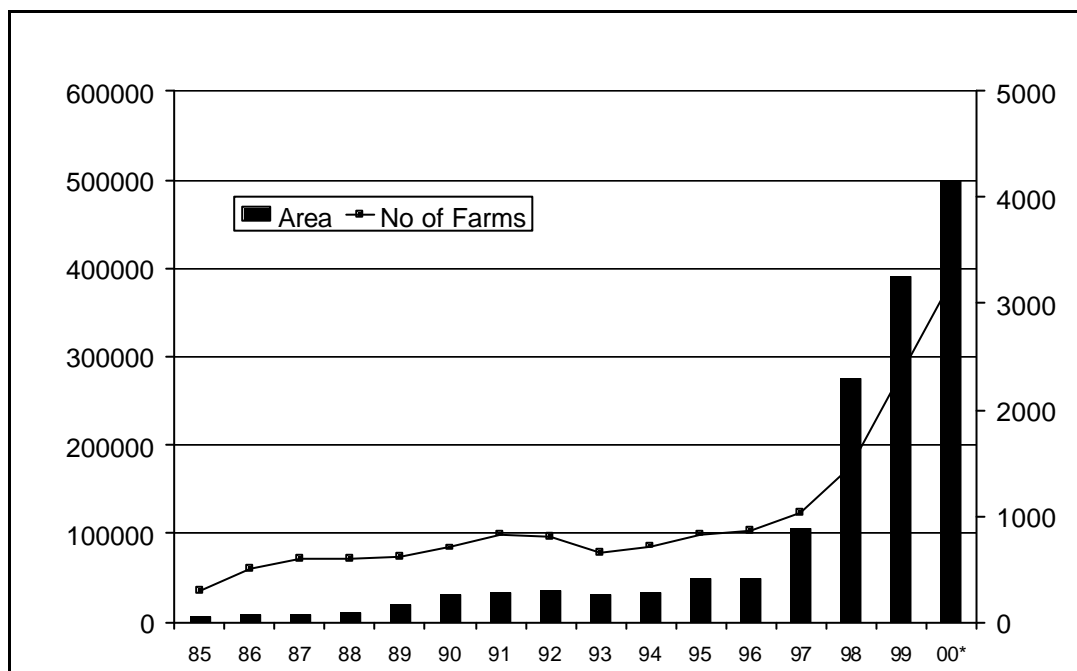
- From the study results, it is recommended that:
 - future programmes to aid conversion should take the complex nature of farming structure into account by being more appropriately targeted; a simplified small farm conversion scheme may also be appropriate;
 - existing research on the performance of converting organic farms, especially in financial terms, needs to be disseminated more effectively;
 - access to information and advice beyond that provided by OCIS in the pre-conversion stage should be strengthened, to improve the performance and minimise the risk of conversion;
 - standards development and enforcement need to be modernised, by reinforcing and broadening the involvement of farmers, broadening ownership among stakeholders to cement their role as consumer assurance mechanisms;
 - the image of the organic system needs to be developed and enhanced to address negative perceptions among the farming community. The organic movement needs to take responsibility for better public relations, rather than treating issues of dissemination of information simply as knowledge transfer.



1. INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT TO THE STUDY

This report describes the results of a study, commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, of the attitudes of farmers towards conversion to organic production methods. The study has taken place in the context of dynamic change, both in the realm of conventional agriculture, and in organic farming itself. In mainstream farming, sustained and significant reductions in returns are bringing about fundamental structural changes. Partly in response, there has been recent, rapid growth in the numbers of organic farms and area managed organically (see Table 1.1; Table 1.2 provides a comparison with selected other European Union countries), which has been supported by the increased priority given to the sector by government policies. In particular, the Organic Farming Scheme provides financial support to farms during the process of conversion; and the Organic Conversion Information Service provides advisory support of various kinds to farmers considering taking the initial steps to convert.

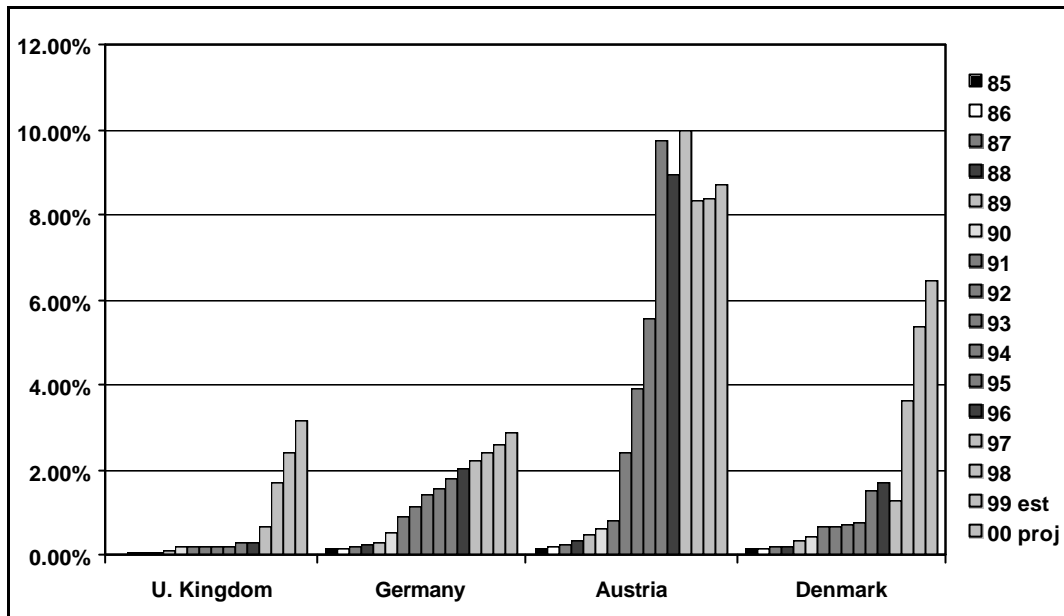
Figure 1.1: Development of organic land area (ha., left axis) and number of farms (right axis) in Great Britain



In some respects, growth in British organic farming mirrors that in other European Union countries, although despite a long organic tradition, Britain has lagged behind the majority. In 1985, the organic sector was relatively small, with approximately 300 farms. While some growth occurred in the late 1980s, it was followed by reduced growth rates. Between 1991 and 1993, when (for example) the introduction of conversion aid schemes had led to rapid growth in Austria and Germany, the number of organic farms in Britain actually declined. Growth revived in 1994, when all EU member states introduced support programmes under the agri-environment programme (EC Reg. 2078/92), although as the UK programme had comparatively low payment rates, the recent acceleration in growth rates did not come about until

1997. Currently, of the estimated 472,515 ha. in the UK in September 2000, the largest area was in Scotland (61%), followed by England (31%) and Wales (7%), with the remainder in Northern Ireland. The relatively high share of organic land area in Scotland is the result of small number of large farms in moorland areas that have entered conversion (SA, 1999).

Figure 1.2: Development of organic land area as a proportion of the total UAA in the UK compared to Germany, Austria and Denmark (1985-2000)



A number of reasons for the recent increased interest in organic production were suggested in a recent survey of experts from the organic sector, representing the farming community, agricultural policymakers and food market professionals (Padel and Foster, 2000). Respondents were asked for possible reasons explaining the recent more rapid growth in organic farming in Britain. The major themes emerging from these semi-structured interviews comprised: the crisis in conventional agriculture; increased consumer demand for organic food resulting from a combination of greater environmental awareness, food scares and growing incomes; higher conversion grants and an increased government commitment to support organic farming under the new administration; the emerging relatively high profitability of organic farming; and increased publicity for both organic farming and the Organic Farming Scheme.

The distribution of organic farms within England and Wales is skewed towards livestock production, and partly in consequence, the predominantly grass-based regions in the South and West have a proportionately higher number of organic producers (SA, 1999). Compared to conventional agriculture, relatively more mixed farms are managed organically, with correspondingly fewer specialised dairy and arable farms. The reasons for the lower uptake of organic farming in the arable sector are not fully understood, but are suggested to be both technical (the more specialised and intensive a system, the more difficult it is to convert) as well as economic (the better profitability of the conventional arable sector), which has made people less motivated to introduce any change. In addition, a substantial proportion of arable systems are stockless, whereas as stockless organic farming systems are

not so common and require land to be set-aside for fertility building through a clover-based sward (Padel and Foster, 2000).

Little is known about current farmers' attitudes towards organic farming in general, or the Organic Farming Scheme in particular. However, there were around 7,500 OCIS enquiries, but approximately only 1,100 successful applications to the Organic Farming Scheme in England up to the beginning of 2000. This suggests that a considerable proportion of farmers expressing an interest in organic production have not followed this up with an application to the OFS (although a proportion might be among unsuccessful applicants) and, possibly in consequence, there may remain considerable perceptual and other barriers to conversion.

It is likely that an even greater number of farmers might have some interest in organic production, but have not contacted the help-line. In 1992, asked whether they would consider organic production in future on all or parts of the farm if they are not doing so already, 38% of the 25,799 producers surveyed in the UK answered positively (NatWest, 1992). The highest interest in organic production was noted in Wales (45%), followed by Southern England (40%), Northern England (37%), Scotland (36%) and the Midlands (33%). Apart from regional differences, positive responses to this question indicated an influence of farm size (greater interest existed among producers with holdings under 50 ha.); of enterprise (there was more interest among dairy, beef and sheep producers); and of age (farmers under 45 years expressed more agreement). Similarly, a survey of conventional and organic horticultural producers in the UK by Burton *et al.* (1997) found a substantial proportion of the conventional sample (approximately one third) having considered organic production as an option for the future.

This level of general interest among conventional producers, which does not seem to have been taken further, needs to be better understood. In particular, the barriers – whether perceived or actual – related to peer estimation, risk aversion, cost and technical issues are likely to be of shifting significance, in the new economic circumstances of farming in Britain. Thus this report is designed to explore contemporary attitudes to organic conversion, to support the better targeting of policy incentives for organic farming contained in the new Rural Development Programme.

The substance of this report is divided into three further chapters. The following chapter provides a comprehensive summary of international research into attitudes and motivations related to conversion to organic farming. Developing on the basis of this earlier work, the third chapter describes the present empirical investigation of farmers' attitudes to conversion to organic farming. The material analysed comes from a telephone questionnaire carried out during the late summer and early autumn of 2000. Although it had been intended to follow up these interviews with in-depth focus group discussions, poor weather conditions in the autumn of 2000 causing widespread flooding, and the geographically scattered location of respondents, caused difficulty in assembling more than two or three participants at any one time and place. Thus, the final chapter reviews, comments on, and draws policy conclusions from, the analysis of questionnaire responses.

2. A REVIEW OF EARLIER STUDIES OF FARMERS' MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDES TO ORGANIC CONVERSION

The aim of this review is to explore the findings of earlier attitudinal studies in the international as well as in the UK context. It is divided into three main sections. The first covers studies of the motives and attitudes of organic producers. It identifies and appraises international studies with particular emphasis on more recent surveys, and of the role of government aid schemes; then reviews similar studies from the UK; and concludes by reconsidering attitudinal differences among organic producers, and factors that might influence this. The following section reviews studies of conventional farmers' attitudes to organic production. Again, consideration of international results is followed by a synopsis of UK studies. The final section draws some tentative conclusions from the review.

Surveys of organic producers' motivations and attitudes

International studies

The international research literature on organic agriculture identifies farming related and personal motives falling into four broad categories. These are: husbandry related motives; financial motives; personal concerns; and general concerns (see Table 2.1: for a review of a range of studies, see also Padel, 2001).

Table 2.1 Motivations to convert to organic production	
<i>Farming related motives</i>	<i>Personal motives</i>
<u>Husbandry and technical reasons</u> animal health problems soil fertility and erosion problems	<u>Personal health</u> own and family health problems ergonomic reasons
<u>Financial motives</u> solving existing financial problems securing the future of the farm saving costs premium marketing	<u>General concerns</u> stewardship food quality environmental conservation rural development
Source: Padel (2001)	

Historically, organic farmers have identified problems with conventional farming systems as a reason for adopting their system, for example in the area of animal health or soil fertility (e.g. Wernick and Lockeretz, 1977). However, in two recent studies from Switzerland and the United States, farmers mention the professional challenge in organic conversion, rather than problems with conventional systems. Respondents in each study saw the decision to convert to organic production as farm business-related, rather than associated with ideology and a change in lifestyle. Farmers with low and moderate input use were more likely to consider conversion (Duram, 1999; Maurer, 1997).

Financial motivations include attempts to solve existing problems, as well as the desire to secure the long-term existence of the farm by taking advantage of the cost saving aspect of organic production, and achieving premium prices. Although the aim to secure the future of the farm was frequently mentioned in earlier studies,

the incentive to sell for a premium and the view of organic farming as a means to cut costs has become more dominant in later studies (for example, in Duram, 1999; Maurer, 1997). In another Swiss survey of organic producers in 1997, the main motivations were described as demand and the opportunity to access premium prices; the particular pressure exercised by one multiple retailer with dominance in the produce market; the availability of direct payments in mountain regions; and on environmental grounds in areas where extensive agriculture is dominant. A favourable social acceptance of organic farming was also described as important in regions with extensive production (FIBL, 1997).

There is a clear shift in emphasis towards financially related motives in more recent studies, and although the reasons for this shift in attitude are not properly understood, it seems as though economic motives for conversion have become more socially acceptable. It is possible that a range of factors are involved, including the deteriorating financial situation of conventional farming, the relatively better financial performance of some farm types under organic management, and conversion incentive payments. Although, in a number of countries, conversion aid appears to affect farmers' decision making, suggested by increased growth rates of the organic sector after their introduction (Michelsen and Soegaard, 1999; Padel *et al.*, 1999), the importance of subsidies on farmers' decisions to convert has yet to be studied in detail.

A Swedish survey, in the wake of the first introduction of a conversion aid programme in 1988, found that the recipients were not only motivated by the financial incentives of the programme, but also by general concerns about the farm profitability, food quality and environmental issues (Svensson, 1991). A utility difference model was used to re-analyse the Swedish data for factors that determine whether a subsidy was required to motivate to organic conversion. The results showed that farmers having need of subsidies manage larger, less-diversified farms, and were more concerned about organic inspection, quality, and the adequacy of technical advice. However, it was found that access to more market outlets and information sources could substitute for payment level in the farmer's utility function (Lohr and Salomonsson, 2000).

In a larger survey of 577 Danish organic producers, the main reason for conversion was found to be the prospect of higher income after conversion (for more than 50% of the respondents), although the relative roles of premium price marketing versus conversion subsidies in improving earnings were not differentiated (Noe, 1999, personal communication; Michelsen, 1999, personal communication). An even larger Finnish study of 1300 organic farmers (almost one-third of all organic farmers in the country) in 1998 identified environmental concern as the main reason for a conversion, but economic reasons as the next most important motive for converting, and conversion support was crucial in the decision to convert.

An alternative perspective is provided by an Austrian study of farmers' willingness to continue in organic production after membership of a conversion aid scheme. This was based on a representative survey of organic producers in the ÖPUL programme (the Austrian agri-environment programme). It suggested that approximately 13% of organic farms, mainly in the region of Tyrol, were likely to convert back to conventional production in 2000, when they can leave the programme without penalties. The main reasons given were lack of access to premium price marketing

for main products; the relatively low payment differential, compared with alternative and less restrictive programmes; the high costs of organic concentrate; inspection requirements; and the future investment required to adapt to the constraints of the livestock standards regulation (introduced by the European Union in 2000). A more detailed analysis of the data showed that membership in a producer organisation, turnover from direct sales, and the education of the farmer all had a significant positive impact in this context (Kirner, 1999; Weber, 2000).

Studies from the UK

In 1978, the first UK survey (Vine and Bateman, 1981) of 70 organic farmers in England and Wales included questions about the farmers' motivations for producing organically. Respondents mentioned improvement of husbandry most frequently (approximately 75%), followed by concerns about food quality for humans and stock (38%), debt reduction (28%) and the risk associated with agro-chemicals (24%). Ashmole (1993), in intensive interviews with 40 farmers and growers, uncovered similar motivations to those found by Vine and Bateman, although environmental concerns were more dominant; several participants mentioned a desire to go "back to the land". Murphy (1992), although not studying motivations directly, reported comments made by approximately 500 producers in the UK responding to a postal survey, about problems they faced with the organic system. Of these, 20% mentioned husbandry difficulties and 28% mentioned that they would like to see increased prices or premiums.

In a comparison of five Scottish and ten French organic producers, economic considerations were the main motive for the Scottish producers, whereas the interviewees in France were also attracted by the values attached to organic farming (Marshall, 1999). In contrast (and corresponding more to previous studies, such as Beharrel and Crockett, 1992) a survey of the motivation to produce organically, found non-economic aspects dominant in the decision to go organic, although the sample of 237 producers represented exclusively horticulture (151 conventional and 86 organic: Burton *et al.*, 1997b).

Research involving case studies of organic producers (Fowler *et al.*, 1999; Haggard and Padel, 1996) indicates some incidence of financial motives for farmers converting to organic production; however, motives for conversion and views on organic farming were diverse, and the sample size was too small to generalise the results. McEachern and Willock (2000) used factor analysis to evaluate the results of a survey of 122 organic producers in Scotland. They identified *naturalness*, *market demand* and *policy* factors as important for the conversion decision, implying that the producers were more strongly inclined to agree with statements regarding these areas than to other statements.

Variation in attitudes and studies of farming styles

The substance of recent studies of motivations for conversion suggests a shift towards environmental, political and economic concerns, rather than the earlier religious or philosophical ideals, or problems with husbandry. The "new" organic farmers also increasingly appear to view organic farming as a professional challenge. Business aspects of organic farming, rather than lifestyle, seem to have become more dominant. This suggests that attitudes have changed with successive cohorts

of converters. It is likely that this differentiation may follow the same pattern relating to personal and farm related characteristics, observed in the adoption/diffusion model (Padel, 2001; Rogers, 1983); this identifies different attitudinal features in earlier and later adopters of agricultural innovations. However, there is also a strong indication that the differences in values and attitudes are related to farm type.

Overall, there appear to be indications that organic producers are not a homogenous group with regard to their attitudes and motivations; some surveys have attempted to cluster organic producers into different groups. For example, Ramsden and Rodgers (1999) found differences in attitudes of organic producers to marketing in the UK, from a postal survey of 59 organic producers. For the majority, direct marketing was the main outlet, although a large proportion of the sample (81%) used more than one outlet, with five producers supplying supermarkets. The authors detected a difference in attitude between the supermarket suppliers and other producers. The former group was characterised as more business-oriented, whereas the non-supermarket users were concerned about their loss of independence and the lack of compatibility of the supermarket outlet with the organic farming ethos.

A small study of 12 farmers, converting to the organic system under the German aid scheme from 1989 (Peters, 1997), showed differences in attitudes even among farmers who were converting at the same time. This study identified two dominant types of farmers, described as low-input orientated and market-orientated; farmers in the former group were characterised by low use of technology and the use of direct marketing, whereas farmers in the latter group used more external inputs and cooperated closely with retailers. Noe (1999) studied value orientations among organic dairy producers in Denmark and found two pairs of opposing values: craft versus business, and turnover versus economy. Producers were observed to hold a range of combinations of these.

