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Associations of BC



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EDITORIAL

I hope you will enjoy this issue of *BC Organic Grower*. While it remains true to its roots – it does have a new look and a new format.

I wanted to make this issue about celebrating. As the new editor, one of the first constructive criticisms I received was that there was too much negativity in the previous journal – this came from a comment made in a survey done on the usefulness of the journal. What a challenge! It has spurred me on to make this next issue as positive as possible. There is much to celebrate in the organic world.

With the world currently focused on global warming (with the help of the movie *An Inconvenient Truth* and David Suzuki's "If You Were Prime Minister" tour) how can we not celebrate and congratulate organic production – a system of farming that minimizes the impact on the environment. The primary focus is to maintain and develop a balanced farm ecosystem that is environmentally sustainable.

You'll find articles on the Organic Harvest Awards, the Apple Festival on Salts Spring Island, and composting – all with good news and much hope about the direction of the organic sector.

The COABC 2007 AGM Conference is just beginning as this journal goes to press and there will certainly be some great articles to come in the next issue.

Over the next year I hope to give you articles that will help you in your world of organics, and provide you with practical advice, update you on current events, and give you much needed information that Certified Operators require.

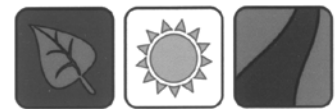
BC Organic Grower draws from a list of writers and experts to write on important issues and standards of the COABC. We do welcome submissions and would love to hear your thoughts.

Please feel free to contact me with suggestions and comments. While, I want to focus on the good, I know that there are many serious issues to discuss and research.

Cassandra



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Deb Foote

Every time I start to feel a hint of spring good old Mother Nature pulls another card out of her hat! I guess in reality spring is still a few weeks away and according to Punxsutawney Phil; we are due for an early one. I know I am not the only one who has been surprised by the recent weather. Last weekend at the Conference I heard two NOAA farmers talking about how they had plowed their fields in the first week of March last year and how this year was quite a different story, given they still had several inches of snow. And that my friends, was before this latest dump. I was out walking the dog yesterday when I met up with one of the elders in my neighborhood that I have become friendly with over the winter. He is a spry old fellow who is right up to date with current affairs. Yesterday he was chuckling because he couldn't understand all of the talk about global warming – when from his perspective it was so “darned” cold. Just wait until summer I said.

As you will read further in this publication we now have an Organic Regulation in Canada! Now the real work begins (standards and material lists). There will be a 2 year transition period, but by December 2008 the standards will be mandatory. As of last week, a letter has been sent to the CFIA requesting that the process for approving COABC as an Accreditation Body under the Canadian Organic Regime begin. Back in December we had a meeting with Gary Briggs from the Organic Office of CFIA. The message that Gary delivered in that meeting was that there would be no question of whether COABC would be approved as an Accreditor, it was a given! Anne Macey and Paddy Doherty, along with Kirsten and Kristy in the office, have been developing and documenting new systems for the office, along with re-writing Books 1 and 2 to ensure that we are meeting all of requirements of the new regulations.

It has been a busy and exciting time. At our October 17 Board Meeting we decided that

the COABC would adopt the National Organic Standards. This decision has now been ratified (at the AGM last month). We are encouraging those of you who can, and your CBs to start using the standards this year, so that come 2008, when the national standards are the COABC standards, you are ready.



It has however become apparent that there will need to be changes made to the standard, and the associated materials list. To ensure that Organic Operators in BC are not adversely affected by the omissions and oversights identified to-date, one of the processes that COABC intends on undertaking is to create commodity/sector based study groups whose mandate will be to review the aforementioned documents and to make recommendations for change. I would encourage you all to take the time to review the sections of the standards that apply to your sector. Be sure to review the materials list as well. Paddy has recently sent an email out to the Listserve calling for participation in the process. He will be compiling all of the concerns and feeding them back to CGSB technical review committee who will address them through a process that is under development. Needless to say, other groups from across the country will have issues, as well, and will want to have their voices heard. As you read this posting a priority list is being developed so that concerns are addressed and handled in an orderly fashion.

