

BHU press release July 08

New intake for Organic Horticulture course in October

The Organic Training College, based at the BHU, Lincoln, will be starting its next Organic Horticulture course on October 20. The course is run by the Organic Training College at the BHU (Biological Husbandry Unit), Lincoln. It's a 10 ha site that was originally established in 1976 and has organic certification from OrganicFarmNZ.

Starting the course in October means the students follow the growing year – they will begin in spring with the sowing of seeds and preparation of vegetable beds, and be able to take advantage of the whole summer and autumn growing and harvesting season.

For current student Heather Hughes a real highlight of the course has been growing her own organic food, and watching the progress of crops from seed to plant to a vegetable that can be harvested. In their first year the students study sowing seeds, transplanting, composting, fertilisers, worms, pest and disease control, orchard pruning, companion planting, computers and use of chainsaws. Year 1 students have their own small plot for growing veges, and Year 2 students have a larger, semi-commercial area.

Working at a community garden but realising he didn't really know much about growing provided the motivation for Simon Riddell to enrol in the course. Highlights for Simon were "harvesting corn, zucchinis, tomatoes and other fruits of our labour. And the people on the course," he adds. "The tutors are great too – there's an amazing amount of knowledge there."

Other highlights are the work experience weeks that give students a taste of a particular sector of the organic industry. "Work experience has been valuable for the students," says Course Director Bill Martin. "Students have gone to market gardens, apple orchards, cropping farms, sheep properties, organic retail outlets and native bush reserves. There's been a good response from the hosts."

There are no fees for the organic horticulture course. The current course has 16 full and part time students who come from a wide range of backgrounds. Of these students, Bill Martin hopes that 6-8 will carry on to do the Year 2 course. No prior educational or work experience is required, and students with some horticultural background or training could go straight into Year 2. Part-time as well as full-time options are available.

For more information on the Organic Horticulture course, please contact Bill Martin, Course Director, on 325.3684, or email college@bhu.co.nz or see the website www.bhu.co.nz.

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