Surveys of conventional producers' attitudes and comparisons with organic producers

International studies

There have been fewer studies of the attitude of conventional farmers towards organic farming and their likelihood to consider a conversion to it, although this perspective would appear to be of particular interest in designing policy incentives to promote more widespread conversion. Corresponding to the NatWest and Burton *et al.* surveys in the UK, mentioned above, studies outside the UK also found a substantial proportion of the conventional sample having considered organic production as an option for the future. For example, Fairweather's (1999) comparative survey of conventional and organic arable producers in New Zealand reported approximately one-third of the conventional producers having considered organic production

A review of international studies of conventional farmers' attitudes towards organic production (Padel and Lampkin, 1994), noted a number of barriers to conversion, including lack of information; anxiety concerning weed and disease problems due to a lack of expertise in alternative control strategies; perceived limitation in future demand; uncertainty about access to market outlets and development of price

premiums; and other institutional barriers, including a lack in government commitment.

Those factors have, generally, been confirmed in more recent surveys. Worries about weeds and other technical problems were major reasons preventing interested farmers in New Zealand in going ahead with the conversion to organic farming; Fairweather (1999) concluded that dealing with issues of technical and economic viability of organic production more comprehensively would overcome a major stumbling block for conventional producers, and could result in higher rates of conversion.

Interviews with 15 conventional and organic producers in Michigan carried out in 1991 found that both groups of farmers shared a concern for the economic risks associated with farming, although the organic farmers reported a significantly greater concern for long-term sustainability and a greater willingness to incur present risk to gain future benefits (McCann *et al.*, 1997).

An Austrian comparison of the farm structure of organic farms with that of conventional producers receiving payments under the reduced input use option of their agri-environment programme concluded that the low-input farms would be well placed to convert to organic production. An attitudinal survey aiming to identify whether, and with what incentives, these producers could be persuaded to switch to organic farming methods concluded that high labour demands, a lack of marketing outlets that pay organic premium prices, a lack of information about organic farming techniques, restrictions in future farm development and investment required in animal housing were major barriers toward the adoption of organic farming (Kirner, 1999). Vogel (1996) attributed the lack of uptake of organic farming in the more intensive, cropping regions of Austria to two factors: the capping mechanism on holding size in the initial conversion aid scheme; and a lack of marketing opportunities for organic sugar beet. In the new support programme under ÖPUL the ceiling has been removed, but uptake in arable regions has remained low. Eder (1998) attributed this low uptake to a lack of expertise among arable farmers.

Swiss research supports the hypothesis that future conversion to organic production is more likely on farms where no major restructuring is necessary to comply with organic standards, particularly in relation to stocking rates and input use. This has favoured conversion to organic farming in extensively farmed mountainous regions, whereas uptake of organic methods is comparatively low in regions with intensive fruit and wine production (FIBL, 1997). In a more detailed survey of conventional producers (Maurer, 1997), the main reason given for not undertaking conversion was the higher labour demand of organic production, whereas important considerations for farmers intending convert in the coming two to five years were direct payments, and the additional income from premiums. However, the majority of farmers in the survey, both conventional and organic, saw the economic future for their holdings as relatively bleak. The attitude among conventional farmers towards their organic colleagues had improved significantly, compared with earlier studies. This is possibly a reflection of increasing emphasis on the farming and technological aspects of organic production, compared to a previously more ideological focus. The experience of the farmers with organic production in the neighbourhood, or directly on the farm, was found to significantly affect the respondents' likelihood to consider organic farming seriously.

An evaluation of the EU Agri-Environment Programme (Loibl, 1999), which sampled approximately 1000 farm households in 20 sample regions of Europe, included questions on attitudes to organic farming and appropriate measures to encourage it. Considerable national differences were identified, with farmers in countries where organic farming support had been integrated in agricultural policy for some time (Austria, Switzerland, German and Sweden) able to express more positive attitudes to organic farming and their motives for becoming an organic farmer. In contrast, in the UK and France, respondents largely saw organic farming as a niche activity. In Spain and Portugal, even awareness of organic production was low; respondents were less clear about its meaning and the difference to extensive production methods employed, and information and advice about the subject was limited. Regional and landscape-related differences were also observed. Farmers in regions with extensive production were more receptive towards organic farming, whereas in the regions with more intensive arable and horticultural holdings producers were sceptical (for example, in one German region, Wetterau, where intensive sugar-beet production occurs). In regions with permanent pasture, the cost of investment required for welfare-oriented animal housing was seen as an obstacle. Organic farmers were more conscious of environmental problems than traditional farmers. Overall, the principal reasons given for not converting to organic farming were mainly economic, such as the lack of appropriate marketing outlets and additional requirements for labour. The author therefore concluded that conversion aid should not just focus on production, but also on regional marketing initiatives.

Studies from the UK

Apart from the UK region in Loibl's (1999) European survey, and the comparative study of conventional and organic horticultural producers (Burton *et al.*, 1997) also mentioned earlier, there are no recent specific studies of conventional producers' attitudes to organic production in the UK; indeed there are only two such studies from beginning of the 1990s. A Scottish study (Chadwick and McGregor, 1991), using focus group discussions with farmers from of a range of different farm types, found different levels of knowledge about organic production, and confusion with regard to production standards. In addition, there were a number of concerns specific to farm type, and complaints about the lack of independent information regarding the implications that conversion might have.

A survey in England (Beharrel and Crockett, 1992) of attitudes of 43 conventional and 42 organic producers to organic production aimed to establish the difference between the two groups with regards to certain values. Both groups expressed similar attitudes to statements relating to the economic aspects of organic productions, whereas differences were found in statements about health, the environment and security of food supplies relating to organic farming. The authors concluded that the then-contemporary shared negative economic assessment of organic farming was a formidable barrier to an increased rate of conversion to organic production.

There is some indication that gender is a factor in conventional farmers' attitude towards organic horticultural production. For example, Burton *et al.*'s (1997) survey of organic and conventional horticultural producers in the UK found a higher proportion of female growers among the organic horticulturalists, compared with the conventional group. A logit analysis of the survey data identified a higher probability

of conversion if the farmer was female, was concerned about environmental issues, was a member of an environmental organisation, obtained information mainly from other farmers, aimed for higher self-sufficiency or believed that organic farming could satisfy society's need for food and fibre (Burton *et al.*, 1997a; Burton *et al.*, 1999). Furthermore the education, the proportion of income from agriculture and some beliefs on the effect of farm size on the environment were found to be explanatory variables, but were not confirmed in the statistical analysis. However, given the importance of farm type on some attitudinal variables, these results from horticultural producers cannot be generalised for the agricultural sector as a whole.

Conclusions

This review has covered a range of international and British studies of the motivations and attitudes of organic producers. Based on these findings, it may be concluded that organic producers are not a single, homogenous group in this respect. Motivations for conversion differ, as do attitudes towards various aspects of organic production such as input use, husbandry and craftsmanship in farming, use of marketing channels and the business outlook of organic production. A range of possible variables that might influence the attitude can be identified: farm size, farm type, social background, region, and the period during which the conversion occurs. It appears possible that the organic farmers can also be classified into a range of different farming styles.

Studies of conventional farmers' attitudes to organic production, and those comparing conventional and organic producers, have been used to generate a better understanding of barriers to a more widespread organic conversion. Acceptance of organic farming was generally found to be higher in regions with less intensive agricultural production, such as the mountainous and marginal regions, and in the livestock farm types dominant in such locations. In countries where organic farming had been part of mainstream governmental support schemes for some time, farmers were able to express clearly what they saw as potential benefits of an organic conversion.

Organic and conventional farmers appear to share concerns for the economic situation of agriculture in general, but differ in their attitude to environmental issues, health and the security of food supplies. However, there does not appear to be a clear dividing line: in several studies a substantial proportion of farmers in the conventional sample have been, or were still, considering organic production seriously as an option for the future. Issues related to the financial viability of organic production systems were identified as barriers to conversion to organic farming; in particular, studies identified uncertainty over the future level of premiums; perception of a limited future demand for organic products, higher labour demands of organic systems and the additional investments required to comply with the standards. Furthermore, a lack of information, particularly on technical issues such as alternative strategies for weed, pest and disease control and confusion with regards to the standards was frequently mentioned. This analysis and review of previous studies has helped to inform the investigation of current attitudes to conversion organic farming in England, which is reported in the following chapter.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY OF FARMERS' ATTITUDES TO ORGANIC CONVERSION

Introduction

The aim of this survey was to identify the nature of barriers to organic conversion across a wide range of situations, and in particular to examine key differences between those who have made the transition and those who have not. Accordingly, three groups from which samples might be drawn were distinguished: farms where the decision to convert had been made; farms where conversion had been considered but not progressed; and farms where, as far as could be ascertained, no interest in conversion to organic farming was apparent. A telephone-based survey was adopted because of the speed with which information could be gained and low cost of extensive coverage, supporting the cooperation of respondents, although this trade-off has precluded in-depth investigation. This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first provides a description of the survey design; the second summarises the bulk of the results, derived from questions allowing either closed or semi-open responses; the third provides detail of the responses to the final, open question; and the fourth provides results of a preliminary discriminant analysis performed on the survey data.

Survey and questionnaire design

Since some questions were only appropriate to one or two of the groups of farms sampled, the questionnaire was designed with a core appropriate to all, but provided separate pathways for specific questions to each group. A copy of the questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix A: broadly, it is designed to obtain information on farm size, structure and location of respondents; a series of statements designed to test their attitudes with regard to conversion to organic farming; similar statement sets with regard to marketing and extension issues; and specific questions concerned with the functioning of the present Organic Farming Scheme.

Construction of the sample frame and identifying the sample involved several compromises:

- For farms where the decision to convert had been made, selection was from MAFF's records of farms participating in the Organic Farming Scheme. Since full information on such farms can be derived from agricultural census returns, it was theoretically possible to draw a random sample stratified by size and type, although in practice a number of cells were empty. The disadvantage is that some farms are converting without the support of the scheme, and are therefore excluded.
- For farms where conversion had been considered but not progressed, the Organic Conversion Information Service's database provided information on farms, which whilst having had an initial half-day visit, had not gone on to take up the full day follow-up advisory visit. It was assumed that, for practical purposes, farms where the initial visit was less than six months from the date of inquiry might be waiting for their follow-up visit, and therefore were

excluded from the sample frame. However, in practice a number of those contacted proved to be still waiting for the follow up visit.

- For farms where, as far as could be ascertained, no interest in conversion to organic farming was apparent, a random sample, stratified by size and type, was drawn from agricultural census returns. Although theoretically possible, no responses from this sample overlapped with the previous two categories. It would also be possible for farmers with an interest in organic farming but who have not contacted the OCIS service to be included, and as will be seen, most respondents in this category had distinct views on the range of questions asked.

The precondition under which MAFF provided access to their records involved an initial mail shot, inviting farmers to participate; this may, therefore, have involved some self-selection bias. For consistency, the same method was applied to the sample drawn from the OCIS database. Table 3.1, below, sets out the number and percentage resulting in usable responses to the telephone survey. The target number of responses for each group was 200. Surveying took place in July and August 2000. Each sample involved 370 initial requests for participation (once the disappointing response rate became apparent in late July, the OCIS sample was increased by a further 130). Because of the poor response rate, and also the fact that it was not possible to obtain the agricultural census returns for the holdings contacted, too little information was available for a significant subdivision of the results by farm type.

	<i>Sample size:</i>	<i>Number of respondents:</i>	<i>Percentage response rate:</i>	<i>Percentage of target response rate:</i>
OFS participants	370	58	16%	29%
OCIS sample	500	123	25%	62%
Census sample	370	66	18%	33%
Combined total	1240	247	20%	41%

Survey results

Table 3.2, below, provides a summary description of the farm characteristics of each sample. The Census sample had the largest average size of holding, and proportionately greater numbers of smallholdings were found in the OCIS sample. Sampled participants in the OFS had a greater representation of dairy and beef enterprises, but less sheep than the other two categories; in the OCIS sample, combinable and root crops were less in evidence, although there was greater representation of both vegetables and fruit. Since payment rates under the initial version of the OFS are low in comparison to turnover, there may be some potential bias in the degree to which this group is likely to convert.

Overall, less than 15 per cent of respondents were from farms in the Less Favoured Areas, although there were notably more of the sampled participants in the OFS scheme, and (particularly in the lower hill and upland area) in the OCIS sample. Interestingly, fewer of the OCIS sample participated in other environmental

schemes, having conspicuously less important involvement in either the Countryside Stewardship scheme or the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme, and a lower proportion reporting the existence of Sites of Special Scientific Interest on their farms.

	OFS participants	OCIS sample	Census sample	Combined total
<i>Farm size:</i>				
% under 20 ha	6.9	24.4	3.0	14.6
% over 20 but under 50 ha	17.2	17.1	13.6	16.2
% over 50 but under 100 ha	20.7	25.2	18.2	22.3
% over 100 but under 200 ha	24.1	14.6	19.7	18.2
% over 200 but under 500 ha	25.9	8.1	30.3	18.2
% over 500 ha	5.2	0.8	7.6	3.6
Average size (ha)	158.1	87.3	217.3	139.6
<i>Gender of respondent:</i>				
% male	89.7	71.5	81.8	78.5
<i>Main enterprises:</i>				
% Mentioning dairy	37.9	22.8	34.8	29.6
% Mentioning beef	50.0	33.3	39.4	38.9
% Mentioning sheep	39.7	31.7	45.5	37.2
% Mentioning pigs	6.9	6.5	12.1	8.1
% Mentioning poultry	5.2	8.1	4.5	6.5
% Mentioning combinable crops	53.4	24.4	48.5	37.7
% Mentioning root crops	6.9	4.1	15.2	7.7
% Mentioning vegetables	6.9	8.9	7.6	8.1
% Mentioning fruit	3.4	10.6	4.5	7.3
<i>Less Favoured Area status:</i>				
% Outside LFA	77.6	62.6	80.3	70.9
% Disadvantaged Area	8.6	8.1	6.1	7.7
% Seriously Disadvantaged Area	8.6	5.7	7.6	6.9
<i>Environmental schemes:</i>				
% Uptake overall	55.2	40.7	56.1	48.2
% Countryside Stewardship	34.5	28.5	25.8	29.1
% ESA	12.1	8.9	19.7	12.6
% with SSSI	8.6	4.9	13.6	8.1

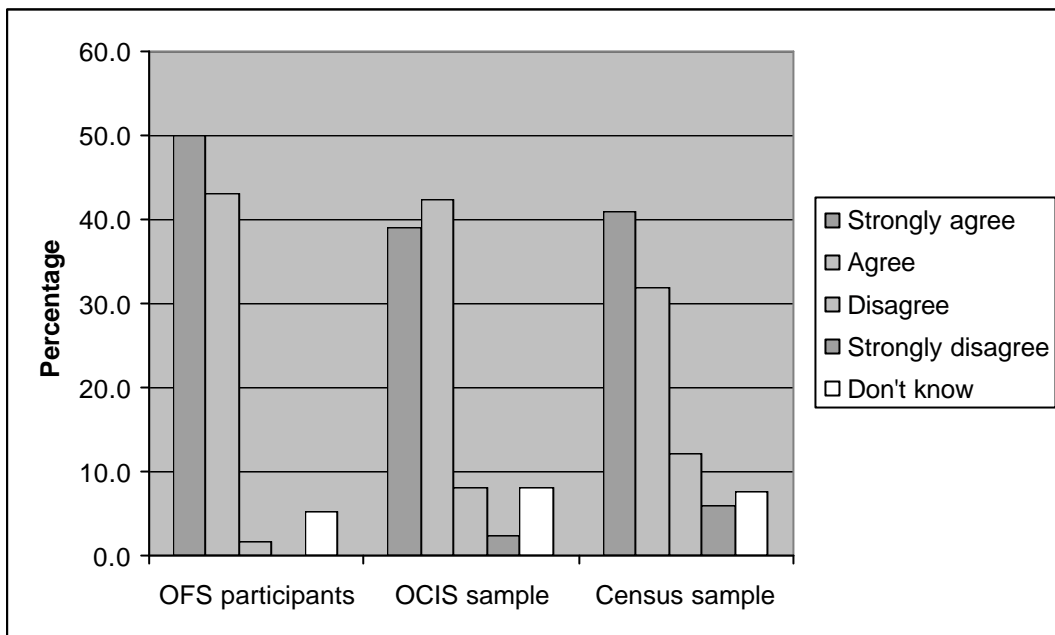
Members of both the OCIS and Census samples were asked whether they would consider farming organically in the future: of the former, 60.2% responded positively; the latter group recorded a lower positive percentage of 34.8%.

Respondents' attitudes to organic farming, in each sampled group, were investigated by means of a series of statements, for which predetermined responses, on a Likkert scale, were confined to "strong agreement", "agreement", "disagreement", "strong disagreement", or "don't know". Some respondents chose not to answer (less than 2 per cent of all responses), and the results that are described include such responses in calculating percentages. For each statement, a graph distinguishes the percentage level of responses in each of these categories.

Statement 1, "Organic farming is kinder to the environment", attracted over 80 per cent agreement or strong agreement overall, with slightly higher levels of agreement among the sample of participants in the OFS. Proportionately more of the general sample drawn from the Agricultural Census (hereafter referred to as the 'Census

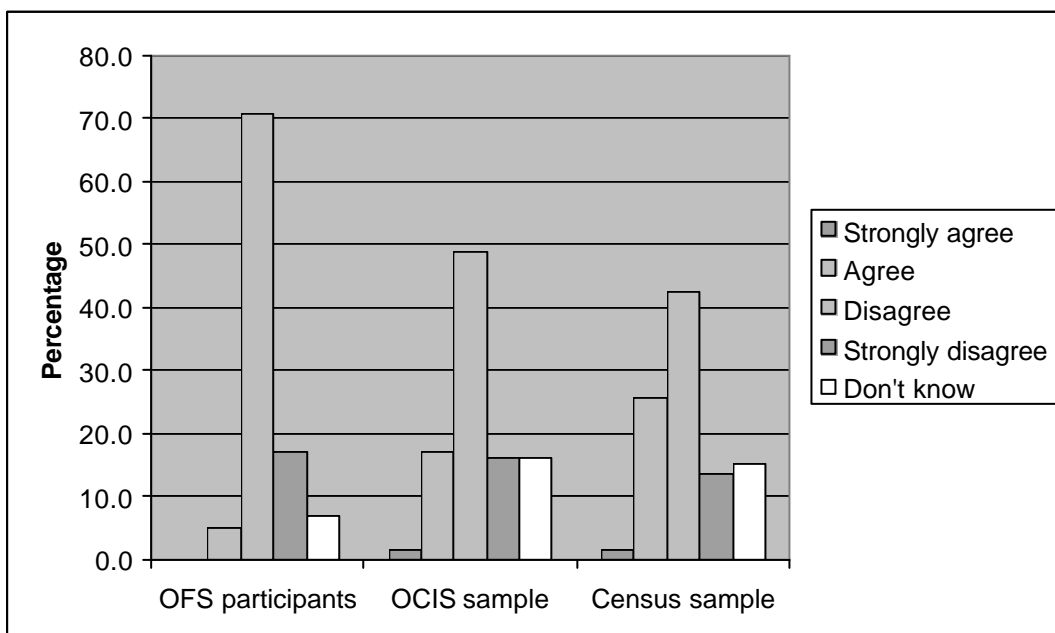
sample') agreed strongly with this statement than those in the OCIS sample who had considered conversion but not progressed with conversion.