Finally with all of the talk about global warming and softening our footprint on the planet, one of the buzz words (terms) that you will be hearing this year is EAT LOCAL. This is a terrific promotional opportunity that every single one of you can tie into, as many of you already are. Find those outlets in your community that will support local farmers. Independent retailers and non-chain restaurants are a great compliment to your farm-gate or farmers market sales and properly

promoted can bring long term benefits for all involved. Watch for local initiatives in the Lower mainland, as well as the North and South Okanagan, and reach out to the groups who are organizing these campaigns, it can bring many positive benefits to your businesses and communities!

Cheers
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Executive Director Reports

What Does COABC Mean to You? by Kirsten Kane

In mid 2006, COABC underwent an internal audit — part of which was a survey of members, polling them on their feelings on everything from their contact with the COABC office, to the *BC Organic Grower* and website. The results, on the whole, were fairly positive, but a significant number of members indicate a disconnect from COABC as a whole. Our official mandate, according to our constitution:

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS OF THE CERTIFIED ORGANIC ASSOCIATIONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA:

1. *The name of the society is Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia.*
2. *The purposes of the society are:*
 - a) *To promote organic agriculture and to provide public education on organic agriculture;*
 - b) *To represent members in matters relating to the Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act of British Columbia;*
 - c) *To develop and administer an organic certification accreditation program for members;*
 - d) *To grant permission for use of the phrase "British Columbia Certified Organic" on agricultural product labels by agri-food enterprises certified by members;*
 - e) *To develop and implement a verification officer training program*
 - f) *To facilitate research and marketing activities on behalf of members*
 - g) *To provide information to the public on behalf of members;*
 - h) *To develop and maintain an approved list of materials for use in the production of organic agricultural products by agri-food enterprises certified by members; and*
 - i) *To be responsible for incidental matters related to the above-referenced activities.*

In an earlier ED column, I wrote about COABC's primary role as an accreditor of certification bodies. We are charged with that responsibility by the province of BC,

and it is our most crucial task. At present, COABC, with assistance from the BC Ministry of Agriculture, is upgrading its accreditation system to meet the requirements of ISO 17011 in order that it become one of the four CFIA sanctioned accreditation bodies under the new federal organic regulation. In the survey, 60% of those polled did not name accreditation as COABC's primary role, and 21% of that 60% subsequently claimed they had no idea what COABC exists to do. That is certainly troubling to us — in order to be certified, members need to work with an accredited certification body. COABC has eleven in the BC Certified Organic Program, and requires that the CBs complete annual renewals, as well as conducting audits on at least three CBs to ensure that the CB is meeting the requirements as a competent certifier. COABC has an accreditation board that oversees the audits, and renewal process, and in doing so, ensures that COABC is meeting the requirements as a competent accreditor.

31% of members claimed that standards were COABC's primary role — this is also of utmost importance to COABC — particularly now that we have an entirely new Canada standard to decipher. COABC is committed to ensuring that its members will have access to information on the new standard particular to their commodity, and hopes to have a great deal of input from you as it endeavours to ensure that this standard both meets your needs as organic operators and does not sacrifice its commitment to organic integrity.

So, accreditation of certification bodies and maintenance of standards — what else? Well, the COABC of course maintains an office, in Vernon, with one full time staff member, office manager Kristy Wipperman, and myself, your part-time Executive Director. Among other things, Kristy pays the bills, does the bookkeeping, looks after logo product,



maintains the COABC database on the COABC website, and has a huge responsibility as the Accreditation Board Coordinator — she prepares and sends out the annual renewals, looks after meeting arrangements and minutes for the Accreditation Board, and wrangles the hundreds of documents required by COABC to fulfill its role as an accreditor. Kristy is also the primary contact for your CB's administrator. 76% of the members surveyed had not contacted the office in the last year, though those that had claimed that they were satisfied with the service they had received. We were happy to hear this, and speculate that those who do not use the COABC office are receiving the information and/or services they require at their CB level.

A key role of the COABC office is as a contact point for the tremendous number of inquiries (primarily phone and email) from the public at large, consumers, students, media, other organisations, and government representatives looking for assistance with a myriad of topics. We refer aspiring organic farmers to certification bodies, provide resources to those looking for answers to standards questions and pest issues, help consumers locate organic product and to decipher what 'organic' means in the marketplace. We field media enquiries on any number of issues affecting organics on any given day, and assist students with their research queries by directing them to an appropriate resource.

