

SEEDA Sustainable Business Awards aim to encourage and promote a sustainable approach to business in the South East region through celebrating excellence, significant achievement and through the dissemination of best practice.

## LUDDESDOWN ORGANIC FARMS LTD

### Company Background

Luddesdown Organic Farms Ltd consists of two adjoining farms (Court Farm and Brookers Farm) run as a single unit. The main farm extends to 903 acres, situated on the North Downs of Kent. The farm converted to an organic system, to Soil Association standards some 15 years ago. Luddesdown Organic Farms Ltd grows 18 acres of organic vegetables, has developed 50 acres of stockless plots and maintains a herd of 100 suckler cows.

### ACTION HISTORY

Non-use of chemicals is bringing with it economic, social and environmental benefits. Luddesdown Organic Farms Ltd operates effectively through the rotation of crops, avoidance of chemicals, environmental disposal of crop residues and a range of other actions which contribute to an integrated approach. While promoting environmental protection in farm management, Luddesdown is also piloting, testing and developing new options in organic farming methods. The farm is constantly innovating to find practical solutions to environmental problems, customer needs and farming practices.

Luddesdown has implemented a range of initiatives, including -

- The development of a personalised vegetable box scheme - serving 250 customers - with promotion of seasonal vegetables and healthy eating. 30 types of vegetable are grown and sold through this innovative marketing scheme
- The farm's 100-cow suckler herd is reared on herb rich pastures and high quality silage grown on the farm. They live in family groups and each cow produces just one calf a year. Veterinary attention is on an individual animal basis only and homeopathy is used in the majority of cases. Homeopathy has been used with the cattle on the farm in preference to antibiotics for the past 9 years, and has proved very effective as a preventative health measure. By creating the best living conditions the animals are stress free, naturally happy and healthy
- Luddesdown is pioneering (with the Elm Farm Research Centre) field trials into stockless organic farming methods, including novel crop rotations and other innovations to take organic farming to the forefront of agricultural good practice. Research and development (eg crop rotation) is

### Key Achievements

- ❖ Completely avoids the use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers
- ❖ Relies on labour intensive farming practices which provides between 20-40% more employment for the local community than equivalent conventional farming
- ❖ Is on average 300% more energy efficient than a conventional farm of the same size
- ❖ Takes 50 tonnes of green waste, collected by local councils each week from 4000 households, for composting
- ❖ Sets land aside for research into developing new options in organic farming methods
- ❖ Hosts visits for farmers considering conversion to organic farming, helping to spread best practice
- ❖ Attracts over 500 visitors each year as part of its 'open door' policy to raise awareness of the benefits of organic food production

helping to identify ways to move farming away from unsustainable and traditionally chemically-intensive practices to identify practical and cost effective alternatives

### Energy/Fuel Savings

The biggest single energy input for conventional farming is synthetic nitrogen fertilizer - it takes 15 tonnes of gas oil to make one tonne of nitrogen fertiliser. At Luddesdown, in common with other organic farms, fertiliser is provided largely by ploughing in manure produced by livestock on the farm. This and other practices mean that organic farms tend to be more labour intensive (between 20-40%) than conventional farms - and benefit rural communities, through providing more local jobs.

### Waste

Luddesdown is working with Medway City Council and Tonbridge & Malling Council to reduce the amount of waste that is sent to landfill. Luddesdown has been taking 50 tonnes of green waste each week, collected from 4000 households around the Medway area, and has piloted composting of cardboard waste collected from the Tonbridge and Malling area.



The cardboard and green waste is left to compost down over a few months. The end product is biologically stable and can reach equilibrium with the soil. No further transportation is required, as all of the resulting compost is used on the farm to condition the soil, which helps it to retain moisture. 2000 tonnes of compost is used for this purpose on the farm each year.

### Water

Due to practices such as the use of compost as a soil conditioner, the farm does not irrigate its crops at all and so uses far less water than a conventional farm. In fact, the only mains water used on the farm is for the cattle to drink. This is also beneficial because over-watering of crops can destroy the structure of the soil leading to soil erosion, as well leaching essential nutrients.

### Community/Other

- Luddesdown is hoping to reach an arrangement with supermarkets whereby local farmers can 'rent' space on the shop floor to sell direct to the public
- Luddesdown is one of 15 Organic Demonstration Farms in England, hosting visits for farmers considering conversion to organic farming, and enabling the spread of best practice
- Luddesdown was founder-director of an Organic Arable Grain Marketing Company. This is a farmer-owned company, set up to ensure that its members receive the best possible prices by serving customers more directly and developing new outlets and seeking to add value to these products
- In the same way Luddesdown has been involved with the development of the Organic Seed Producers Company and with NIAB organic cereal variety trials
- In conjunction with the Soil Association Organic Farms network, a farm trail guide and information board has been installed. The farm has an open policy to visitors with a number of organised visits each year and an annual open day which attracts over 500 visitors
- The farm is about to embark on an Organic Systems Development Programme with other leading organic farms in conjunction with Elm Farm Research Centre. This programme will encourage best practice by setting new standards
- Luddesdown is a founder member of Regional Organics South East, who continue to represent organic farming at the Kent Show and, with the support of Kent County Council and Horticulture Research International, have produced a directory leaflet of 'Where to buy Organic Food in the South East'

- Luddesdown is a member of the National Association of Farms for Schools

### Transport

By supplying food locally Luddesdown contributes to a reduction in 'food miles', though this is not easily quantifiable. Initiatives such as re-using waste on the farm and not buying in fertilisers means that Luddesdown's impact on the transport system is comparatively low.

### Biodiversity

Careful management of the downland pastures, hedge planting and woodland management helps ensure that Luddesdown's delicate habitats are preserved. The Farm has worked with the Farming Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and benefited from the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and Farm Woodland Grant Scheme in the planning, implementing and financing of their conservation projects. Projects include -

- maintaining the semi-ancient woodlands by introducing a coppicing programme within the 58 acres of woodland. This will help create new habitats for animals like dormice which are under threat
- hedging, to encourage wildlife through hedge management - e.g. adjusting the trimming cycle to leave fruits and seeds for small mammals and songbirds until just before the nesting season starts
- Badger gates and nesting boxes have been installed around the farm

Management practices at Luddesdown aim to benefit a range of farmland birds such as skylark, linnet, swallow, songthrush and barn owl, which have declined drastically over the last 20 years.

### Company Awards

- Winner of the Environmental Innovation category and overall winner of the Kent Environment Business of the Year in 1998
- Brian Emsden Memorial Cup from the Country Landowners Association and Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group for outstanding contribution to preservation of wildlife and efficient farming 1998
- Highly Recommended - Organic Producer of the Year Award 1998
- Best Arable Producer in the 'YOU' magazine awards 1999

### Contact

Gerry Minister  
Luddesdown Organic Farms Ltd  
Court Lodge  
Luddesdown  
Nr. Cobham  
Kent  
DA13 0XE

For further information about the SEEDA Sustainable Business Awards, please contact Clare Marshall at SEEDA Tel: 01483 484278, Email: [claremarshall@seeda.co.uk](mailto:claremarshall@seeda.co.uk) or visit SEEDA's website: [www.seeda.co.uk](http://www.seeda.co.uk)