Figure 3.1: Statement 1: "Organic farming is kinder to the environment"



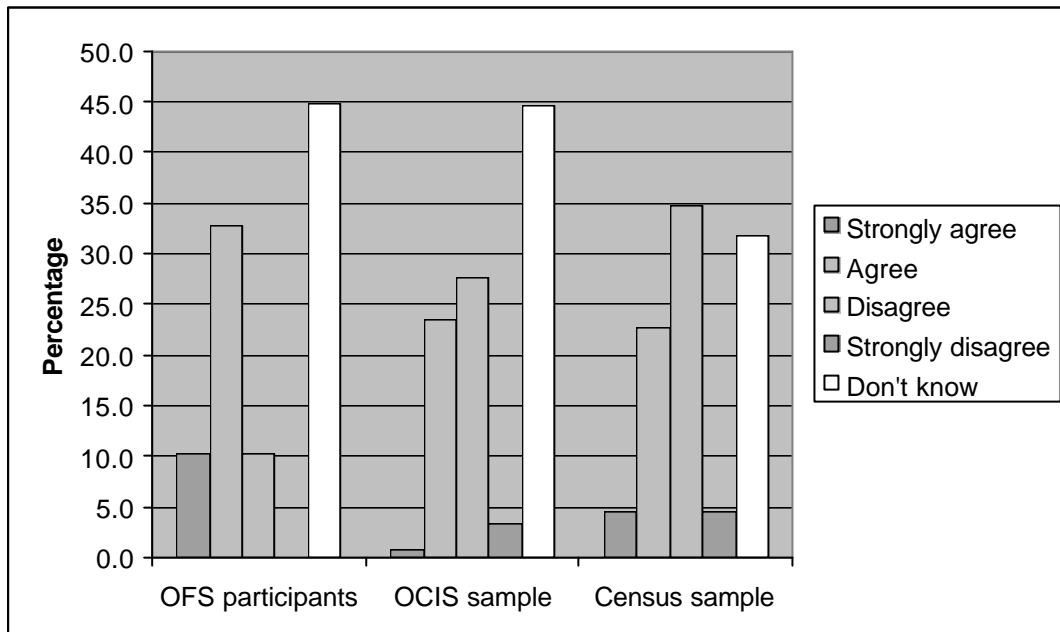
Strongest disagreement with Statement 2, "You can't control weeds, pests and diseases without chemicals" was found, unsurprisingly, in the sample of participants in the OFS. There was virtually no strong agreement, although almost 20 per cent of the OCIS sample representing interested farmers who had not gone further with conversion agreed with this statement. There was also a fairly high proportion expressing too little knowledge to state an opinion (particularly in the OCIS and Census samples).

Figure 3.2: Statement 2: "You can't control weeds, pests and diseases without chemicals"



Statement 3, "Organic farms are more profitable than conventional ones", attracted the highest of all proportions of don't know responses, although remarkably less in the Census sample. Agreement tended to be stronger in the OFS participant sample, and there was a slightly greater degree of disagreement in the Census sample. Responses in the OCIS sample were notable for lack of strong agreement or disagreement.

Figure 3.3: Statement 3: "Organic farms are more profitable than conventional ones"



Over 90 per cent of OFS participants agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 4, "Premiums on organic products are a strong incentive to convert". However, agreement was lower in the OCIS sample than in the Census sample representing farming as a whole, and over 8 per cent of the former group strongly disagreed with the statement.

Statement 5, "I am interested in organic farming because it is popular among local farmers", attracted an overwhelmingly negative response. This may be interpreted as a desire to reject any suggestion of peer pressure, or a reflection of the fact that peer pressure may still be against conversion. Alternatively, and more simply, it may suggest that there are still relatively few, widely scattered organic farms and some respondents might be in areas where not many exist. The repudiation was slightly weaker among respondents in the OFS sample than in the OCIS sample, which in turn (though having more expressing strong disagreement) exhibited a slightly weaker total disagreement than in the Census sample.

Figure 3.4: Statement 4: "Premiums on organic products are a strong incentive to convert"

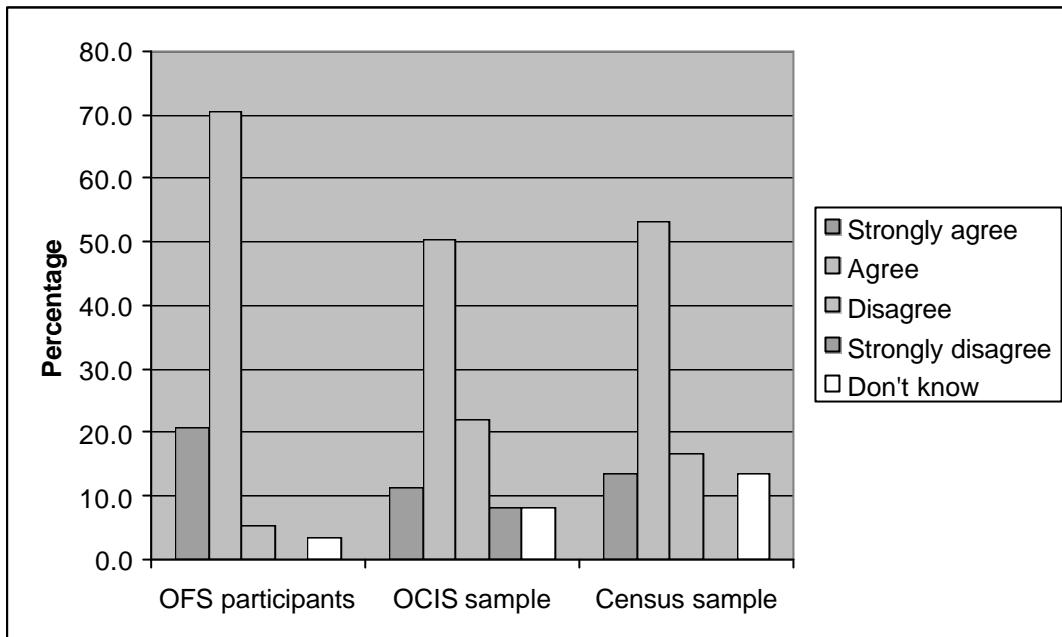
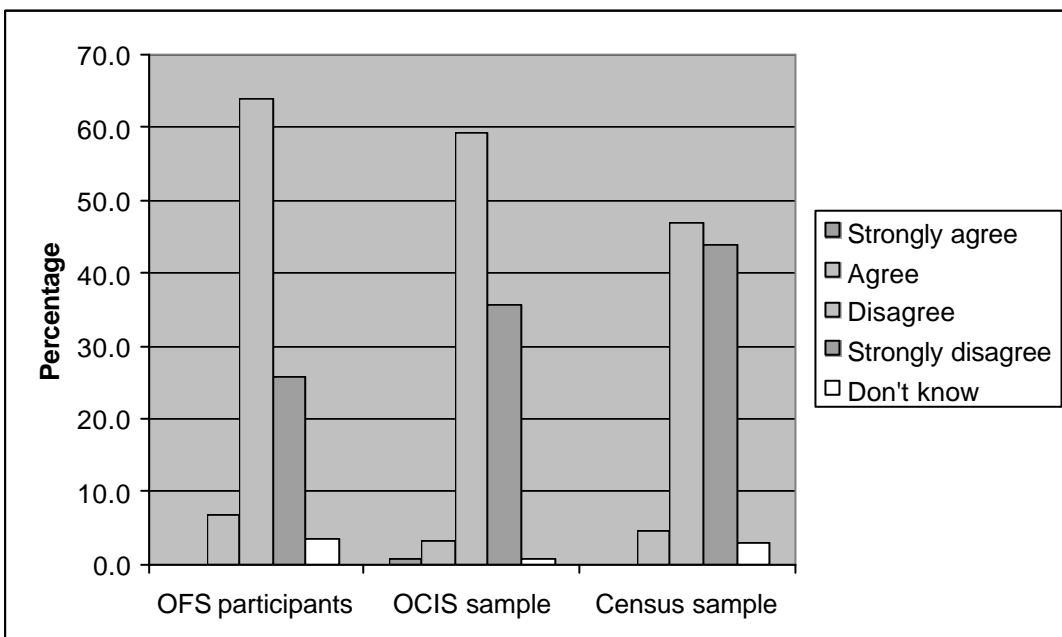
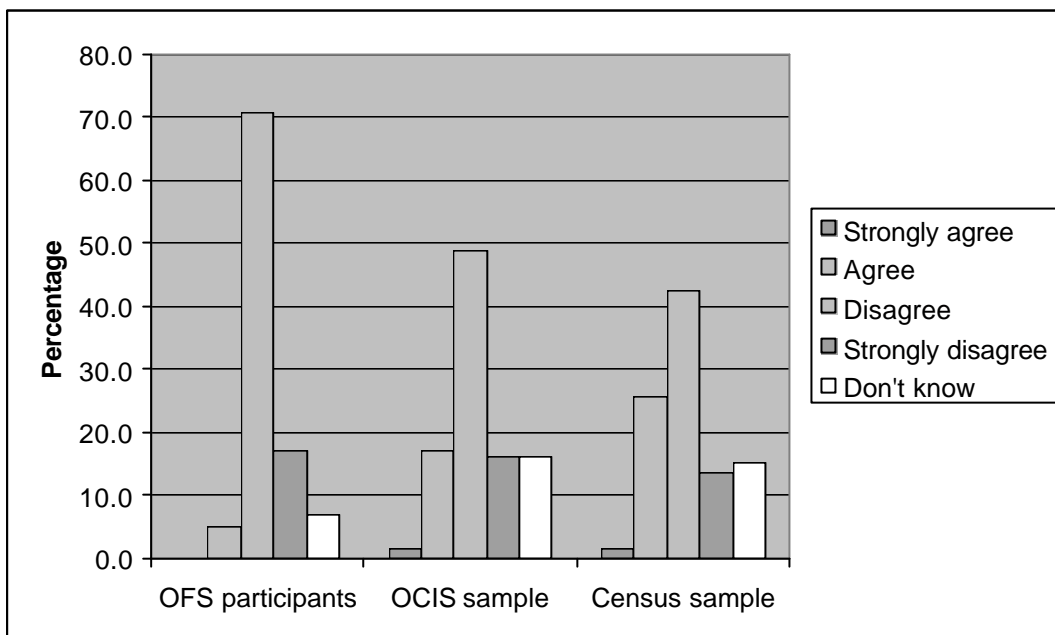


Figure 3.5: Statement 5: "I am interested in organic farming because it is popular among local farmers"



Attitudes to Statement 6, "The organic standards are too restrictive to be practical" were broadly similar in both the OFS sample and the Census sample; greater agreement was expressed by the OCIS sample, possibly since they can be assumed to have considered but rejected conversion; there was more disagreement than agreement, overall, in the OFS sample and the Census sample, although not in the OCIS sample. The relatively high overall proportion of "don't knows" in response to this statement was, in fact, lowest in the OCIS sample, and highest among respondents from the Census sample. -

Figure 3.6: Statement 6: "The organic standards are too restrictive to be practical"



The stimulation of change in farm system management expressed in Statement 7, "Changing to an organic system is an exciting new challenge" attracted a high level of agreement from respondents participating in the OFS. Slightly less, but still considerable agreement was expressed by respondents from the OCIS sample, but the greatest proportion expressing strong agreement was among respondents from the Census sample.

Statement 8, "I am not the right type of person for organic farming" attracted a high level of disagreement across all respondents, although agreement was higher in the Census sample.

Figure 3.7: Statement 7: "Changing to an organic system is an exciting new challenge"

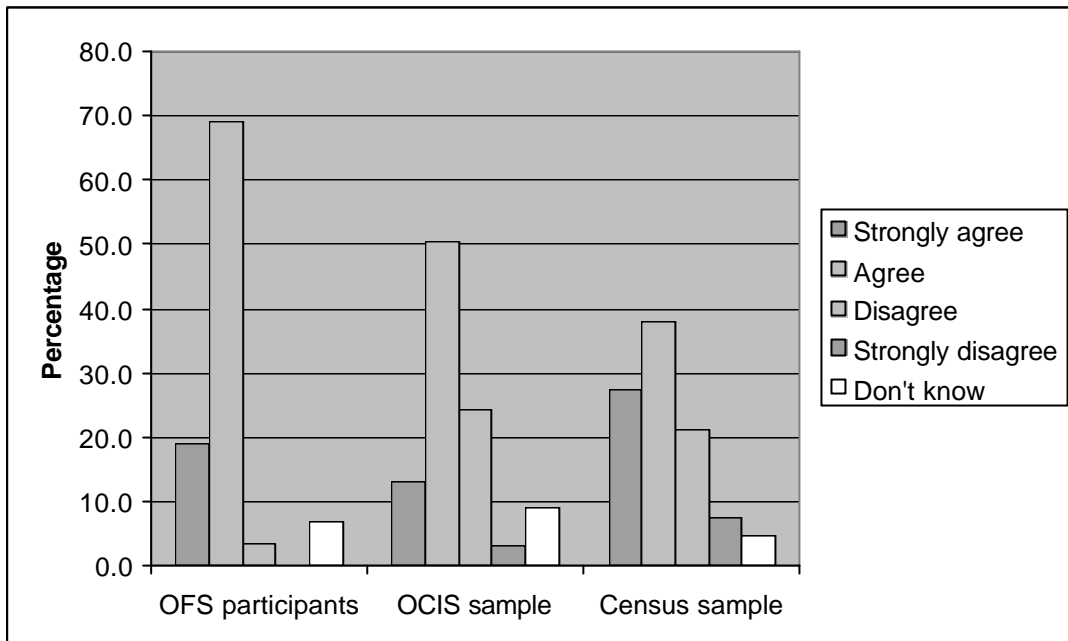
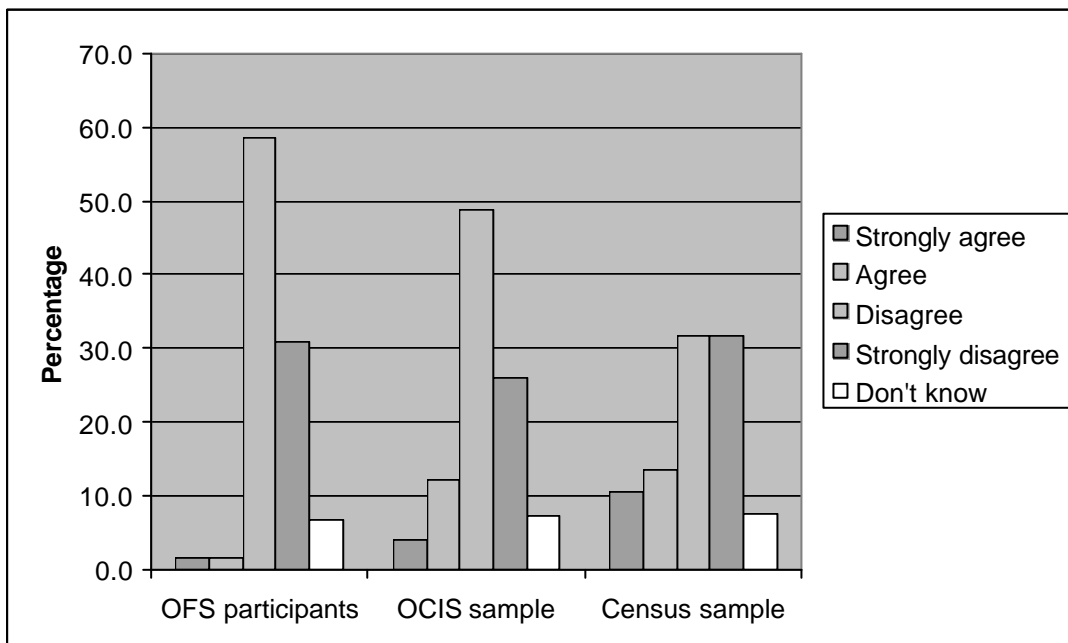
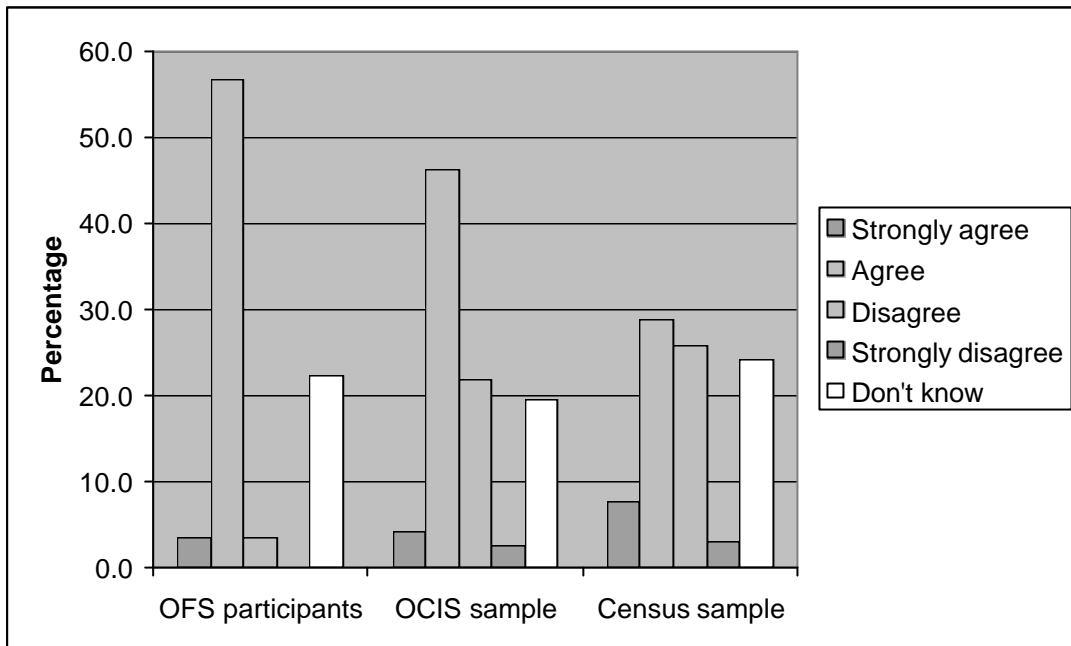


Figure 3.8: Statement 8: "I am not the right type of person for organic farming"



The lack of knowledge expressed in response to Statement 9, "Organic farming gives staff a chance to make good use of their skills" was the highest overall; of the Census sample, almost a quarter were in this category. Also, there was no strong agreement evident among respondents from any of the sample groups, though agreement was stronger among OFS and OCIS sample respondents.

Figure 3.9: Statement 9: "Organic farming gives staff a chance to make good use of their skills"



To give an indication of the overall attitudinal pattern among the three sampled groups, ordinal coding of responses has been used to provide summary measures. Statements which indicate a favourable attitude to organic conversion have been coded as 2 for strong agreement, 1 for agreement, 0 for don't know, -1 for disagreement, and -2 for strong disagreement; those choosing not to provide a response have been disregarded. For statements 2, 6 and 8, this coding was applied in reverse.