My role as ED is to oversee COABC's functions as a whole, manage staff and contractors, and to be the liaison between COABC and government and other organisations. I regularly work with Ministry of Agriculture staff and other institutions/organisations on projects for the BC organic sector, in particular because I also administer the Organic Sector Development Program, an agri-food futures fund from the Investment Agriculture Foundation that provides funding for projects in the BC Organic Sector. I also oversee COABC events such as the AGM and conference and the Organic Harvest Awards, field inquiries from those that contact the office, and attend events such as the Pacific

Agriculture Show and Canadian Health Food Association Expo West to provide information to the public and industry on organic production, certification, and standards. I also work with various groups as an advocate for the BC Organic Sector such as the BC Agri-Food Trade Council and Speciality Production Advisory Committee (Dairy). I have also just been asked to sit on the board of the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada as a representative of the organic sector from the West, and as someone who brings an accreditor/certifier perspective to the table.

All of the above were suggested by varying numbers of those polled as things that COABC should be involved with — advocacy, government relations, consumer education, promotion of organics, and the vital roles of accreditation and standards.

A few of those polled thought that perhaps some of the things we are up to aren't appropriate for COABC. We are striving to balance the things we need to do, with those that we feel are appropriate as an organisation with a provincial, sector wide mandate. We hope that we are meeting the needs of everyone with a stake in the sector — from the farmer to the consumer, from government to industry. Perhaps this is too broad a mandate — the survey results indicate somewhat mixed feelings on at least some of our activities.

If this is the case, I encourage you to get involved with the board of your CB — attend meetings, email your rep — make your thoughts heard. If you think we are doing a good job, speak up as well. Make COABC mean more to you. KK



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Organic Harvest Awards

Vancouver, BC, November 4, 2006

by Kirsten Kane

The second annual Harvest Awards took place November 4th, 2006 at the Coast Plaza Hotel in downtown Vancouver. The Coast Plaza was the site of the first awards, and we were so happy with the location and staff, it was a natural choice to return once again. A sell out crowd of 150 organic industry folk, wonderful entertainment, and the fabulous organic stylings of Chef Luc Graffauz made the evening memorable.

The crowd on hand also enjoyed a 'farewell' keynote address from Cathleen Kneen, former editor of the *BC Organic Grower* and tireless supporter of COABC, and then it was onto the awards.

Michael Gordon of Shared Vision Magazine (our media sponsor) as MC did a great job of announcing our winners and keeping the event rolling.

The winners were presented with wonderful wooden trophies handmade by wood-working students at Pleasant Valley Secondary School in Armstrong, BC.



And the Winners Were...

Best Non-Alcoholic Beverage:

Ethical Bean Coffee Co.; Product: Folk Festival Blend

Best Alcoholic Beverage:

Crannog Ales; Product: Hell's Kitchen Organic Ale

Best Bakery Product:

Vancouver Croissant; Product: Organic Croissant

Best Processed Meat Product:

Organa Farms; Product: Certified Organic Beef Jerky, Certified Organic Smoked Ham Boneless, Organa Farms Certified Organic Beef Jerky:

Best Dairy Product - TIE:

Olympic Dairy Products Inc.; Product: Organic yogurt; Avalon Dairy: Product: Aged Cheddar

Best Processed Product:

Valentine Farm; Product: Certified Organic Vinegars

Best Horticultural Producer:

Alderlea Farm

Best Livestock Producer:

Thomas Reid Farms

Best Organic Dairy Producer:

Jerseyland Farm

Best Organic Direct Farm Marketing:

Klippers Organic Acres

Best farm-based organic home delivery business (CSA / 'Box' Program):

Wildflight Farm

Best Organic Integrated Farm System (Sustainable Practices):

Olera Farm

Best Retailer:

