



Guy and Christabel Pilgrim,  
Pilgrim's Organics. 400-hectare  
family farm near Te Kuiti.

## ORGANIC MEAT PRODUCERS REAP REWARDS THROUGH HANDS-ON APPROACH

There is no such thing as a weekend off for Guy and Christabel Pilgrim, as they work hard both on and off the farm at Pilgrim's Organics.

The two agriculture college graduates from England moved to New Zealand seven years ago to pursue a dream of farming organically. They are now in their fourth year of full certification with BioGro, and early in 2007 launched Pilgrim's Organics beef and lamb range.

Guy and Christabel spend weekdays on their 400-hectare family farm near Te Kuiti, and weekends at farmers' markets in Auckland selling their produce. This is vacuum-packed cuts of organic beef and lamb, ranging from \$16 (mince) to \$45 (eye fillet steak) per kilogram.

In summer their typical big weekend will see them at the Waiuku markets on a Friday night, at the Parnell and Oratia markets on Saturday, and Cleveland and Ellerslie on Sunday, as well as once a month markets at Blockhouse Bay and Tamahere.

"It's all go really," Guy says.

"We always wanted to start our own branded meat product. Whilst there's an awful lot of messing around, there's also a lot of satisfaction for us when people come and say that was a nice bit of steak or lamb."

Guy and Christabel stress farming organically requires a hands-on approach. The farm, with 400 ewes and 110 breeding beef cows, operates without any agricultural chemicals, steroids or hormones.

The largest farming challenge the couple face on an annual basis is fly strike. There are no organic alternatives to chemical sprays for this problem, and the only way to keep on top of it is to maintain a strict shearing regime. This can see lambs shorn up to three times in summer.

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Guy and Christabel Pilgrim sell their organic beef and lamb at a series of markets in Auckland every weekend.

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When it comes to keeping on top of internal parasites, they utilise rotational grazing. Freshly weaned lambs will go onto pastures which have been previously grazed by cattle, which “hoover up” ovine parasites, Guy explains.

“Too many conventional farmers reach for the bottle of drench because it says so on the calendar, often the animal won’t need that chemical input,” he says.

While there are organic products, such as seaweed-based drenches, for parasite problems, the Pilgrims regard these as more of a “health tonic” for occasional use.

“It’s prevention we are trying to look into, rather than cure. We have to be more hands-on in terms of the pasture and the animal, and working with the whole system.” Guy says.

Pilgrim’s Organics is one of New Zealand’s first fully organic meat brands, and is currently processing about 15 lambs per week.

Consumers like not only the ethical basis behind their meat having been organically farmed, but also the traceability aspect.

“It’s about helping the consumer really know exactly what they are buying and identifying with the product. It’s all about telling the story,” Guy says.

And when it comes to taste and texture, there is no beating organic meat, he adds.

Guy and Christabel are now looking to contract other organic livestock farmers, as market demand has surpassed their own farm’s production capability. As well as having found a ready clientele at farmers’ markets, they supply a number of gourmet delicatessens and retailers.

“I would love to think about exporting one day, but I can’t even think about that until we have access to more supply,” Guy says



Pilgrim’s Organics is finding a ready market for vacuum packed cuts of beef and lamb.



Clean, green, and organic – the Pilgrim’s farm near Te Kuiti.

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