The results of this comparison are provided Table 3.3, and graphically in Figure 3.2, below. In general terms it shows (provided the assumptions are appropriate) that the group of respondents participating in the OFS are, in every respect, more favourably disposed to organic farming than the other two groups. The most positive responses were obtained in response to statement 1 (Organic farming is kinder to the environment), followed by (negatively coded) responses to statement 8 (I am not the right type of person for organic farming). The most adverse comments were attracted by statement 5 (I am interested in organic farming because it is popular among local farmers), although complex and not entirely understood factors, including social barriers, may be responsible for this reaction. The largest divergence between attitudes was in response to statement 4 (The premiums on organic products are a strong incentive to convert), where the average score for OFS participants was 1.07, compared with a sceptical 0.35 for the OCIS sample (respondents from the Census sample scored 0.66). The smallest divergence in views was distinguished in response to statement 5, although for reasons already suggested this is probably less important than in the next smallest divergence relating to statement 6 (The organic standards are too restrictive to be practical). Here, the average score for the OCIS sample was -0.14; for OFS participants, it was 0.19. However, the Census sample displayed the largest variability, measured by standard deviation; the statement having the highest overall

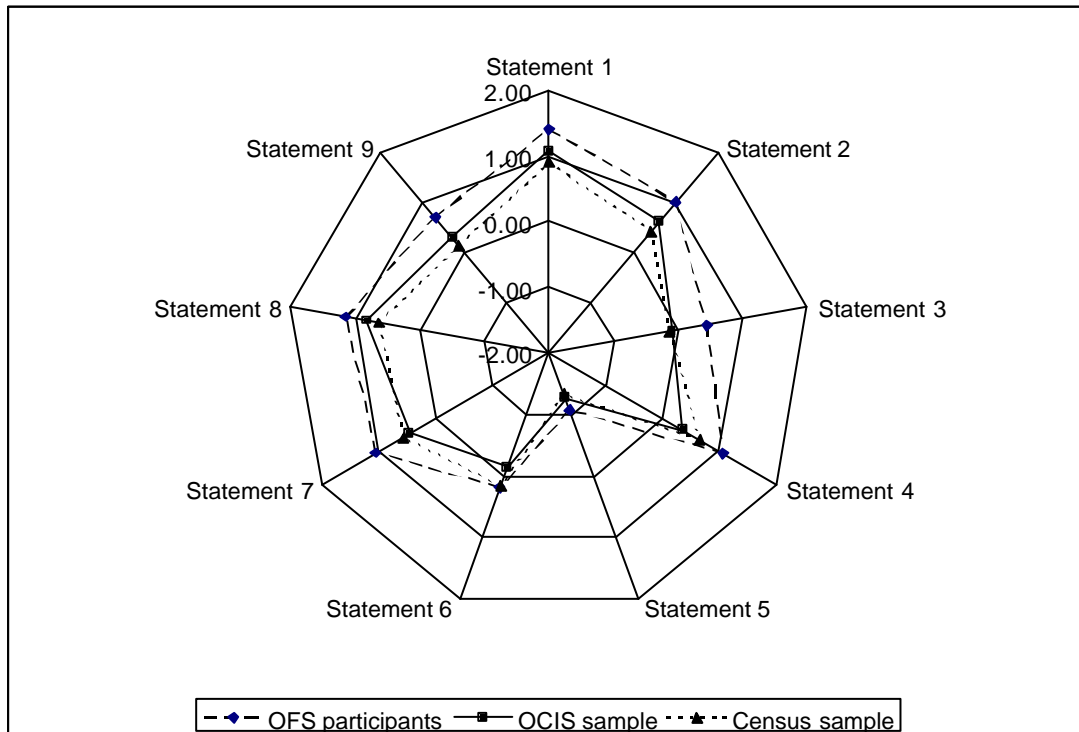
variability in response was statement 6, "The organic standards are too restrictive to be practical".

Table 3.3: Average attitudinal scores

	OFS participants	OCIS sample	Census sample
Organic farming is kinder to the environment	1.41 (0.68)	1.07 (1.01)	0.91 (1.25)
You can't control weeds, pests and diseases without chemicals	1.00 (0.68)	0.61 (1.01)	0.42 (1.07)
Organic farms are more profitable than conventional ones	0.44 (0.82)	-0.09 (0.82)	-0.12 (0.98)
Premiums on organic products are a strong incentive to convert	1.07 (0.67)	0.35 (1.18)	0.66 (0.93)
I am interested in organic farming because it is popular among local farmers	-1.07 (0.75)	-1.26 (0.71)	-1.32 (0.75)
The organic standards are too restrictive to be practical	0.19 (1.13)	-0.14 (1.23)	0.17 (1.15)
Changing to an organic system is an exciting new challenge	1.05 (0.64)	0.46 (1.10)	0.57 (1.31)
I am not the right type of person for organic farming	1.16 (0.77)	0.82 (1.09)	0.63 (1.37)
Organic farming gives staff a chance to make good use of their skills	0.70 (0.61)	0.29 (0.96)	0.14 (1.04)

Note: Standard deviations are in brackets.

Figure 3.10: Comparison of respondents' attitudes between Sampled Groups

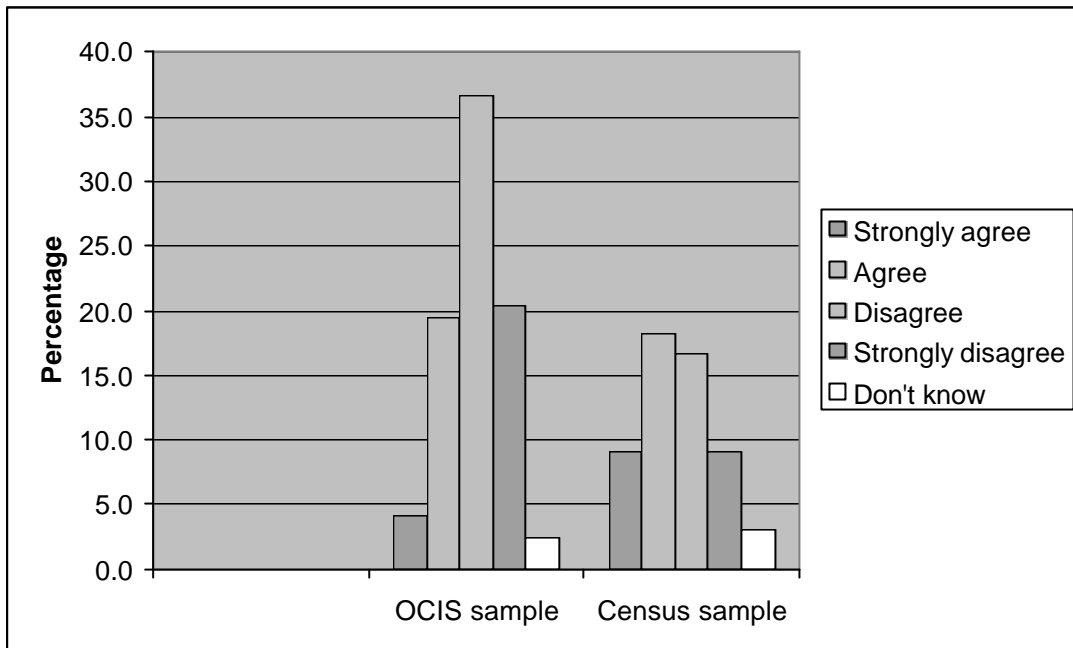


Statement 10, "My farm structure is not suitable for organic production", does not appear in Figure 3.10 because it was only raised (for obvious reasons) with the OCIS sample and the general Census sample respondents. In response, a bare majority

of all the respondents from the Census sample disagreed, compared with just over a quarter of the OCIS sample.

|

Figure 3.11: Statement 10: "My farm structure is not suitable for organic production"



Respondents were then asked specific questions, with pre-coded responses, about marketing and extension issues. The initial question related to the development of future demand for organic food. Almost two-thirds of all respondents expect demand to increase, and more than a third expect it to increase significantly. However, a clear divergence appears between the different groups sampled. Respondents from the OCIS and Census samples have proportionately greater optimism than participants in the OFS, expecting a significant increase. Fewer respondents from the Census sample expect a small increase, but overall the OCIS sample anticipates higher levels of growth (somewhat paradoxically, since they are the group who have consciously decided not to convert to organic production). The largest proportion expecting the market to be static or decline was found in the Census sample.

Subsequently, respondents were asked to describe the state of development of marketing channels for organic meat, crops, eggs, vegetables and milk, again with pre-coded responses. For organic meat, little difference can be established between the three sampled groups: none believe that marketing channels are well developed, around two-thirds believe that they are little developed, and (by a small margin) a less significant percentage of respondents who participate in the OFS believe markets are not developed. The proportion of "don't knows" increases from the OFS group, through the OCIS group to the general sample derived from the Census.

With regard to organic crops, some respondents (though less OFS participants than in the other two groups) believe markets to be well developed, and although the majority described them as little developed, a higher proportion of the OCIS sample believed them to be undeveloped. The profile of the market seemed to be better recognised than that for meat, with fewer respondents expressing no knowledge.

Figure 3.12: Future development of the market for organic food

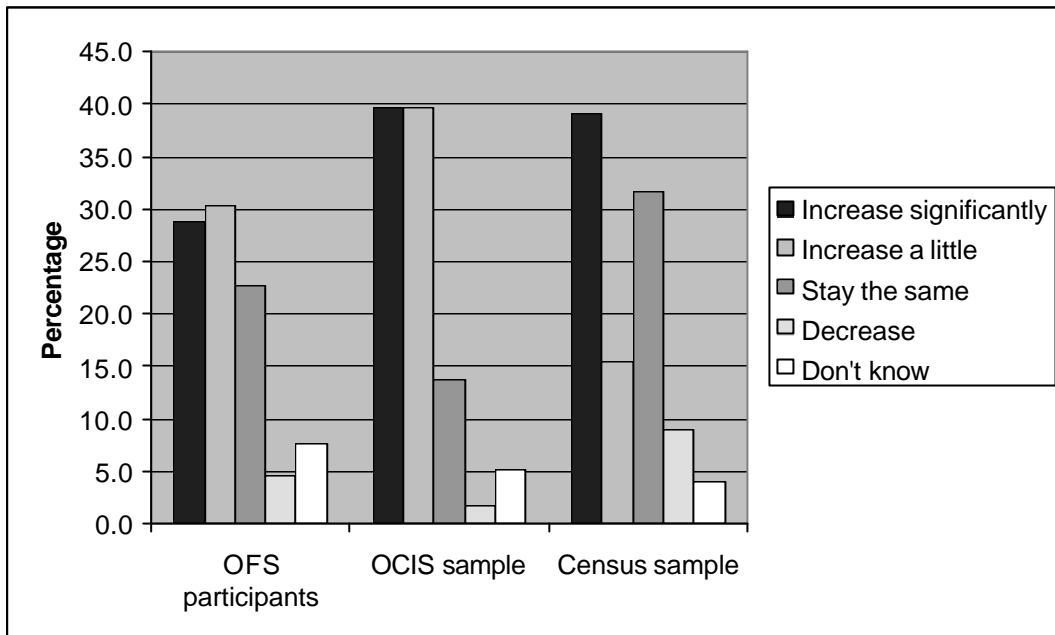


Figure 3.13: Development of marketing channels: organic meat

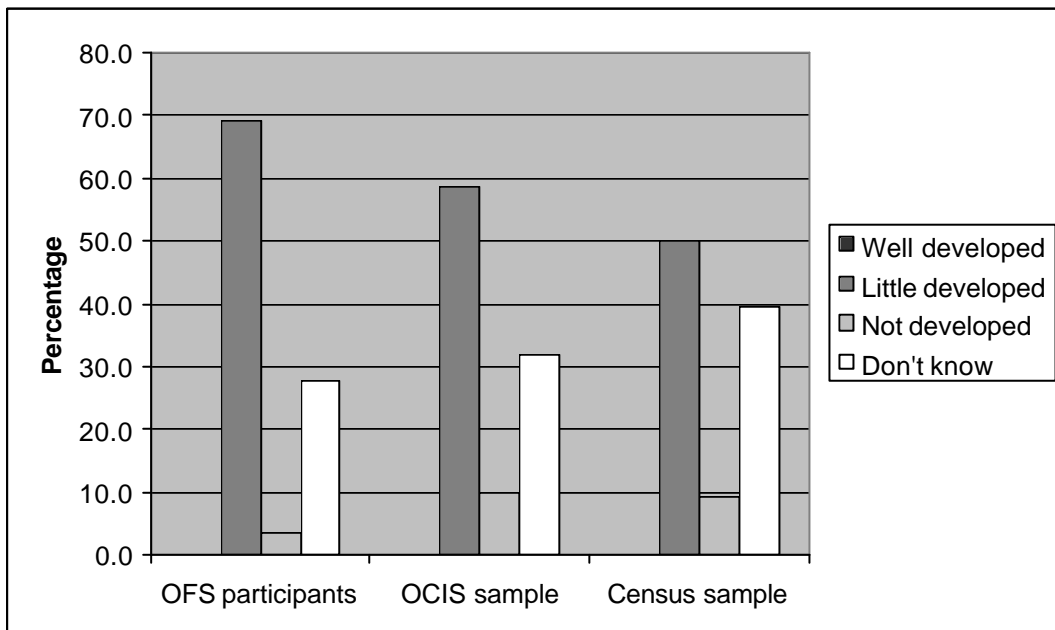


Figure 3.14: Development of marketing channels: organic crops

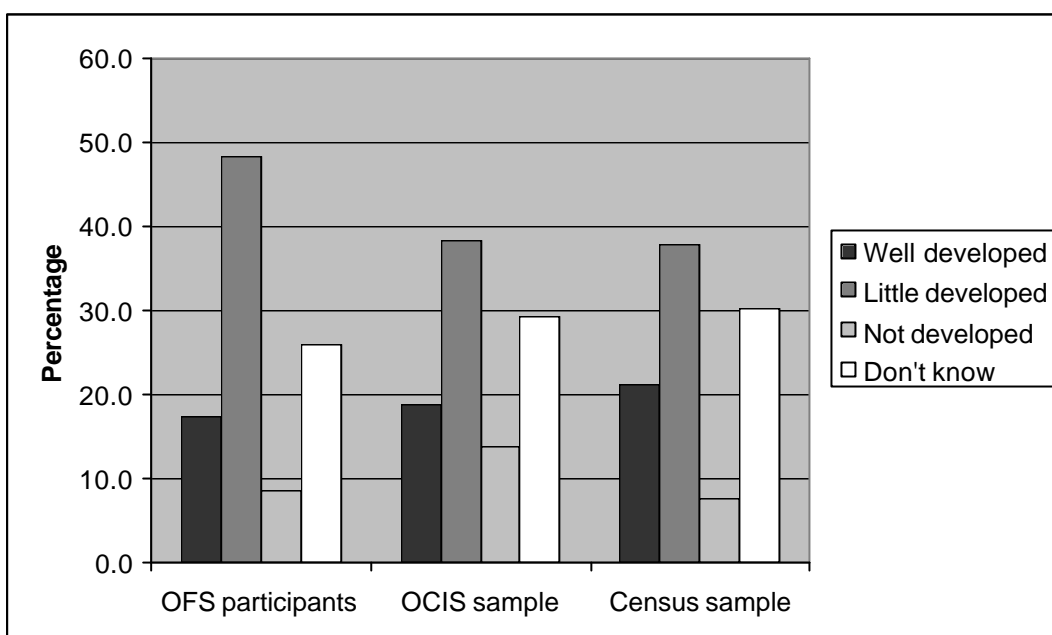
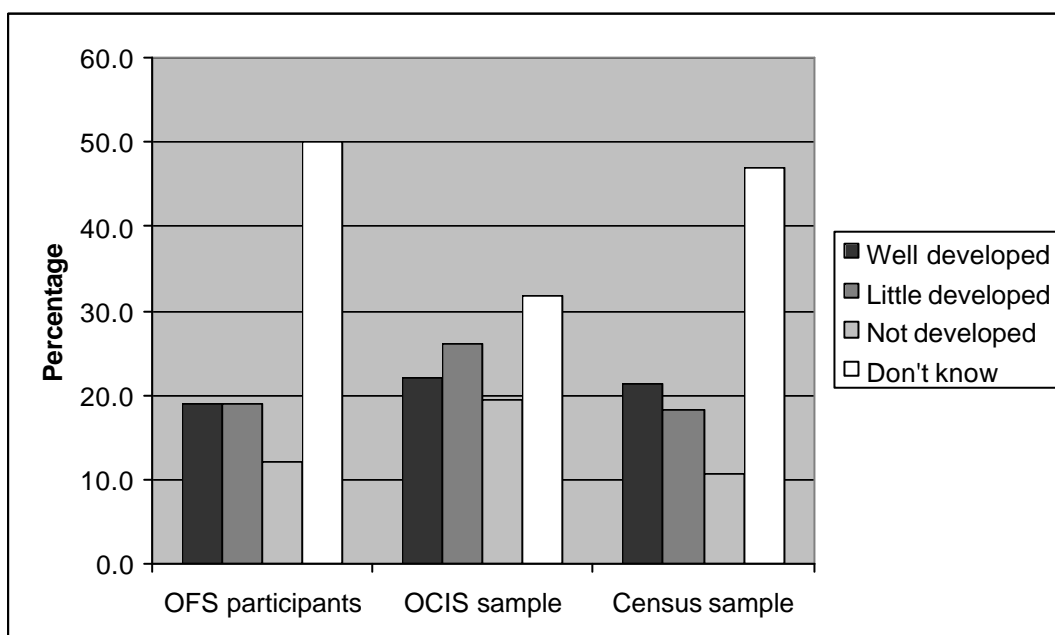


Figure 3.15: Development of marketing channels: organic eggs



Marketing channels for organic eggs appear to be recognised as least developed, from the perspective of respondents, although a high proportion (40 per cent overall) also expressed no opinion. Again, little difference emerges between the three sampled groups, apart from a higher proportion of OCIS sample respondents expressing the view that egg marketing channels are not developed.

The market recognised as best developed by all respondents was that for organic vegetables. The highest overall proportion recognised it as well developed; none of the OFS participants, and few of the other two groups expressed the view that it

was not developed at all; and the number of “don’t knows” was fewest of all marketing channels.