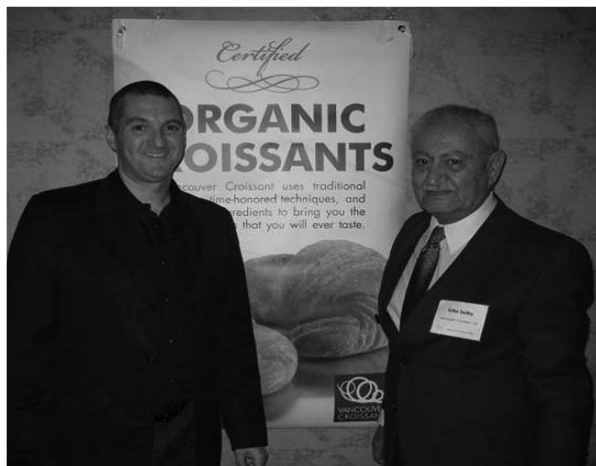
Capers Community Markets

Best Home Delivery (Non Farm):

Urban Harvest Organic Delivery

Best Commitment to Organics by a Restaurant:

Aprodite's Café & Pie Shop



Everyone had a great time, thanks to the able co-ordination of Marc Smith of Amuse Consulting. Marc and his associate Christina, with input from the COABC OHA committee and office staff, planned for months to ensure a snag-free evening that would be enjoyed by all.

Of course, the event was possible due to the generosity of the many sponsors: Save on Foods, The Organic Grocer, Avalon Dairy, Sun-Opta, Capers, Whole Foods, Skeet and Ikes, Catalyst Creative, Olympic Dairy, Hills Foods, Discovery Organics, Crannog Ales, and Pro Organics.

We certainly appreciate their support of the Harvest Awards- an event which brings together so many elements of the Organic Sector in BC. Stay tuned to the COABC website for details about the Organic Harvest Awards in 2007!



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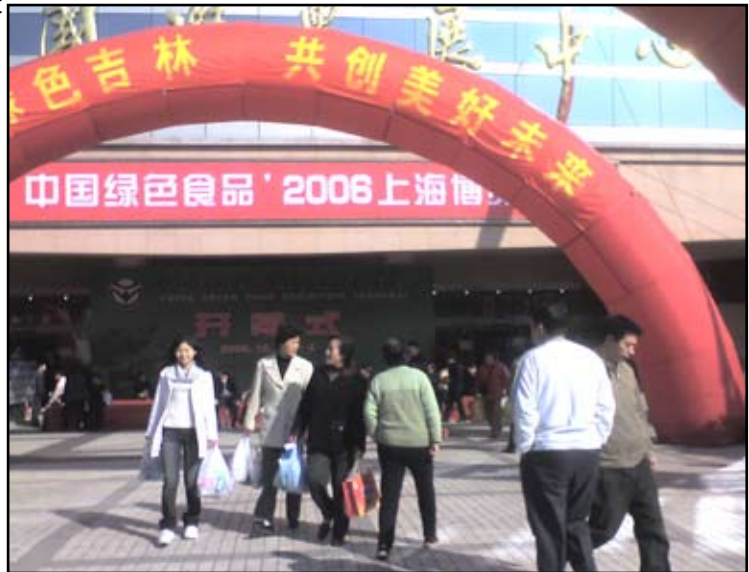
By Darcy Bomford

Flying back from China last summer, I found a story in one of the inflight magazines on the increasing popularity of Organic products in China. There was mention of the first ever tradeshow put on by Biofach for Organic producers, brokers, and retailers in China. More and more importance has been attached to China's organic market and its future development, and I wanted to see it for myself firsthand.

I signed up and arrived at the International BioFach China Conference on "Organic Development in China" to a huge crowd of Chinese delegates, growers and Biofach representatives. International BioFach China Conference on Organic Development in China, jointly organized by China Green Food Development Center and Nuremburg Global Affairs, GmbH, "aims to make policy proposals from multiple perspectives and discuss research achievements, so as to accelerate China's organic food development and create conditions for exploring both international and domestic organic markets." The show was held in a large auditorium at hotel convention center and a translation service was provided for international visitors.



With China's huge population and its boast of the highest growth rate, it is no wonder the country is attracting keen interest. China might be the most promising future market for the organic industry. Although much eco-



conomic growth is needed – 670 million are still living on less than a US dollar a day and the population density is 1.5 times the global average.

