

PRESS RELEASE 25/2/2020

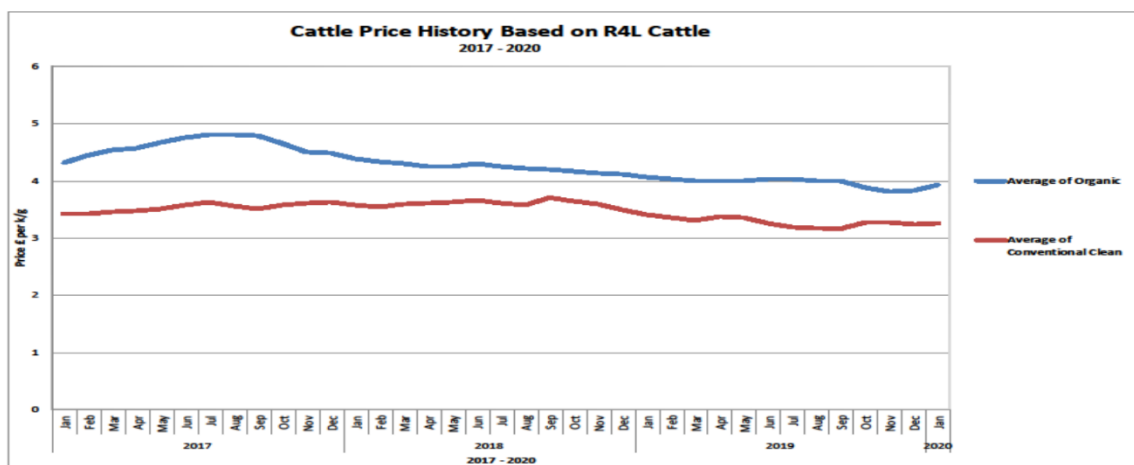
THE FUTURE FOR ORGANIC BEEF & SHEEP PRODUCTION

Peter Jones, Director, Store Cattle & Store Lamb Manager of The Organic Livestock Marketing Co-Operative (O.L.M.C.), gave a series of four talks on the 18th, 19th, 20th & 21st February, at various venues across the South West taking in Devon, Cornwall & Somerset. Over 40 producers attended the events, the talks were well received and prompted a lively debate.

The need to reduce the carbon foot print and breed better cattle to convert grass forage into meat prompted the most questions. The presentation started by identifying the area of agricultural land farmed organically and particularly the fact that just over 29% of the land farmed in the UK was in the South West. This made the West Country the highest concentrate of Organic farming in the UK.

The presentations also highlighted the year on year growth of organic sales in the UK. It was noted that meat, fish and poultry sales had risen by a massive 6.5% in 2019. The outlets for organic sheep and lambs were also discussed for retail and processing along with abattoir outlets. The fact that contracts were available for sheep and cattle for producers more readily than conventional red meat sector was also seen as an indication, retailers wanted a steady stream of cattle and lambs for known suppliers.

The average prices achieved in the last year were also shown in graph form and showed the highs of 2017 and some of the lows seen more recently.



Peter Jones said that he could see a hardening of prices during the next 12 months but didn't see us returning to the levels of £5.00 per kg seen in the summer of 2017.

The need for more efficiency was discussed widely, the need for less cattle producing the same amount of meat was an answer to control emissions which is seen by the public as a major issue. The need for the Organic beef producer to finish cattle in 24 months (as conventional beef producers do on average) should be the goal of all organic operators. This could only be achieved by better cattle breeding, mainly achieved by cross breeding cattle. Using the benefits of native breeds crossed with modern breeds to produce calves that were hardy and versatile but had the better growth rates and confirmation to produce faster growing cattle off grassland and forage along with the need to manage grassland and manage turnout of cattle to maximise efficiency was also discussed.

The presentation went on to explore the opportunities for organic lamb producers and producers wanting to sell lambs in the Autumn as store lambs. This year there is a marked shortage of organic hogget's and this trend was likely to continue in the next 2 years at least. It was identified that a lot of store lambs are lost and sold into the new organic trade at livestock markets.

O.L.M.C. are embarking on a major recruitment drive this autumn to purchase organic lambs and could easily accommodate smaller batches. These lambs would be sold to producers with the resources and feed available to finish lambs between January and June and show good returns to store lamb producers.

The meetings ended with a look at future trends in the organic world and the fact that the growth in organic sales were like to continue in the next 2 to 3 years across the board i.e. all organic produced products.

The post Brexit political climate is more likely to favour environmentally friendly farming than factory type farming, emissions and carbon footprint production will be a vote winner for politicians who can no longer blame Europe for misguided elements of the Common Agricultural Policy. The meetings were seen as very successful and reflect organic producer's optimistic vision of the future.

Peter Jones

07720 892 922