Figure 3.16: Development of marketing channels: organic vegetables

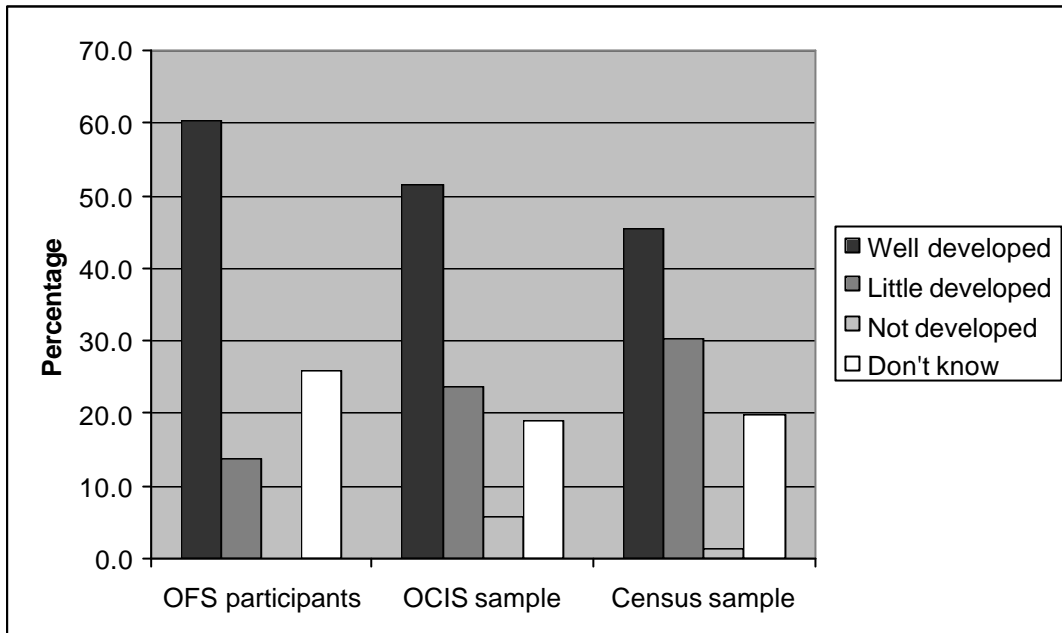
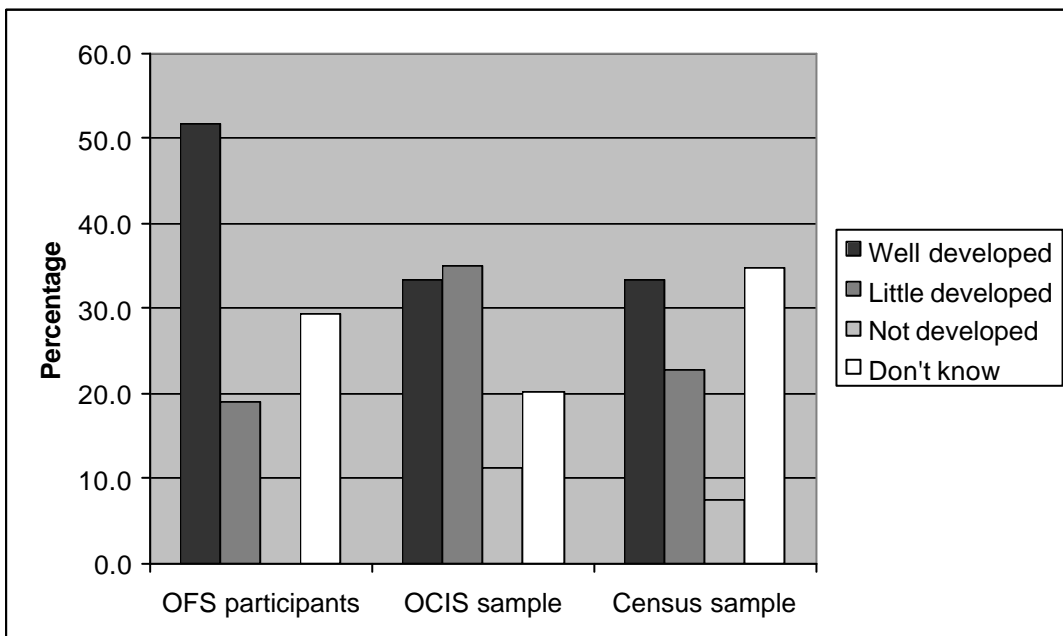


Figure 3.17: Development of marketing channels: organic milk



Finally, a high proportion of the OFS group recognised that the marketing channel for organic milk is well developed, almost as great a share as for vegetables. Whilst the other two groups had lower proportions describing the marketing channel as well developed, there were compensatingly higher proportions recognising it as little developed; however, over 10 per cent of the OCIS group felt that it was not developed.

The last set of common questions related to the level of access to information and advisory services for organic farming. Respondents from the OFS sample appear, on balance to believe that both information and advice are more difficult to access than the other two sampled groups, perhaps because OFS participants need detailed and specific advice, which is not so readily available. Greater proportions of the OCIS and Census sample respondents believe information and advice are very easy to obtain; almost identically fewer proportions believe them to be very difficult to obtain.

Figure 3.18: Access to information on organic farming

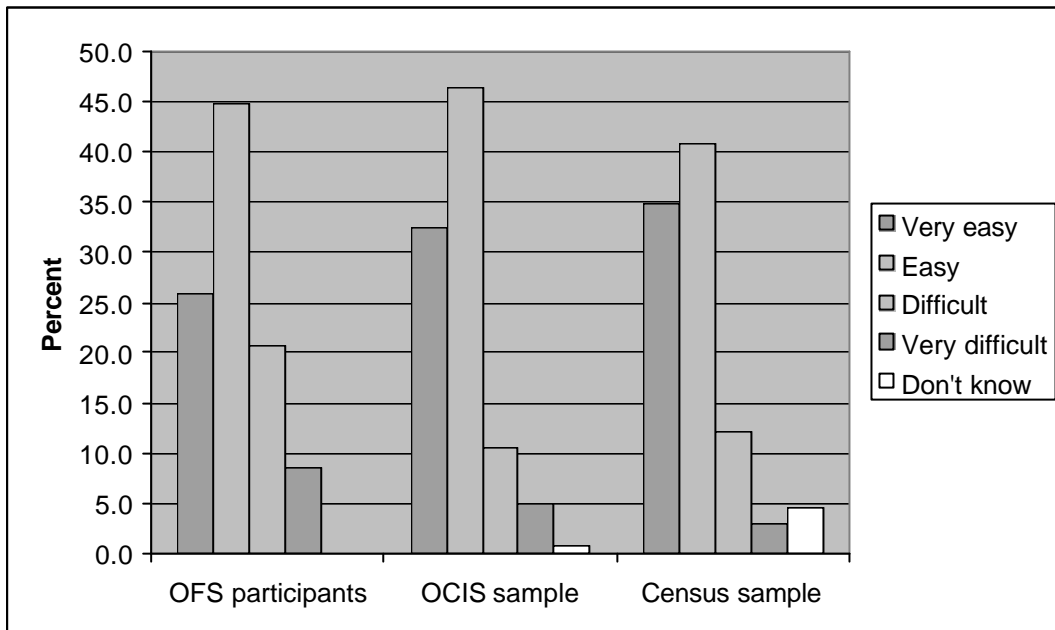
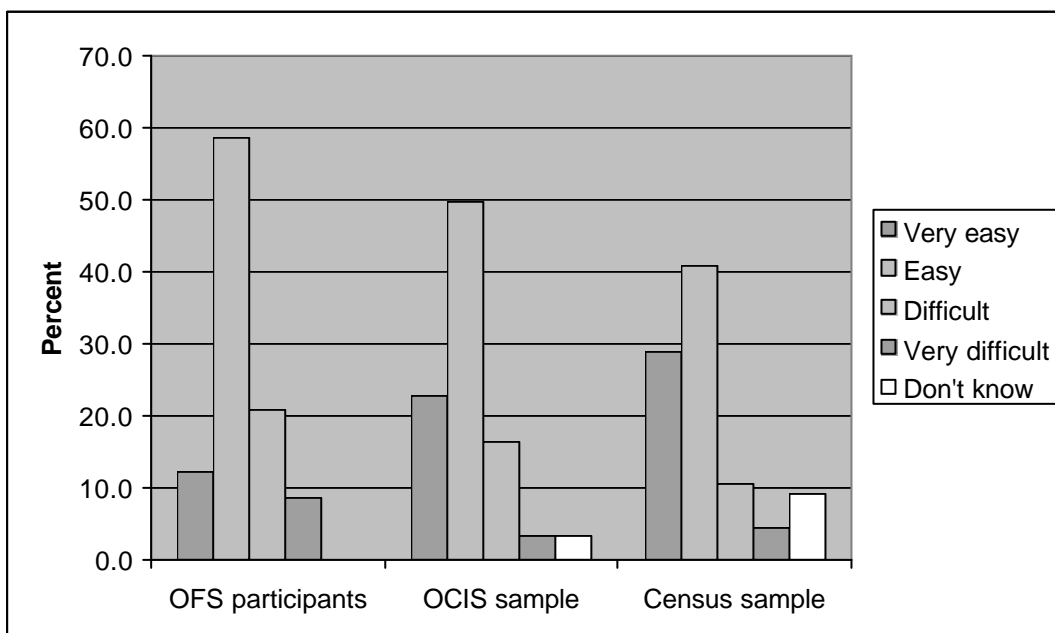
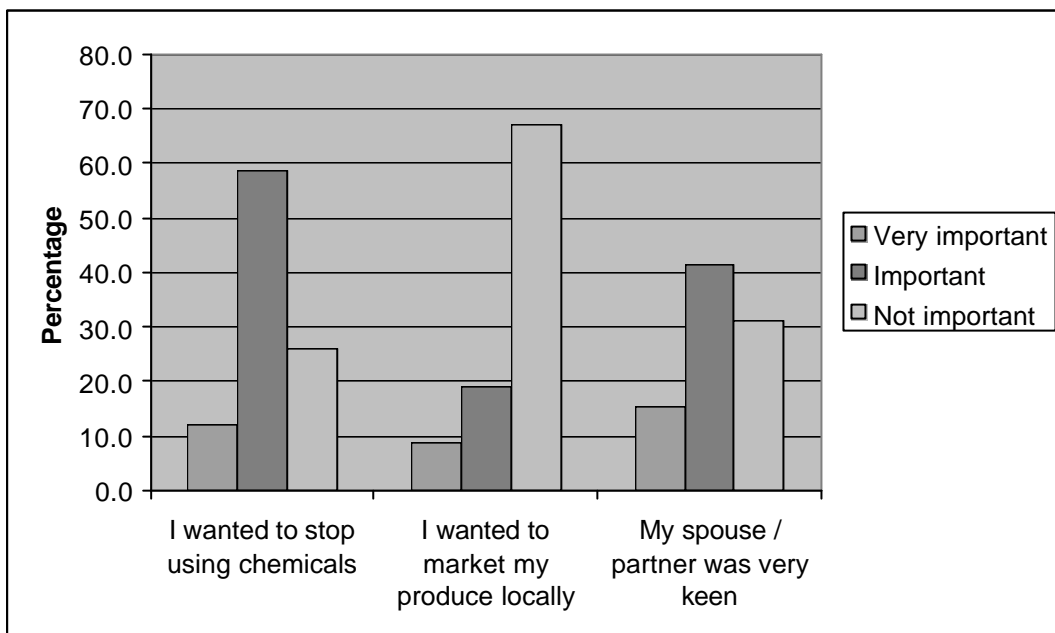


Figure 3.19: Access to advice on organic farming



Remaining questions were specific to each sampled group. The OFS group of respondents was probed about reasons for conversion and concerns about conventional production. Firstly, respondents were asked to assess three statements about avoidance of agrochemicals, local marketing and their spouse's interest with respect to their importance in the decision to convert. The first and third were of importance for most respondents; spouse's interest was rated very important by proportionately more respondents, although avoiding agrochemicals was rated either important or very important by over 70 per cent of respondents. In contrast, local marketing was described as unimportant by more than two thirds of respondents.

Figure 3.20: Reasons for deciding to convert to organic farming



Secondly, the OFS group were asked about the concerns prompting their decision to convert to organic farming, with pre-coding to measure their agreement with certain issues. Financial viability of the farm emerged with the highest level of strong agreement, although environmental effects attracted a higher proportion of either agreement or strong agreement. Opinion was fairly evenly divided with respect to personal health, and soil fertility and animal health and welfare appeared to be much less important.

Both the OCIS sample respondents and those from the Census sample were asked if they were familiar with the MAFF Organic Farming Scheme. Those who answered positively (72 per cent of the OCIS respondents, 39 per cent of the Census group) were then questioned further on the scheme. Firstly, they were asked how important the OFS scheme would be in a decision to convert to an organic system. For the majority of the OCIS respondents, it was just one of several reasons; it was the main reason for less than a third of the total. For the Census sample respondents, the position was reversed; for over half it would be the main reason, but just one of several reasons for only 27 per cent of the total responding.

Asked to describe payment rates, very few (3 per cent overall) described them as too high; almost half of the OCIS respondents, but only 30 per cent of the Census

respondents, believed they were too low. Roughly a quarter of both groups believed them to be about right, and the remainder (a higher proportion of the Census group) were unable to express an opinion.

Figure 3.21: Concerns about conventional production influencing decision to convert to organic farming

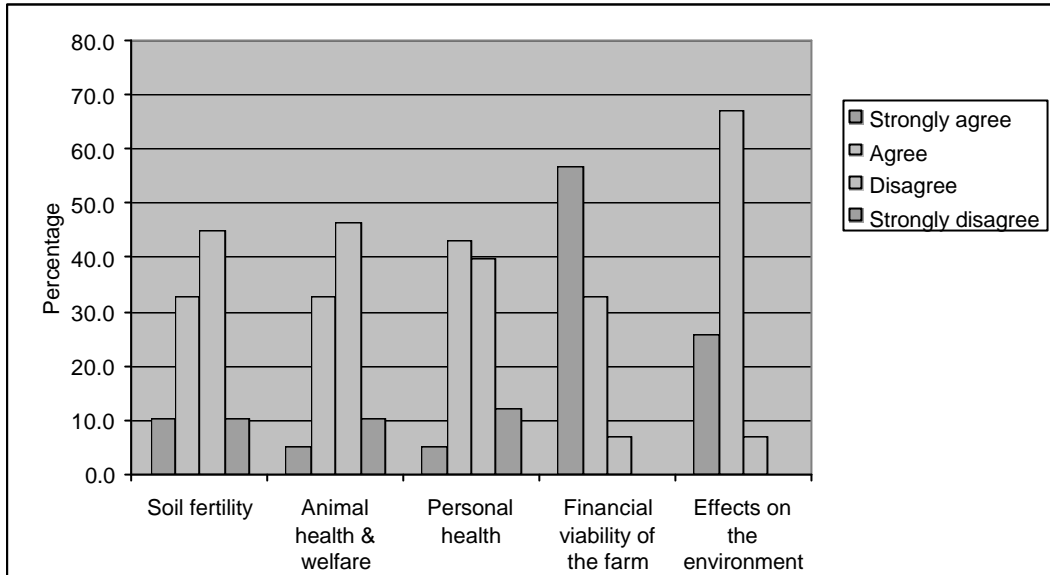


Figure 3.22: The potential importance of the OFS scheme in the decision to convert

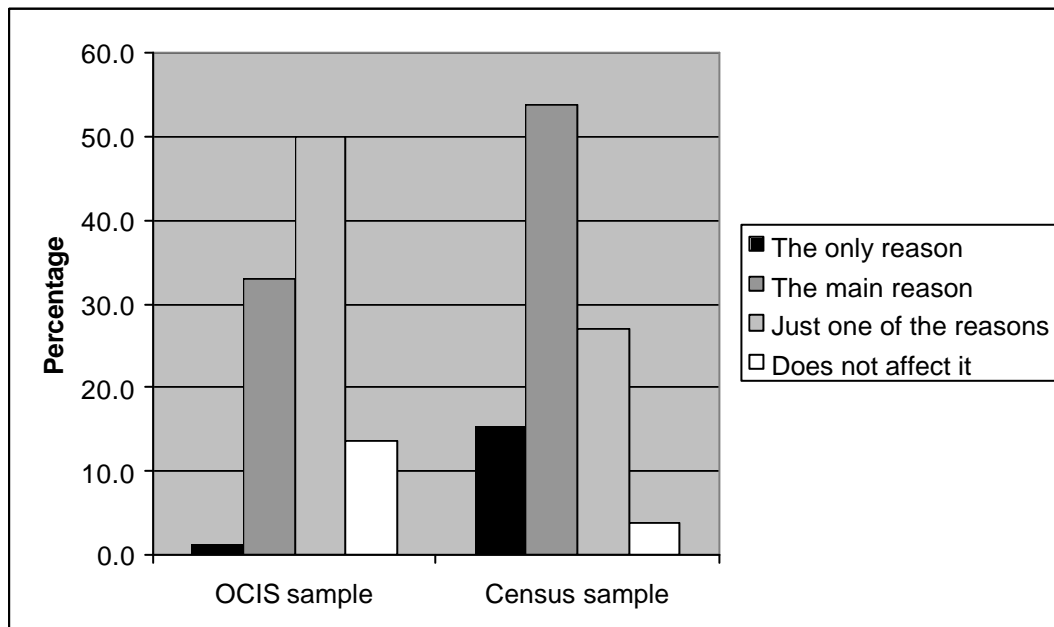
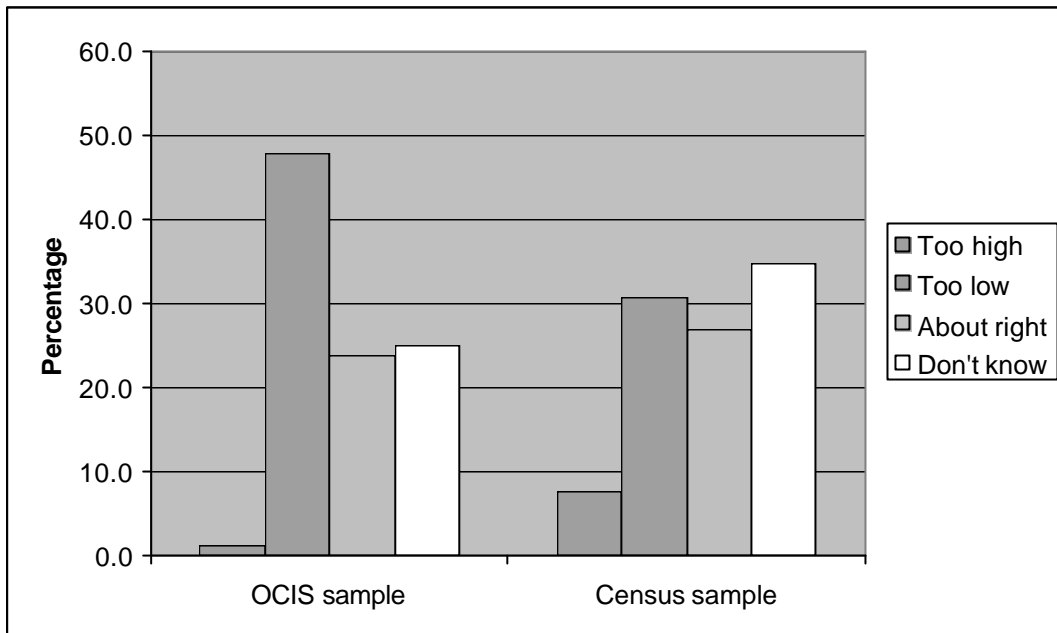
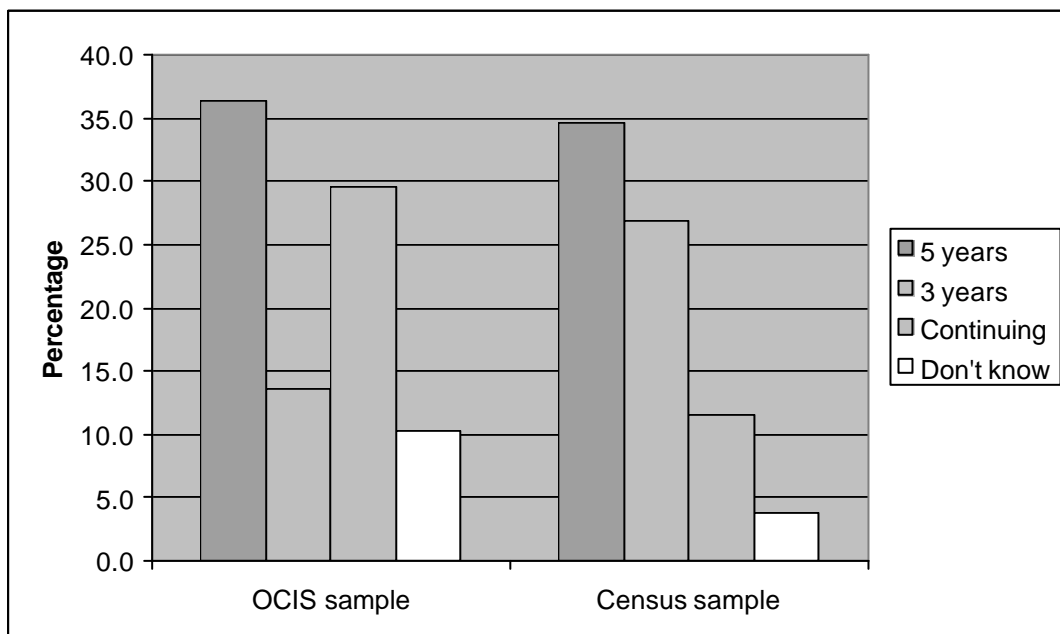


Figure 3.23: The level of OFS payment rates



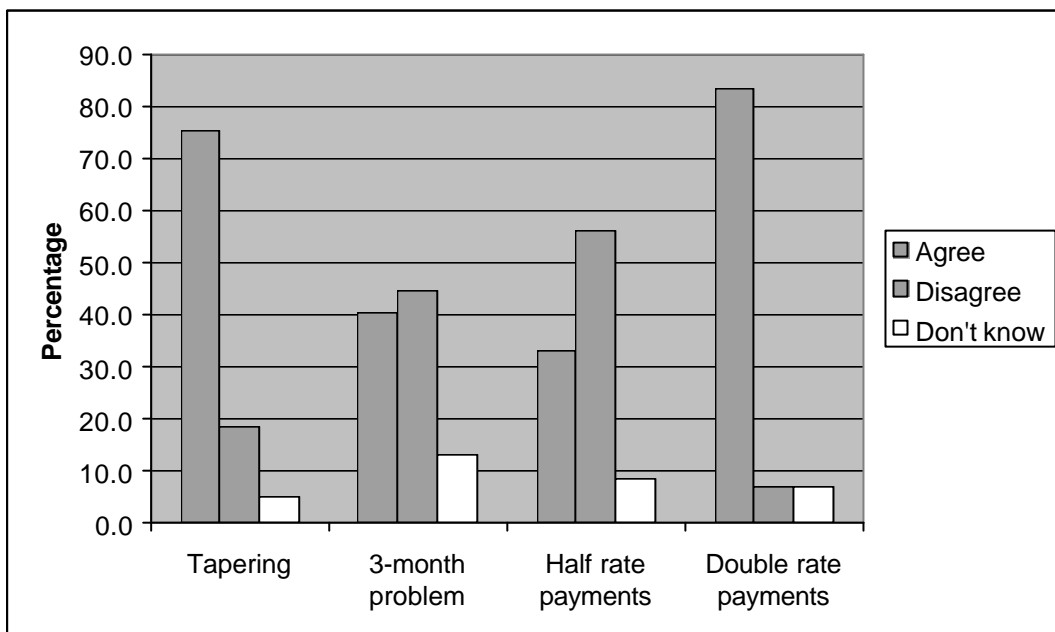
The next question concerned the period over which payments from the OFS should continue. Few of the respondents from the Census group felt that that should continue after conversion, in contrast to almost 30 per cent of the OCIS respondents, although about one third of both groups believed that the current five year availability should continue.