We heard from a variety of international delegates, from America, Europe and other Asian countries. Keynote speakers included a member of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, who agreed that Organic Agriculture cannot be the solution to all problems, but if developed with care and integrity would represent an important tool to achieving a worldwide sustainable development that takes into account the welfare of the people and the environment.

In her presentation she gave current global statistics with such numbers as 26,258,270 hectares of total organic area and a market value of more than 25 billion USD.

There was also person from O stores telling us about their chain of stores throughout

China that sell organic products exclusively. We also heard from a Hong Kong organic market specialist telling us how the increasing acreage of organic land in China is causing a huge increase in low cost imports.

We also heard from a number of European speakers telling us of the dynamic organic industry and how its influence is being felt around the world.

Given the fact that China now has the world's second largest area of organic acreage (next to Australia) it is evident that China is on the road to solidifying their National Organic Program in line with the North American and Europeans.

During the second day of the show there was a Green Food Expo, which was essentially a trade show exhibiting 'Green' or Natural and Organic producers and resellers. The show was quite large and it was amazing to see how many products are already sold as China Certified organic. There were organic apples (complete with custom sun-grown logos), organic rice, chicken, eggs, goji berries, and hundreds of other products from all over China.

This show was a prelude to the first ever Organic exhibition to be held in May 2007 in Shanghai to showcase certified organic products from China. The show will be sponsored by Biofach and put on by Messe trade fairs of Nurenburg.

China's organic movement is picking up steam, there are currently 30,000 organic (or 'Green' as they call it in China) products on the market from 18,000 supplier or growers. They are experiencing a 30% growth in their domestic market.

China also has their own chain of grocery stores that retail organic and natural products to China's rising middle class. 'O-store' and

'O-Bistro' stores are prospering in China's fast-developing urban centers.

A number of third party certifiers have



approved organic products from China into the North American marketplace. As China's organic movement gathers steam and becomes more organized, it is safe to say that more and more 'Certified Organic' products available in your local store may also say "Product of China".



(Editor's Note: We should remember the importance of the National Standard - verifying anything coming in from China or anywhere else for that matter is certified as we understand certified. Buying locally is still the preference.)

THE NEW STANDARD

BC Joins With the Rest of Canada Paddy Doherty

Canada's new standard

The new Canada Organic Standard was passed (by the Standards Council of Canada) on September 3, 2006. This event was the culmination of four years of work by many players in the organic sector in Canada. Though the standard reflects the input from the entire country, BC's organic standard was strongly influential in developing the new Canada Standard.

COABC's new standard

The COABC Board of Directors has proposed that BC should adopt the Canada Standard and use it to manage the BC Certified Organic Program, as well as the new Canada organic program. This is welcome news to some of us who have been working diligently on two standards for the last 10 years. Standards development is a lot of work, and there is only so much energy and expertise to go around. It makes sense to pool our resources with our colleagues in Quebec and Saskatchewan, and the rest of the country.

However, according to COABC policies, the new standard will not come into effect in BC until January 1st, 2008. During the coming year, we (the members of the Canada standard technical committee) expect to fix any errors or omissions in the new standard, so that the transfer from the COABC standard to the Canada standard will be as painless as possible.

Though use of the Canada standard is not mandatory in 2007, some CBs will be using the standard voluntarily, in order to allow their members to have access to the Canada organic program.

How is the Canada standard different?

The Canada standard, being the result of a consensus process involving the entire coun-

try, is of course different from the BC standard in many ways. However, if you read through the Canada standard you will recognise many passages from the BC standard.

I will point out some salient differences:

1) The Canada standard does not use the term *regulated* (or restricted) as an annotation to materials or practices. This eliminates the ambiguity long associated with use of that word.

2) The Canada standard uses a permitted substances list (PSL)—only permitted substances are included; all others are prohibited. This may prove difficult for certification bodies to manage, but if the list is inclusive enough, it does provide the information that is needed.

3) Treated (with prohibited materials) fence posts are prohibited in the Canada standard, but there is a derogation for large acreages.

