

Report from the Organic Farming Working Group.

Norvite's Managing Director, Ed Smith, represented Scotland at a meeting of the feed industry's organic experts in Whitehall in February as well as at the subsequent meeting between key representatives of the UK feed industry and the head of DEFRA's Organic Farming Unit.

Collectively, the feed industry forecast a 16% increase in demand for organic feed materials for the coming year. However, the meeting recognised that domestic production is assumed to be no more than half the demand and concern was expressed over an apparent drop in the figures for farms in-conversion to organic status.

Whilst supplies of grain have been extremely tight over the last few months, the supply situation has eased somewhat in recent weeks due to lifting of export quotas in Ukraine and with other supplies becoming available from Eastern Europe. However, the group noted that there is still a shortfall in supplies of vegetable protein, especially peas and beans. The situation remains that production of organic cereals and pulses in the UK needs to dramatically increase to get anywhere near domestic demand.

It is hoped that the recent EU-wide increased allowances of in-conversion cereals into feed rations and delivered prices of around £200/ tonne for feed wheat, coupled with ever increasing demand should help to encourage new entrants into the organic sector. DEFRA's representatives indicated that the funds available for conversion should help to stimulate supply. However they were not prepared to countenance any relaxation of standards amid concerns of a consumer backlash.

Of some concern to the industry is the lack of data on grain production, from existing and in-conversion land and demand for cereals and pulses throughout areas of the UK. The quality of information for Scotlands' organic producers produced by David Younie, Caroline Bayliss and their team at SAC was highlighted as an excellent example of what the rest of the UK needs achieve in improved reporting and recording.

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