Figure 3.24: The payment period of the OFS



Finally, respondents in the group familiar with the operation of the OFS scheme were asked to either agree or disagree with statements about the structure of payments and conditions under which they are made. With regard to payments tapered to be higher at the beginning of conversion (assuming a constant total), three quarters agreed that payments should be higher at the beginning of the conversion period. 40 per cent agreed, but 45 per cent disagreed, that the need for OFS applicants to apply to the MAFF Organic Farming Scheme within 3 months of registering with a sector body was a problem. 38 per cent of OCIS sample, but only 15 per cent of the Census respondents, would consider organic conversion even if the OFS paid only half the present rates. However, if the OFS paid twice the current rates, the proportions would rise to 85 and 77 per cent, respectively.

Figure 3.25: OFS payment rates and conditions



Responses to the open question

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked whether they had any further comments or perceptions that they wished to express, which may have been missed out of the preceding questions. A significant number – 74% of total respondents – took this opportunity to make further comments, which when summarised revolve around 26 identifiable themes. Appendix 2 provides a detailed inventory of comments, and a summary plot of frequencies for each sample group. This section provides analysis and commentary, although often the responses were so varied that representative cases of verbatim comments are needed, in order to demonstrate the range. Responses to the open question have been grouped around 8 major issues, in order of the frequency with which such issues surfaced.

Many respondents mentioned difficulties in gaining access to high quality information, attracting the second highest number of individual comments (17% of all comments of this type). A significantly higher proportion came from the OFS sample, compensated for by a lower proportion from the OCIS group. The most widely held view, overall, was that the quality of information available is generally poor. Views

included, for example, the fact that “advice is simply not good enough”, and “I found I was eligible for conversion, but it wasn’t even suggested to me how to convert over time”. None suggested that there is a lack of information or advice, but rather, that available information is vague and not specific enough: “Most advice seems to be directed for beginners, little technical or practical advice available for those already converting or beyond”. A need for “regionally specific advice” was also expressed. Some questioned the usefulness and credibility of organic adviser, conveying the impression that some advisers were not experienced enough to offer valuable practical advice, and so were not taken seriously: “young, inexperienced advisers are ignored by farmers”; and “we need field officers with practical knowledge”. Several respondents suggested that the best place to obtain good advice and information was from other farmers: “why not use the best farmers as advisers?” and “the best place to get good advice is from farmers who are already organic”. Other issues raised were the occasionally high cost of information, and the need for more research, which could lead to better, specifically practical, advice. Some of the Census sample suggested that information appeared biased in favour of organic conversion.

Across the three sample groups, the subject of standards was the most frequently raised issue, attracting comments from 25% of all respondents. The OCIS group produced the largest number of responses, indicating that the whole issue of adherence to standards may be a significant barrier to successful conversion. 32 individuals made specific comments about the restrictive nature of standards and regulations. The highest number of these comments was received from the OCIS group, and it was clear that the issue of standards had featured strongly in their decision to opt out of the scheme: “rules and regulations dictating where you buy inputs from was the last straw – we left.” Several comments suggested that, in some cases, the regulations were out of touch with day-to-day farming practice. One respondent commented that “some rules are too stringent to be practical”; another that “organic regulations do not take into account the realities of farming practice”. The volume of regulation led other respondents to comment that there were “too many rules”.

The issue of inconsistency in organic standards, collectively across the sample groups, was the most important issue relating to standards. A fundamental concern was inconsistency between standards on an international level. There was genuine frustration with the perceived confusion and complication surrounding standards and a strong lobby (41 individuals, 16% of the total sample) for a single set of guidelines: “standards are bizarre, inconsistent and contradictory”, particularly with relevance to the apparent unfairness of “foreign standards, leading to cheap imports and undermining the home organic produce”, with competition from EU and other international producers who were perceived to operate to lower levels of organic regulation, safety and quality. (The survey took place before the introduction of the Livestock Regulation, which has clarified and reinforced the standards of imported meat and meat products.) A number of respondents drew attention to inconsistencies, contradiction and even conflict between standards in the UK: “there is conflict among schemes, and a lack of consistency”. Several also reported compatibility problems with other farming schemes, even agri-environment schemes; one commented that the OFS had a “pitiful tolerance of other schemes. Our Countryside Stewardship payments were virtually nil because we were in OFS”.

There were some specific concerns over the number of modifications to standards. This was a particularly important issue for OFS group members: one case was raised where the respondent perceived himself abandoned by the Soil Association when a particular rule was changed twice in twelve months; since no flexibility was allowed, that respondent believed that, as well as causing financial hardship, conversion was delayed a whole year. Several individuals voiced the sentiment that there “should be some leeway in the rules”. As well as frustration with the volume of rule changes, there was dissatisfaction with the effects they have on farm planning: “it is difficult to plan long-term if rules keep changing”; “it is impossible to plan without security”; and “the government should sort out the rule changes and those caught up between them – those that suffer should be the first in line for funding”. More generally, respondents criticised MAFF for not taking sufficient control of regulation: one respondent suggested that “MAFF would be better employed policing all forms of food production to ensure it is healthy, not just safe and not just organic”

However, more serious criticisms concerned the Soil Association’s role in developing and maintaining standards, with regard to inconsistency between sectors. For example, one respondent identified inconsistency in regulations covering slaughtering: “why are they allowed to use chemicals and we are not?” Others were particularly disturbed by the lack of certified abattoirs around the country, leading to livestock discomfort on long road journeys, which many are clearly unhappy about; nine individuals made specific pleas for more certified abattoirs, almost equally from the OFS and OCIS samples, and one from the Census sample.

Nine individuals raised a variety of concerns over the policing of standards. In some of these respondents’ experience, there was evidence of poor auditing and checks. The decentralized nature of current regulation was also a concern for some, reiterated in pleas for a standardisation of regulations in the UK and elsewhere.

A further, strongly felt sentiment was that standards were out of touch with the concerns of those within the OFS, even at odds with the practicalities of farming. One typical response was that “rules and regulations (were) written by pen pushers not farmers”.

From the strength of feeling expressed on the issue of standards, responses from the various samples suggest that both discrepancies in interpretation and specific concerns with anomalies may have undermined confidence in the regulatory system as a whole. Whilst both internationally and in the UK, there are encouraging signs of greater sector body coordination and harmonisation, some of the misconceptions also indicate the need for farmer education about standard requirements and the reasoning behind them.

Further dissatisfaction was expressed with the role of the Soil Association (the only institutional body, apart from MAFF, to be specifically identified for criticism); however, apart from two respondents in the OFS sample, the remainder came equally from the OCIS and Census samples. The following responses represent the range obtained: “the Soil Association approve some chemicals not even approved by MAFF”; “the Soil Association charges are excessive”; “it is very expensive to go organic and have to give a high percentage to self-styled organic bodies such as the Soil Association”; “the Soil Association have good inspectors but are poor advisers”; the Soil Association is too inflexible, has too much power, and involves too much

bureaucracy"; and "the Soil Association don't trust producers, it tries to catch them out, sees itself as Messiah, is difficult to deal with, idealistic and blinkered, particularly by not looking positively at genetic modification".

Aside from regulatory issues, the next topic of importance (in an industry which perceives itself as over-regulated) was the issue of the increased bureaucracy associated with participation in the OFS. Just over 10% of all respondents made comments on this issue, in particular those from the OCIS sample, where the issue was the second most frequently raised (25% of that group). One respondent from the OCIS sample commented that the OFS was "more of a hindrance than a help". The volume of form-filling appeared as the main concern, although two comments in particular suggest that the bureaucracy issue may deter participation in the OFS: "it is difficult to justify registering as organic as a hobby farm, due to costs and administration"; and "administration and costs deter organic farmers from registering under any organic scheme".

Concerns about marketing were expressed by 6% of the overall sample, divided evenly between the various subgroups. They saw the need for specific improvements in marketing support for organic producers, ranging from advice, aid for extensive promotion and marketing campaigns, and alleviation of difficulties in access to organic markets. Whilst such themes were common, few respondents suggested particular mechanisms for improving marketing. However, some comments shed light on aspects of marketing, publicity and even simple education about organic farming where failures might exist, in terms of public confusion over the objectives of organic husbandry and comparison with the problems that conventional farming can cause. A significant number of respondents advocated support for local co-operatives of organic producers as both a means for collective marketing, and a useful forum for information exchange. Respondents in this survey, in general, viewed supermarkets with suspicion, and with little recognition of any positive role in market development. There was concern about profiteering from organic producers and forcing down premiums to producers: "there is a need for intervention to counter supermarket power"; and "supermarkets are eroding premiums".

Another serious issue broached by respondents concerned assistance during the conversion phase, from a range of perspectives, but mostly connected with financial support. Many felt that demand for assistance would overwhelm the seemingly inadequate resources provided. One farming consultant maintained that "... a lack of OFS funding has not only stopped my conversion, but led my clients to believe that it is currently unwise to convert". Others commented on the poor impression given by a scheme is too poorly resourced to meet demand on it. Another respondent believed that the situation has been critical for some time and argued that "... there needs to be closer control over the numbers converting to control demand and maintain premium".

Eight individuals specifically complained about what they described as the high level of certification fees. This was viewed by some as a further burden to those trying to convert to organic farming. The overall economics of conversion was a major issue for respondents, one of whom argued that it was perhaps "... the main barrier to conversion ... I'm sceptical of whether organics would even be able to pay rents". Eight individuals from the OCIS and OFS groups wanted payments to be made throughout the entire conversion period: one argued, "Conversion is financially very

difficult, especially in the second year. The size of grant is OK, but it needs be spread out better over the conversion period". Twelve individuals, eight alone from the OCIS group, stated that in their experience conversion was simply not economically viable. One respondent suggested that his farm was "too productive to think about reverting to organic – although I have converted some acreage as a result of contract with supermarket". One respondent felt "... trapped by the conversion period - what if funds or markets dry up?" This comment reflected the often-precarious financial situations many respondents find themselves in during the conversion period. Financial support emerged as a particularly important issue for 'hobby' enterprises where the uncertainty of gaining funding and the cost implications were a significant deterrent to conversion.

Several respondents also gave examples of the day-to-day barriers experienced when attempting to convert. Whilst not necessarily reflecting typical problems, they give some insight into the range of difficulties being perceived:

"Our stud is a major part of the farms enterprises but cannot be entered into organic scheme which has effectively blocked our conversion."

"As most of the farm is down to pasture, changing to organic was considered too much risk in terms of animal welfare, parasites and so on."

"Our conversion was overwhelmed due to a lack of a slurry store."

"We would have been OK if we went for the old scheme, but now we are not eligible due to being in an ESA."

Several others suggested that the particular soil type on their farms did not allow conversion.

Despite increasing market opportunities in the organic sector and the health and environmental benefits it promotes, there were 15 specific comments from producers who remained unconvinced about the benefits of farming organically. One respondent was typical, expressing "... grave doubts about whether organic farming actually is better than conventional farming for the environment and consumers", although other concerns related to the practicalities of operating an organic system. The largest number of sceptical views were expressed, perhaps unsurprisingly, by respondents in the Census group; relatively fewer were found in the OCIS group, and only three individual expressing such views came from the OFS group.

There was further doubt about the availability of additional labour required for some organic systems, although it was not only an issue for the organic conversion sector. Organic demands perceived to exacerbate general labour shortages in agriculture; according to one respondent, "... the popularity of organic farming is causing problems with labour and mechanisation for ordinary farmers". A range of other issues were raised, including a perception of the backward looking nature of the organic system, and uncertainty about the evidence that organic farming is better than conventional production for human health or the environment. Some of these concerns were reinforced by comments about the integrity and effects of current publicity for the organic sector, spread fairly uniformly among the three groups. About 6% of all respondents felt, in some way, that the claims of organic farming

are misleading, on issues such as animal feeds, poultry production, and the use of sewage residues; and some concern was expressed over tactics, for example, of "... marketing via food scares", and promotion at the expense of conventional farming.

The broad range and sometimes hostile nature of the comments provided in the final question should be placed in context. Appendix B indicates that for each of these groups of comment, usually only about 5% of the respondents in each sample raised any one theme. The exception was in comments about the quality of information and advice, where (in particular, in the OFS sample) concerns involved significantly more respondents.

Preliminary statistical analysis of the attitudinal data

The low response rate to the initial mail-shot requesting agreement to be involved in the telephone survey brings into question the statistical significance of the results.¹ The target number of responses originally envisaged was 200 for each group; this was only approached by the response of the OCIS sample (62 per cent of target), with considerably lower proportions in the other two groups.

If responses are, however, generalisable, then two major issues emerge from a preliminary reading of the results. Some farms that have expressed an interest in conversion but have not subsequently followed through their interest by joining the scheme appear to be on rather smaller holdings than average, and possibly considering conversion as a strategy to counter falling revenues. This is borne out by a number of the attitudinal statements, where the OCIS group are notably more bullish about the market and on farm financial viability (although it should be noted that some in the OCIS sample are still waiting to be allocated a place on the OFS).

Also, the importance of accurate and constructive knowledge about the issues involved in organic farming becomes apparent. Sampled farmers who are already participating in the OFS have better knowledge about the degree of development of marketing channels, are less confident about the ease of access to information and advice, and are more willing to admit to uncertainty about the level of profitability of farming organically.

To explore the differences between the groups in more detail, correlation coefficients measuring the degree of association between the responses to the questions asked to all three groups have been calculated. The correlation matrices for each group are set out in Table 3.4; note that a coefficient of zero represents no association, a coefficient of one would indicate perfect correspondence, and a negative coefficient shows an inverse relationship between variables.

These results should be treated with caution because of the limited sample size, and also because of the fact that qualitative attitudinal variables have been transformed into numerical values in the same manner as that used to produce Figure 3.10. Few of the correlation coefficients between variables are large, or statistically significant, probably as a result of small sample size.

¹ For example, 95% confidence intervals for average holding size, derived from sample statistics, range from between 120.1 and 196.2 hectares for the OFS group; 67.2 and 107.4 for the OCIS group; and 86.2 and 611.0 for the Census group.

Table 3.4: Correlation matrices of major common variables, by sample group												
<i>OFS participants</i>												
	Area	???	Age	S0	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
???	-0.20											
Age	-0.23	0.06										
S0	0.12	0.06	0.04									
S1	-0.46	0.17	-0.05	0.06								
S2	0.01	0.08	0.08	-0.18	<i>-0.31</i>							
S3	0.06	0.00	0.00	<i>0.31</i>	0.08	-0.19						
S4	0.22	0.20	0.08	0.14	-0.03	-0.39	<i>0.26</i>					
S5	0.00	0.18	-0.01	0.04	0.04	0.14	0.09	-0.02				
S6	0.00	<i>0.30</i>	0.08	0.10	-0.20	0.02	-0.26	0.14	-0.12			
S7	0.07	-0.10	-0.06	0.14	0.21	-0.36	<i>0.34</i>	0.44	-0.17	-0.14		
S8	0.05	0.08	0.06	-0.13	-0.18	<i>0.27</i>	-0.20	0.02	0.10	-0.01	-0.34	
S9	-0.06	-0.02	0.11	0.13	0.32	<i>-0.29</i>	0.10	0.07	0.08	-0.06	0.08	0.16
<i>OCIS sample</i>												
	Area	???	Age	S0	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
???	0.02											
Age	-0.02	0.08										
S0	-0.11	0.09	0.01									
S1	-0.35	0.12	0.08	0.37								
S2	0.25	-0.07	0.04	-0.28	-0.45							
S3	0.07	0.02	0.05	0.16	0.13	-0.12						
S4	-0.02	0.07	0.05	0.16	<i>0.21</i>	-0.12	0.35					
S5	0.04	0.17	<i>0.20</i>	0.03	-0.03	0.26	-0.03	0.06				
S6	-0.08	0.01	-0.04	-0.25	<i>-0.22</i>	0.35	-0.17	-0.10	-0.02			
S7	-0.03	<i>0.19</i>	0.07	0.09	0.25	-0.33	0.13	0.37	0.02	-0.28		
S8	<i>0.19</i>	-0.01	-0.06	-0.09	-0.16	0.25	0.02	-0.18	0.04	-0.01	-0.14	
S9	0.02	0.16	-0.08	0.17	0.33	<i>-0.19</i>	<i>0.18</i>	<i>0.22</i>	-0.03	0.03	<i>0.22</i>	-0.05
<i>Census sample</i>												
	Area	???	Age	S0	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
???	-0.07											
Age	0.08	-0.16										
S0	0.01	0.00	-0.06									
S1	-0.24	0.17	-0.14	0.39								
S2	-0.16	-0.15	0.06	-0.02	-0.22							
S3	0.08	0.02	-0.04	0.15	0.22	<i>-0.30</i>						
S4	0.05	0.14	0.14	0.11	<i>0.26</i>	-0.08	0.36					
S5	0.06	-0.02	0.26	-0.04	-0.23	-0.06	-0.22	<i>-0.27</i>				
S6	0.15	-0.14	0.19	-0.04	-0.37	0.52	-0.34	-0.18	-0.02			
S7	-0.02	0.13	-0.07	0.22	0.45	<i>-0.31</i>	0.42	0.26	-0.17	-0.33		
S8	0.16	-0.14	0.09	-0.23	-0.44	0.20	-0.21	-0.08	0.09	0.39	-0.24	
S9	-0.21	0.02	0.09	0.21	0.39	<i>-0.27</i>	0.42	0.35	0.05	-0.38	0.44	-0.23
<p>Notes: Correlations significant at the 99% level of confidence are shown in bold. Those significant at the 95% level of confidence are shown in italic. Area is the farm size in hectares. ??? represents gender (female=1, male=0). Age represents the respondent age band. S0 corresponds to the degree of confidence about future development of the market for organic food. S1 – S9 correspond to the attitudinal statements described in Figures 3.1 – 3.9, as follows: S1, “Organic farming is kinder to the environment”; S2, “You can’t control weeds, pests and diseases without chemicals”; S3, “Organic farms are more profitable than conventional ones”; S4, “Premiums on organic products are a strong incentive to convert”; S5, “I am interested in organic farming because it is popular among local farmers”; S6, “The organic standards are too restrictive to be practical”; S7, “Changing to an organic system is an exciting new challenge”; S8, “I am not the right type of person for organic farming”; S9, “Organic farming gives staff a chance to make good use of their skills”.</p>												

Firstly, examining the correlation coefficients for the responses by OFS participants, few major insights emerge. Farm size varies inversely with agreement to the

statement that organic farming is kinder to the environment; the more disagreement there is with the statement that weed and pest control require chemical control, the less agreement there is that premiums are a strong incentive to convert, and also the less agreement that organic standards are restrictive; finally, greater agreement that organic conversion is an exciting challenge, correlates positively with the belief that premiums are a strong incentive to convert and negatively with the belief that the respondent is unsuited to organic farming.