4) The use of non-organic manure was a difficult topic as the technical committee was trying to develop a standard that complied with the EU, but respected Canada's current practices—the result is imperfect. The Canada standard prohibits the use of non-organic manure from a fully caged and restricted movement, or a land-detached operation, regardless of whether the manure is composted before use. This means that non-organic manure may be used without composting in certain cases (such as dairy or horse manure).

5) The Canada standard allows the use of raw (uncomposted) manure on crops for human consumption, in certain cases.

6) Land that is wild or has not been cultivated for three years does not require a transition period in the new Canada standard.

7) The notion that production units should not be alternated between organic and non-

organic production is fully included in the Canada standard.

8) Laying pullets must have been under organic management from no later than the second day of life in the Canada standard—the COABC standard allows laying pullets from non-organic sources with a 90-day transition period.

9) The Canada standard allows operators to bring non-organic animals into an organic herd, but breeding females must not be in gestation—this is stricter than the COABC standard, which allows gestating females up to the third trimester.

10) The Canada standard has a derogation for the use of parasiticides in slaughter stock.

11) There are a number of differences in the honey production standards.

12) The livestock stocking rate table in the Canada standard has some differing parameters from the COABC standard.

13) The Canada standard requires that greenhouse production is 'soil-based', while the COABC standard is ambiguous.

14) The Canada standard has a standard for 'Wild Crops', which are not included in the COABC Standard.

15) There are a number of differences in the processing section of the Canada standard.

16) The labelling requirements in the Canada standard are more specific—the name of the CB must be on all labels, not just the certification number.

17) Products containing less than 70% organic ingredients may not be certified under the Canada standard.

18) Section 11 in the Canada standard (requirements for adding or amending substances in the PSL) is much more comprehensive than that of the COABC standard.



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19) There are many differences in the PSL, primarily the lack of substances necessary for organic processing, and the lack of synthetic pheromones, which are essential for organic fruit production.

Problems in the Canada standard

From my perspective, the new standard is good, but there are a few places where it needs improvement.

20) The PSL lacks a number of important processing ingredients and aids.

21) The PSL does not allow the use of synthetic pheromones for fruit production.

22) The standard for the use of manure is too restrictive in some places and too lax in others.

23) The Livestock Stocking rate table needs review to ensure it is realistic.

What happens next? COABC members should review the Canada standard to become familiar with it and to identify any problem areas. Problems should be reported to your CB so that they can be brought forward to BC's representatives on the Canada General Standards Board Technical Committee—then reviewed and fixed at the national level.

Some BC CBs may choose to continue having a standard of their own. This is allowed under the BC Certified Organic Program as long as the CB's standard complies with the COABC standard.



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THE FIRST SUSTAINABLE MICROFARM FORUM

Why are there so few food farms on the Sunshine Coast? asks Robin Wheeler

This is the question that had nagged at me for over a dozen years. Maybe it shouldn't have – we are plagued with relatively small properties made up of pockets of grit between cedar trees, on the sides of various mountains. The local museum held out hope – historically, the coast had many small market gardens and berry farms and a well-organized farmer's group, which had slowly died away with the coming of modern life. On further investigation I discovered we actually had Farm Status galore – a full 92 to be exact, which was exciting and mysterious until I found out that almost all of them were joyfully producing horses. Not too much food there, and not a working horse in the bunch. We do have a couple of excellent market farms here, and a small handful of loyal folk producing for neighbours out of oversize backyards, but very little in the way of organized food production. So, this summer I

gathered a group of people who had actively tried to create a livelihood for themselves off the earth and we talked about the problems involved. Too little income. Too hard work. Low grade soil. The buying population uninformed and scattered. Soil amendments hard to gather. Working off farm was exhausting. No formal resources beyond our small One Straw Society to keep us tied together.