For the sample of OCIS inquirers who have not proceeded onto the OFS, broadly the same correlations exist, although other significant correlations are also found. Farm size is also positively correlated with disagreement that chemical control methods are necessary; favourable attitudes to demand are associated with less agreement that organic farming is kinder to the environment and that standards are too restrictive; greater belief in the profitability of organic farming is associated with premiums being observed as a major incentive for conversion; and the more that standards are believed to be restrictive, the less organic conversion is seen as an exciting challenge.

For the final group, drawn from the Census, scrutiny of correlation coefficient reveals rather less overlap with the other two groups. The belief that organic farming is kinder to the environment is positively correlated with favourable expectations of the development of demand and the excitement of the challenge of conversion, but negatively with views that organic standards are too restrictive and that respondents are not personally suited to organic farming; also, views that organic standards are too restrictive are positively associated with the opinion that chemicals are necessary for weed and pest control, but in reverse with belief in the profitability of the organic system and the excitement of the conversion challenge.

Discriminant analysis provides a more formal means of analysing the major differences between the three groups. Descriptive, rather than predictive, discriminant analysis reveals whether statistically different differences exist between average score profiles of two or more *a priori* defined groups, and can also help determine which of the independent variables account for most of the difference in those average score profiles. It involves the use of uncorrelated linear combinations of the original variables, or discriminant functions, to produce an additive partitioning of the association between groups, identified by a categorical variable; standardised discriminant functions allow the important variables separating different groups to be identified (for more details, see, for example, Stevens, 1986; or Hair *et al.*, 1995). Since there are three groups, two discriminant functions may be identified. Table 3.5 provides the appropriate measures for interpretation of the discriminant analysis: the standardised discriminant functions, pooled correlation coefficients between the standardised canonical discriminant functions and the discriminating variables, and group centroids of the unstandardised canonical discriminant functions. Both functions are statistically significant, although at the lower limit of the numbers required to be generalisable.² The group centroids of the first discriminant function show that it separates the OFS participants from both the OCIS sample and the

² Both Barcikowski and Stevens (1975) and Huberty (1975) have shown, using Monte Carlo studies, that reproducibility of results for given populations depends on there being a relatively large ratio between the overall sample size and the number of independent variables (of approximately 20:1). In this case, there are 13 independent variables, requiring a minimum overall sample size of 260; the total of 247 responses comes acceptably close to that minimum.

Census sample; those of the second discriminant function separate the Census sample from the OCIS sample.

Table 3.5: Discriminant functions, coefficient-variable correlations and group centroids for major common variables				
	<i>Discriminant Function 1</i>		<i>Discriminant Function 2</i>	
	Standardized Canonical Coefficients	Pooled within group coefficient-variable correlation	Standardized Canonical Coefficients	Pooled within group coefficient-variable correlation
Area	-0.08	-0.04	0.58	0.57
?/?	-0.44	-0.26	-0.25	-0.29
Age	-0.09	0.37	0.12	0.06
S0	0.51	0.00	0.12	0.14
S1	0.10	0.38	-0.11	-0.19
S2	-0.33	-0.46	0.44	0.22
S3	0.37	0.57	-0.24	0.01
S4	0.32	0.55	0.48	0.40
S5	0.43	0.241	-0.15	-0.05
S6	0.23	-0.16	-0.54	-0.34
S7	0.19	0.46	0.17	0.16
S8	-0.18	-0.36	0.13	0.19
S9	0.08	0.41	-0.12	-0.18
	<i>Group centroids for Function 1</i>		<i>Group centroids for Function 2</i>	
OFS participants		-0.30		0.51
OCIS sample		0.82		0.04
Census sample		-0.23		-0.29

Note: For the key to the variables, see notes to Table 3.4.

Generally, the largest correlations determine the underlying construct represented by the discriminant function; the value of the standardised coefficients is important for determining which of the coefficients are redundant. For the first discriminant function, it is primarily correlations of coefficients and variables concerned with profitability (S3, 0.57; S4, 0.55) and the excitement of the challenge (S7, 0.46) that define the function, although there is a negative correlation (S2, -0.46) associated with the weed, pest and disease control variable. However, the low standardised coefficient associated with S7 suggests that it is redundant, and thus the first, more important discriminant function may be characterised as a profitability-management continuum. For the second discriminant function, the largest correlations are between farm size and the premium variable (Area, 0.57; S4, 0.40), with a secondary, negative correlation associated with the belief that organic standards are restrictive. All standardised coefficients relating to these variables are relatively large, and so this may be characterised as a scale-management continuum.

Thus, in broad terms, the first discriminant function suggests that members of the OFS sample are less concerned about management problems of conversion to organic farming, and more upbeat about profitability, than either the OCIS or the Census groups. The second discriminant function suggests that size, and perceptual barriers to conversion (particularly statement 4 concerning the incentive of premiums and statement 6 on the practicality of organic standards), are responsible for the

OCIS sample's characteristic of showing interest in, but not proceeding with, conversion to organic production.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The major objectives of this study have been to assess the effect of rapid and dynamic change in the circumstances of organic farming on the attitudes of farmers, more generally, towards taking up the system. The enthusiastic policy stance of the government, together with the decoupling of the organic premium from conventional prices, may have shifted the emphasis from a set of "old" motives, concerned with the environment, ethics and craftsmanship, to a "new" rationale based on business interests in reducing costs, increasing margins and securing the future of farm businesses. Paralleling this shift, the historically hostile stance of conventional farmers towards the organic system may be softening, and the level of interest expressed through OCIS reflects this. However, on the surface it still seems as if such interest is difficult to translate into concrete take-up, and this may reflect remaining perceptual barriers and, possibly, for some currently highly profitable farming systems, incentives that are at least perceived to be too low to justify adaptation to organic methods. Clarification of these issues will have important consequences for future agri-environment policies.

This study does provide some evidence in response to such questions, although because of a poor response rate and other difficulties with the survey, any conclusions that may be drawn are tentative. Nevertheless, results outlined in Chapter Three do provide a wealth of material, illuminating key issues for the future of organic policy in England.

Farms that contacted OCIS, but did not go on to enter the conversion scheme, tend on average to be small, with considerable numbers appearing to be horticultural smallholdings; their participation in other agri-environment schemes is also relatively low. This suggests that size may be an absolute barrier to conversion, and is supported by later analysis. Farmers within the OFS tend to be more involved in grass-based livestock enterprises, although the combinable crops they produce are likely to be for animal feed.

In general terms, the significant results of responses from the attitudinal statements may be summarised as follows.

Organic farming is associated significantly with ecological care, although from a number of responses to the final, open question, environmental understanding seems to be patchy. In particular, respondents in the samples drawn from OCIS records and the general farming population were uncertain about strategies to control weed and pest control strategies without usage of agrochemicals. The organic approach also continues to be perceived as less profitable than conventional agriculture, apart from those already converting with the help of the organic aid scheme. The fact that such perceptions persist may be due to the absolutely small base from which the organic sector has grown, since few respondents from any of the three samples recognised it as spreading through the influence of existing organic farmers. There is some dissatisfaction with the framework of certification and standards, expressed with some vigour in the final, open question; nevertheless,

conversion is seen by many respondents as an exciting challenge, especially those actually carrying it out. Few see themselves as the barrier to conversion; and the farm structure is not an overwhelming problem for those in the OCIS sample who have considered but not progressed conversion, although the Census sample reflecting the general farming population was evenly divided on this issue.

The market is not seen as a barrier either, at least for the OCIS sample; few expect the organic market to decrease. The marketing channels perceived as most developed are those for vegetables and dairy products; crops, eggs and meat are, in succession, distinguished as less well developed.

Information about organic conversion is, for most respondents, perceived as very easy to obtain; advice, though rated less enthusiastically, is still identified as relatively easy to obtain. On the other hand, the difference in responses between the OCIS and OFS samples, together with comments in reaction to the final, open question suggest that although information and advice are saturated in the pre-conversion phase, once embarked upon the process participants in the OFS get little or no support.

The main motive for conversion reported by those in the OFS, overwhelmingly, and in conformity with prior studies, was to stop usage of agrochemicals. However, the influence of farmers' spouses, which has been a prominent factor in other studies, appears as being of minor importance; and the desire to market locally (which might be interpreted as part of a set of "sustainable agriculture" attributes) is of hardly any significance. Among the OCIS and Census samples, both financial security and care for the environment figured strongly as reasons for wanting to convert to organic production, though animal welfare, soil fertility and personal health were of lesser importance.

Payments available from the OFS are cited as important by respondents in the OCIS and Census samples, and most would prefer them to be higher and for longer. However (with the possible exception of horticulture), payment levels in the OFS have been calculated to reflect probable revenue declines over the conversion period (Lampkin, 1999); from this, it can probably be inferred that misperception of the likely financial changes resulting from the decision to convert constitute a barrier.

The wide-ranging assortment of comments gathered from the final question in the survey suggests, at least in part, some degree of ignorance on the part of farmers concerning the regulatory structure of organic farming, and residual hostility towards the approach as a whole. Nevertheless, all of the perceptions expressed deserve serious consideration. To some extent, remarks about inconsistency and confusion in standards will have been addressed by the coming into force of the Livestock Standards Regulation (interviews were completed before this occurred), which ensures a common system of control of organic production across the European Union; and there is evidence that the major organic organisations in Britain are taking seriously recommendations from the Agriculture Select Committee's report on organic farming (HoC, 2000) that consistency between them should be improved. However, that by itself is not enough; organic organisations will need to make active efforts to engage with their new and potential membership, to encourage involvement and to explain and popularise knowledge of the basis of certification standards.

Social scientists should always be wary of claiming too close a correlation between attitudes, particularly as expressed through a vehicle as superficial as a brief telephone questionnaire, and behaviour. Nevertheless, where such results not only reiterate what has been found in previous studies, but also are also helpful in accounting for problems that are occurring in policy delivery, they may be regarded, in broad outline at least, as helpful. On this basis, the concluding section sets out some suggestions for policy reform.

Recommendations

Our recommendations centre around five major themes. Three relate to policy, one concerns the institutional structure of the organic sector itself, and one involves the overall partnership between government and the organic movement. Together, they address the major grassroot concerns expressed by the respondents to our survey, and are consistent with the broader framework of evidence from earlier studies.

Since a good deal of the evidence presented here suggests that a number of different types of problem inhibit conversion, including size and business structure, one of the major conclusions of this study is that future programmes to aid conversion should be more sophisticated and appropriately targeted, particularly through modulation to address the dissimilar issues differentiating smallholdings from other farm types. It is possible that a simplified small farm conversion payment scheme could address this issue.

The lack of knowledge in particular areas, particularly relating to management issues as an increasingly broader range of farm sizes and types are drawn into conversion, suggests a case for additional research on financial performance of converting (and probably immediate post-conversion) organic farms, but only if such research can be disseminated effectively. In order to build confidence among potential converters, a range of best practice management strategies, including financial management, need to be available so that farm businesses can evaluate how their changing their existing management might change performance. Since at present the OCIS package includes very little in terms of such advice, instead concentrating rather on technical issues, this may be one of the most effective and easily implementable recommendations.

Because of the clear divergence between the perceptions of accessibility of information and advice expressed, respectively, by the OCIS and OFS samples, it seems clear that more and better advisory services would improve the performance of farms in conversion. Although it has been contended that the need for advisory support continues for some time beyond the legal conversion period, since changes to farm structure continue for as much as 10 years after commencement (Dabbert, 1996), in fact advisory support becomes much more restricted once farmers set out on conversion with the support of the OFS. Quite apart from possible effects on de-conversion (Rigby and Young, 2000, found lack of technical ability to be an important influence on cessation) potential converters may well be affected by the degree of success or difficulty implied by those ahead in the conversion process.

The sense of mild antagonism expressed by respondents towards organic organisations, particularly the Soil Association, is a cause for concern. One obvious method of improving relationships would be to modernise the way in which standards are developed, policed and disseminated, by reinforcing and broadening the involvement of farmers. Greater commitment in this way could, for example, have provided valuable checks on the numerous changes that have proved damaging to the continuity of the standards. Ownership of the standards by a broader group would help cement their role as consumer assurance mechanisms, rather than as a burden of agricultural bureaucracy.

The final recommendation concerns the way in which organic farming, as a whole, is perceived. The results indicate that there is a degree of residual unfriendliness towards the organic sector felt by conventional farmers, and promotion of greater understanding between the two may help avoid the potential for the kind of conflict that has materialised in Germany. The most effective way of achieving better relationships would be to refine the sensitivity of current image management of the system, and rather than treating the exercise simply as knowledge transfer, involve conventional farmers both formally and informally in the efforts to promote a more sustainable agriculture in England.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Organic Farming Scheme (OFS)

Attitude Survey

A. Introductory section

Thank-you for agreeing to help us in this survey work. Comments like this in italic are intended for your guide you through the questionnaire. Please work your way through the questionnaire with the respondent, ticking the boxes that are most relevant. If you are asked any questions, please refer the respondent to the organic farming Helpline on 0117 922 7707.

Boxed questions = as directed ONLY. Q1-5 will not be asked if the information is available from census.

" I am calling from the Institute of Rural Studies, Aberystwyth University regarding a survey about the Organic Farming Scheme. Is it a convenient time to ask you some questions about organic farming or shall I call again later ?

Thank-you for agreeing to take part in this survey about how farmers decide whether or not to convert to organic production. It is being conducted for MAFF by the University as part of a review of the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). Your answers will remain confidential and anonymous.

OCIS Sample ONLY To start with, can we get an idea of your farm ?

Q1 What area do you farm ?

Area Farmed
(acres)

Area Farmed
(hec)

Q2 Do you farm in a less favoured area?, if yes, is it a disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged area ?

non-LFA - non Less favoured area

DA - Disadvantaged area

SDA - Severely disadvantaged area

Q3. What are your main enterprises ?

Dairy

Combin crops

Beef

Root crops

Sheep

Veg

Pigs

Poultry

Fruit

Q4 Is your farm in an environmental scheme ?

Yes

No

Q5 If YES, which schemes are run on your farm

(tick as mentioned, do not run through all the choices)

ESA - Environmentally sensitive area

NSA - Nitrate sensitive area

NVZ - Nitrate vulnerable zone

CS - Countryside stewardship

CA - Countryside access

MS - Moorland scheme

HS - Habitat scheme

SSSI - Site of special scientific interest

other

Q6 Is there any area currently farmed organically ?
(including in conversion)

Yes

No

Organic Area
(acres)

(hectares)

OCIS stoppers & conventional farmers ONLY

Q7 Would you consider farming organically in the future ?

Yes

No

B. Section on organic farming in general

Q8 I would like to ask you how strongly you agree with the following statements

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Organic farming is kinder to the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You can't control weeds, pests and diseases without chemicals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organic farms are more profitable than conventional ones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The premiums on organic products are a strong incentive to convert	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am interested in organic farming because it is popular among local farmers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The organic standards are too restrictive to be practical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changing to an organic system is an exciting new challenge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am not the right type of person for organic farming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organic farming gives staff a chance to make good use of their skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Non-OFS ONLY

My farm structure is not suitable for organic production

Now I would like to ask you two questions about marketing organic products

Q9 How do you see the demand for organic food developing in the future ?

Increase significantly

Increase a little

Stay the same

Decrease

Don't know

Q10 Please choose one option to describe the following organic marketing channels

	Well developed	Little developed	Not developed	Don't know
Meat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eggs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vegetables	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Milk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q11 How easy is it to obtain information and advice

	Very easy	Easy	Difficult	Very difficult	Don't know
Information on organic farming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advice on organic farming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

TO OFS group only

Q12 Please indicate how important the following reasons were in your choice to convert to organic farming

	Very important	Important	Not important	Don't know
I wanted to stop using chemicals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wanted to market my produce locally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My spouse / partner was very keen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

To what extent do you agree with the following statements ?

Q13 I decided to convert because under conventional production, I was concerned about

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Soil fertility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Animal health & welfare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial viability of the farm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The effects on the environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C. Organic farming scheme in detail - OCIS stoppers and conventional only

Now I would like to ask you a few more detailed questions about the Organic Farming Scheme and I will refer to it as the OFS

Q14 Are you familiar with the MAFF Organic Farming Scheme Yes No

If no, move to section D

Q15 How important would the OFS grant scheme be to your decision to convert ?

The only reason The main reason

Just one of the reasons Not effect it

Q16 How would you describe the OFS payment rates ? Too high Too low About right Don't know

Q17 Over what period do you think the OFS payments should be made ?

5 years

3 years

Continued after conversi

Don't know

Q18 Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Yes	No	Don't know
Payments should be higher at the beginning of the conversion period (assuming total stays the same)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants to the OFS must apply within 3months of registering with a sector body. Is this a problem for applicants ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you consider organic conversion if the OFS paid HALF the current rate ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you consider organic conversion if the OFS paid TWICE the current rate ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

OCIS ONLY

Q19 Have you started organic conversion without funding from the OFS ?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Q20 Did you decide to stop your conversion because you could not get a grant from the OFS ?

	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Q21 The OFS requires land classified as unimproved land under other schemes to be treated as unimproved land under OFS. Does this cause financial or management difficulties ?

	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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OFS ONLY

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Q22 Did you consider starting the organic conversion without OFS ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q23 Will you continue to farm organically when the scheme ends ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

D. Personal details May I ask you some questions about yourself ?

Q24 What is your role in the farm business

<input type="checkbox"/> Sole owner	<input type="checkbox"/> Joint owner	<input type="checkbox"/> Farm manager
<input type="checkbox"/> Tenant	<input type="checkbox"/> Farmers spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Q25 Gender (no need to ask !)

<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female
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Q26 In which age band do you fall

<input type="checkbox"/> 18-25	<input type="checkbox"/> 25-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 41-65	<input type="checkbox"/> over 65
--------------------------------	--------------------------------	--------------------------------	----------------------------------

Q27 Have you studied agriculture or farming in further education

<input type="checkbox"/> Further Ed	<input type="checkbox"/> University	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Inc. Organic	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Q28 How many years have you been farming

<input type="checkbox"/> 0-5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6-20	<input type="checkbox"/> 21+
------------------------------	-------------------------------	------------------------------

Q29 Do you have any comments on organic farming that we may have missed ?

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Negative SA feedback | <input type="radio"/> One EU std | <input type="radio"/> Hobbyist | <input type="radio"/> Sceptic |
| <input type="radio"/> W / D control | <input type="radio"/> One global std | <input type="radio"/> Fees too high | <input type="radio"/> Stds too restrictive |
| <input type="radio"/> Funding throughout conver | <input type="radio"/> Red-tape | <input type="radio"/> Animal welfare | <input type="radio"/> Unfair imports |
| <input type="radio"/> Splitting Fm community | <input type="radio"/> Poor info / advice | <input type="radio"/> Co-ops / local groups | <input type="radio"/> Supermarkets power |
| <input type="radio"/> Policing inadequate | <input type="radio"/> Difficult market | <input type="radio"/> Honest publicity | <input type="radio"/> Better marketing |
| <input type="radio"/> Operate better stds | <input type="radio"/> Uneconomic | <input type="radio"/> Rule changes | |
| <input type="radio"/> One UK std | <input type="radio"/> Demand | <input type="radio"/> More abattoirs | |

Q30 Would you be willing to take part in a discussion group to explore these issues further Yes No

Name	Tel	CPH
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Send results	Postcode	OFS <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	County	OCIS <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Focus group		
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes		

Appendix B: Responses to the open question

As noted in Chapter 3, comments made as a result of the final, open question were coded into 26 separate themes. These comments are reproduced in this Appendix, and are summarised in Table B.1, below, by sample group.

Code no:	Description of comment code	OFS Participants	OCIS Sample	Census Sample	Total
1	Critical comments about the Soil Association	2	5	4	11
2	Concerns over the effectiveness of weed and disease control	1	3	4	8
3	Proponents of a single UK-wide organic standard	6	11	2	19
4	Proponents of a single EU-wide organic standard	3	6	3	12
5	Proponents of a single global organic standard	0	7	3	10
6	Individuals who criticised the amount of bureaucracy in the OFS	5	17	3	25
7	Critical comments about information and advice within the organic sector	16	16	11	43
8	Feeling that operating within the organic market difficult	2	2	2	6
9	Scepticism about the economic viability of organic conversion	2	8	2	12
10	Feeling that the OFS could not meet demand	3	12	4	19
11	Need to identify organic growers operating on a 'hobby' rather than business basis	3	2	0	5
12	Feeling that the fees charged by registration bodies (e.g. SA) were too high	2	5	1	8
13	Concerns about animal welfare as a result of organic farming practice	1	9	4	14
14	Individuals who proposed the establishment of local support groups and organic producer co-ops	4	6	3	13
15	A need for organic marketing and publicity to become more honest	1	9	4	14
16	Frustration with frequent rule changes in the organic standards	8	2	4	14
17	A need for more certified abattoirs (mainly on animal welfare and transport grounds)	4	4	1	9
18	Scepticism about the benefits of organic farming	3	4	8	15
19	Comments that the rules and regulations were impractical or too restrictive	14	11	7	32
20	Comments regarding the unfairness of different organic standards on an internal level and the difficulties this imposed on the UK organic sector through imports	6	4	6	16
22	Concerned about the influence and power of the supermarkets over the organic sector	1	4	4	9
23	Feeling that they operated to the same or a better standard than stipulated in organic regulations but were not registered as organic	0	3	1	4
24	Need for increased support for marketing organic produce	3	6	5	14

25	Concern and scepticism about the policing of organic standards	2	5	2	9
26	Concern that the organic movement was causing a rift between organic and conventional producers; a them and us atmosphere	0	4	0	4
27	Comments supporting funding throughout the whole conversion period	3	3	3	9

- 1. Administrative burden**
 - Don't like paperwork - biggest problem
 - Too much bureaucracy, there are inspectors for everything. Too much paperwork - makes life a misery
 - Why are the grants and paperwork so confusing?
 - Difficult to justify registering as organic as a hobby farm due to costs and admin
 - Too much red tape (three such comments)
 - Admin and cost deter organic farmers from registering under any organic scheme
 - Too much paperwork

- 2. Policing and monitoring**
 - Need more monitoring to ensure quality outputs
 - Better policing
 - Poor auditing and checks
 - Policing of organic regulations in the EU and UK a concern
 - MAFF would be better employed policing all forms of food production to ensure it is healthy not just safe and not just organic

- 3. Supermarkets**
 - Supermarkets taking over and premium will be lost to producers
 - Supermarkets will force down prices and premiums
 - Need intervention to counter supermarket power
 - Supermarkets undermining organic sector as non-organic goods promoted as organic
 - Supermarkets are eroding premiums

- 4. Imports**
 - Foreign imports and standards unfair
 - Stop imports
 - Control foreign imports
 - Foreign standards leading to cheap imports and undermining home organic produce

- 5. Demand**
 - Agencies keen to sign people but cannot cope with demand
 - They do not appear capable of handling the current levels of demand
 - There needs to be closer control over the numbers converting to control demand and maintain premium
 - Resources too stretched

- 6. Animal Welfare**
 - Problems occur when it is decreed which abattoir is to be used - long journeys have implications for animal welfare and excessive fuel consumption
 - Sheep are the hardest thing to keep alive under the organic system
 - I have deep concerns for my animals welfare as standards are so restrictive in that area
 - Did not join due to serious concerns over animal welfare
 - Lack of certified abattoirs

- We have Animal welfare concerns when not allowed to use certain medical treatments

7. **Information and advice**

- Not all information is in-depth enough
- Much poor and bad information around
- Advice biased toward pro organic
- The best place to get good advice is from farmers who are already organic
- Felt out of depth in first year of conversion due to lack of knowledge
- Hard to find good specific advice e.g. yields
- Advice simply not good enough
- All advice should be free
- Better research into exactly what is good and bad for the environment
- Cost of advice once committed to conversion is too high
- Despite much demand, there is little interest / advice / information in the organic egg sector
- Difficult to sell to shops at premium
- Good helpful information pre conversion, but not since
- Had to pay up front for info
- High cost of advice
- I am disappointed at the high cost of advice
- Info and advice not objective
- Info very basic - needs to be specific
- Information / advice is generally good but slow in coming
- Lack of answers to problems of organic practices
- Local group much more useful than OCIS
- More advice needed, little information available post conversion especially as regards technical issues
- More independent research required
- Most advice seems to be directed for beginners, little technical or practical advice available for those already converting or beyond
- Need far better advisors
- Need regionally specific advice
- Nobody has any real answers, not even MAFF
- Not enough advice, we need field officers with practical knowledge
- Not enough marketing advice available
- Positive benefits on the environment un-rated
- Quality of information poor
- There is a lack of good advice
- There is much misinformation put around about the size and availability of markets
- There is still a lack of basic guidance - how far do you have to be from conventional farmers to avoid cross-contamination?
- Too much organic drivel puts people off - want clear concise accurate advice which is proven - much idealism but little practical proof
- Very little advice available for organic fruit growers
- Very little research into organic
- Young / inexperienced advisors are ignored by farmers - why not use the best farmers as advisors?
- Info very general, not specific enough

8. **Scepticism**

- Organic farming is driving us back in time rather than forward into the 21st century
- I don't think there is a big gap between the quality of conventional and organic products
- The government is putting too much emphasis on organic
- Use of raw untreated sewage is dangerous to health & environment
- Organics is all about reverting to old fashioned practices many of which consumers would not like if they knew about them
- Sceptical about benefits and if labour will be available
- Organic farming is neither good nor easy on tenant farmers
- One of the biggest cons on the British public
- There is no scientific evidence to prove that organic is better than conventional production for humans or the environment
- Animal welfare has improved but people are not aware of what's in treatments, fertilisers etc
- Organic too narrow minded, e.g. will not consider GM alternatives for future
- I am worried that the use of the old organic methods will plunge agriculture back 50 years
- Its very labour intensive and time consuming, seems like we're going back to the 1940's
- Premium prices will not last
- Where is all the extra labour going to come from?
- Many modern breeds cannot cope with low input farming
- Organics old fashioned image may be popular with consumers but its out of touch with reality and farming practice
- There will always be a market for organics but it cannot overtake conventional farming -supply will rise, price will fall, newcomers will be less attracted to it
- The popularity of organic farming is causing problems with labour and mechanisation for ordinary farmers
- Grave doubts about whether organic farming actually is better than conventional for the environment and consumers
- No long-term proof that organically grown products are any better for humans than conventional products

9. **Marketing**

- Organics is all about marketing and nothing to do with the environment and ideals
- Organic should be seen as a niche market or it may threaten the whole market with its claims
- Market is evolving and therefore very difficult to predict
- Not sure where to sell products - need advice
- Having to pay to use the word organic is ridiculous - a protection racket
- Do we want to promote British or Organic?
- Difficult to market organic eggs as no network of producers
- Many too busy growing to carry out marketing
- People should not have to pay the Soil Association a fee to use the word organic - it's in the dictionary
- Needs extensive promotion and market campaign
- Clearer labelling needed

- Should be concentrating on and marketing quality not quantity
- Strong environmental motivation, needs more effort to encourage take-up
- Farmers need to learn to produce what the market wants and this includes environment, soil conservation, access, animal welfare, and organic only if it fits in
- Becoming more enthusiastic as conversion continues - perhaps not all the benefits are sold to other farmers

10. Standards

- Agencies are overzealous in their application of standards
- Standards sometimes out of date and controversial
- If we went organic we would have to half our flock
- Had to import top soil to join the scheme - cost of testing was greater than the OFS grant
- Conflicts between OFS and CS and other schemes
- Lack of consistency on worldwide organic standards, we in the UK are regulated far more and therefore have a cost disadvantage
- Standards are lax and getting more relaxed each year
- Should be some leeway in the rules
- Should be single global standards and regulations
- Must be a standardised organic regulatory system worldwide
- Some environmental standards should be tightened
- Need worldwide standards and regulations for organic production
- Should be world wide standards
- Rules and regulations dictating where you buy inputs from was the last straw - we left
- Why have different standards? The rest of the world has much lower standards than UK creating an unfair and uneven playing field
- Competition and inconsistency between schemes
- Ambiguity in classifications
- Need single European organic standard
- Sheep grazing restrictions are a problem for management
- Conflict among schemes and lack of consistency
- Anti attitude to artificial fertilisers is wrong
- Labelling is becoming a joke as so many standards now exist
- Sheep grazing restrictions cause problems - would prefer to use less sheep for more days but am not permitted
- I am put off going organic due to the complexity of schemes
- Impossible to plan without security. Need to know what the rules are before planting and that that won't change until you've sold your produce
- Too many rules
- Milking rules on hygiene are suspect
- Difficult to plan long term if rules keep changing
- Organic regulations do not take into account realities of farming practice
- Should be some leeway in the rules
- Organic standards are too restrictive
- Don't agree that we should have nothing non-organic on the farm
- Constant changes in regulations confusing
- There is also no consistency in the interpretation of new rules amongst organic bodies
- Abattoirs hypocritical - why are they allowed to use chemicals and we're not

- Should be uniform regulations within the EU
- The government should sort out the rule changes and those caught up between them – those that suffer should be the first in line for funding
- Some rules are too stringent to be practical
- Too many rule changes too often
- Regulations often blurred or non-existent in some areas of concern
- Inflexible new rules, despite one year saying one thing, the next year saying something else – my conversion was put back a whole year
- It is not easy to make long term plans when the rules keep changing
- Need common worldwide standards
- Silly rules on disease, can't use preventatives, but can use anything once disease is found
- Livestock rules farcical
- Standards too lax
- Need consistent standards
- Rules, regulations but no answers to problems farmers have
- Standards bizarre, inconsistent and contradictory
- Rules are crazy - if you can't find organic feed ok go ahead and use normal stuff and still call product organic
- Rules and regulations written by pen pushers not farmers
- Imported rubbish undercutting home market - standards not the same
- Double, treble and quadruple standards, need to treat everyone equally
- Pitiful tolerance of other schemes e.g. Countryside Stewardship - payments were virtually nil because we were in Countryside Stewardship Scheme

11. Funding and support

- OFS funding is a lottery and is undermining confidence in the scheme
- Conversion funding for new machinery
- Funding is made available at the wrong time - This requires farms to commit to the OFS before being assured of funding
- The Government must decide whether to run with organic and so provide the resources or not
- Scheme keeps running out of money - its a farce
- Need to stop grants and subsidy
- Not enough grant aid available
- Organic farming should be market not subsidy driven
- (From farming consultant) lack of OFS funding has not only stopped my conversion but led my clients to believe that it is currently unwise to convert
- Scrap OFS - introduce organic area payments
- Better-distributed payments
- Need more training and support especially for small producers
- OFS too low to compensate for costs of conversion
- 3 comments stating that funding should be available throughout the entire conversion period
- No support network
- I am worried about the inevitable loss of premiums as organic markets expands
- UK farming should follow New Zealand's example
- The government should stop funding conventional agriculture if they really do want to encourage organic
- The OFS should be an EU scheme backed by EU money

- The government should step in and consolidate funding and standards
- Premiums will disappear with increased uptake
- Training is expensive, should be made cheaper
- Long waiting lists for grants
- OFS subsidy should be paid over whole of conversion period
- Average farm would find it difficult to convert without OFS
- UK at disadvantage to rest of EU, as standards are so high
- Should promote local / support groups - would encourage specific local knowledge to be shared
- Should be no subsidies in farming
- Too much incentives in farming - should be financially stable before converting
- Subsidies cause problems, agriculture should be market led
- If there were no financial incentive people would not convert
- GB far behind rest of Europe in supporting organic
- Conversion payments should span whole conversion stage
- OFS more of a hindrance than a help

12. Agencies

- Aggressive confrontational attitude
- Annual fees are too high for small producers
- Co-operatives best way forward
- I am deeply unhappy with the way Soil Association policies control organic production
- Lack of consistency in adjudicating bodies
- MAFF are incompetent, MAFF is too stringent on common grazing land
- More commitment needed from Government
- No consistency between schemes and even outright hostility toward each other
- Organic sector is being run in amateur fashion
- Politics between sector bodies is farcical
- PSD lord it over UK chemical users, but different standards in EU & worldwide - why should we be forced to pay for the PSD's particular standards if rest of world don't agree with them?
- Soil Association approve some chemicals not even approved by MAFF
- Soil Association are idealist - what standards are we to have next?
- Soil Association charges are excessive
- Soil Association: good inspectors but poor advisors
- Soil Association have no idea about real farming, bad decisions are putting people's livelihoods at risk
- Soil association too inflexible, too much power, bureaucracy
- The government is more concerned with fox hunting than agriculture
- The Soil Association are money grabbers - when OFS was increased, SA raised fees
- The Soil Association don't trust producers, try's to catch them out, sees themselves as messiah's, difficult to deal with, idealists, blinkered (not looking positively at GM)
- The Soil Association have been clamped down on by the Advertising standards Authority and The National Office of Animal Welfare, are they the sort of organisation that should be setting the agenda and standards for the organic industry?

- Very expensive to go organic and have to give a high % to self styled organic bodies

13. Conversion

- Conversion is financially very difficult, especially in the second year. The size of grant is ok, but it needs to be spread out better over the conversion period
- Feel trapped by conversion period - what if funds / markets dry up?
- Slashing of payments in 2nd yr of conversion is very difficult
- Other EU countries have annual payments for being organic, why not us
- Converting to organic would be too time consuming and costly for our "hobby" enterprise
- Our stud is a major part of the farms enterprises but cannot be entered into organic scheme which has effectively blocked our conversion
- As most of farm down to pasture, changing to organic was considered too much risk in terms of animal welfare, parasites etc
- Economics of conversion are not favourable
- I am actively looking at conversion as a means to get greater profitability from milk
- Did not convert because access to organic markets is difficult
- Level of investment needed in machinery is very high
- Conversion scuppered due to not having a slurry store
- I consider my standards better than those promoted by Soil Association and can prove 25yrs of organic practice, yet I am still forced to go through conversion
- Conversion periods are too long in some cases. Should be more flexible and less extreme.
- We small / second job farmers are often ignored in the conversion process
- Not allowed to convert as milking/shipment farm
- Conversion without OFS mostly unviable
- Farm too productive to think about reverting to organic - have converted some acreage as a result of contract with supermarket
- Found I was not eligible for conversion but it wasn't even suggested to me how to convert over time
- Not enough emphasis on creating even basic conversion plans or even cropping plans or in converting in manageable stages
- Soil type did not permit conversion, Soil type not suitable for conversion
- Not convinced OFS subsidy fully compensates through conversion
- Don't agree that ESA payments stop after conversion
- Post conversion, the organic producer is subject to price / market fluctuations and lack of support – it leaves them vulnerable
- Main barrier to conversion is financial - sceptical of whether organics would even be able to pay rents
- We would have been ok if we went for the old scheme but now we are not eligible due to being in an ESA

14. Publicity

- Bad impression gained of scheme - i.e. run out of money
- Public should be made aware of the real differences between organic and free range poultry farming
- Organic claims to be environmentally friendly but it must be bad to use sulphur and copper sprays on fruit instead of conventional ones
- Organic should come clean to the public about production methods - e.g. organic baby food can contain heavy metals
- Public confusion - is free range organic?

- Better education to the public about what organic farming is and what problems conventional farming can cause
- Should encourage organic production simply from environmental point of view
- Public being duped
- False impression given of the social / environmental benefits of organic production
- Develop website for sales
- Public are being misinformed about animal feeds
- British public more conscious of low prices than other benefits
- Need to educate public on current methods of production
- Conventional farming given bad press as result of organics
- Organics being promoted at the expense of conventional
- Concerns about organic principle of marketing via food scares
- Needs more interest generated in organic farming by MAFF

14. Environment

- Don't support compulsory creation of field margins
- Organic producers need to be made more aware of ecosystem management
- Surprised no criteria for roadside verges conservation, pollution, wildlife value
- MAFF would be better off if they spent more time encouraging better practice in conventional farming rather than bothering about organic farming

15. Weed control

- Weed control over large scale is impossible
- Would help if you could have limited control of weeds

16. Viability

- Facts should be faced, some parts of the country and only certain enterprises are viable as organic
- Financially not feasible on every farm
- Only possible on some soil types

17. Ideology

- Organic should be about ideology not profit
- Organic is losing sight of food safety and health issues and getting too involved in alternatives
- Should be some sort of compromise between organic and conventional
- Organic is sentimental farming - why turn the clock back? Why not use the available technology
- Organic is splitting the farming community
- Seems to be a them and us emerging
- There is local conflict between regulated and non-regulated organic producers- what is and what is not organic?
- Us and them attitude developing between organic and conventional farmers
- Changed to organic as a quality of life decision
- Organic one way out of subsidy trap

18. Miscellaneous

- Worried about fruit trees becoming disease ridden and dying
- Organics very dependant on disposable income and changes in attitudes
- Agriculture is very manipulated by the chemical companies, their prices reflect the level of subsidy