This list of challenges was the genesis for the Sustainable Microfarm Forum, which One Straw hosted on November 5 in Roberts Creek. This gave us an opportunity to gather properly and meet face-to-face, and to receive real life lessons from existing BC players. We could break down that sense of

isolation and make sure everyone left with a list of supportive phone numbers and a sheaf of information papers. Our proposed list of goals was as follows:

- To increase knowledge of and networking among microfarmers.
- To provide a starting point for learning about small lot production.
- To reduce concerns and resistance by providing information on marketing and bookkeeping procedures.
- To increase skills of bringing previously cleared land to a productive state, (by building soil through the addition green manures, compost and amendments).
- (To emphasize the importance of a healthy soil to sustain productivity)
- To show methods of increasing farm income to thereby empower small farms to expand crop types and size.



- To educate buyers on the importance of supporting local growers.
 - To create long term relationships between farmers and neighbourhood buyers.
 - To begin to decrease dependence on outside sources of food.
 - To eventually decrease fossil fuel emissions by decreasing truck deliveries.
 - To keep food dollars on the Sunshine Coast
- Twenty one people met that morning, running from a retired logger with a an urge to grow food for others, to a couple with an existing Food Box program, and everything in between.

Alain, who has converted a raw forest clearing into a sturdy market garden in three years took us outside to get our hands dirty with his lesson on Amending Marginal Soils. Susan Davison from Glorious Organics cleared some of the haze around bookkeeping with her real life examples of employee timetables, income sheets and spreadsheets. Marika Nagasaka from (ALS) farm in Sooke came well equipped with farm journals, calendar systems and farmers market tips that could help us increase our efficiency.

Rochelle Eisen spoke of the issues around Organic Certification – pros, cons and challenges that will arise with international standards. Every break and every meal time between speakers for the 11 hour day was crammed with intense chatter and note scribbling between newly formed allies. It was agreed that good follow up would be important and a second meeting for February was arranged.

Everyone left with a sheaf of papers including phone numbers for local help, Cyber Help information, including seed suppliers and where to find price lists, upcoming

local garden lessons on seeding and propagating, COABC Certification packages and other juicy handouts.

The participants and instructors have now been connected with an email fan that anyone can activate. I have been receiving phone calls and emails for days with folks debriefing their exciting day. I realize how rare and unacknowledged it is to spend time here with those who truly understand the urge to grow food. This was a pretty validating day all around for people who are normally separated by miles of bush.

I think we are on the path of something hot in terms of increasing our capacity to grow good clean food on the Sunshine Coast. I would like to extend huge thanks for the funding from The Certified Organic Association of British Columbia Organic Sector Development Program ~ Regional Production Seminar Series, and the Sunshine Coast Regional District.

This is just the beginning of a long and fruitful path.

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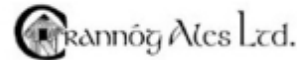


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COMPOST TEA: Can We Really Turn Water Into Gold?

Mario Lanthier and Sonja Peters
CropHealth Advising & Research, Kelowna,
British Columbia

Compost tea is everywhere. It was on the program of the latest meeting of the "U.S. Composting Council", the largest composting conference in North America. It was on the program of the annual meeting of the Washington State Organic Council last December in Seattle. In addition, for many years, it has been at the annual conference of "Acres USA", a magazine covering commercial organic and sustainable farming.

Appropriately, one researcher recently concluded: "Compost tea production practices are evolving faster than traditional researchers capacity to evaluate the impact of new practices on disease suppression".

Is compost tea a procedure worthy of consideration for commercial organic farmers? Or is it hocus-pocus recipes hiding under scientific symbols? Or is it both?

Solid research is now being published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. The results point to compost tea being beneficial to improve plant growth and prevent diseases such as damping-off and Botrytis mold. But success depends on a number of factors as many compost tea applications make no measurable impact.

In the coming issues of this magazine, we will review the science behind compost tea, and offer "recipes" that can be applied on B.C. organic farms. The first article will examine compost tea applications to prevent plant diseases. The following article will examine the preparation of disease-suppressive compost, the cornerstone of high quality compost tea. The last article will review specific recipes and ingredients, for those wishing to tailor compost tea applications to their situation. See you then! (continued on page 18)



Commercial compost tea application
Shown is Seannen Hummel from Seattle,
Washington State. Note the advertisement
on the side of the truck. As with many other
companies in Canada and the USA, she is now
offering compost tea applications to lawns,
trees and gardens.

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B.C. RESEARCH WITH COMPOST TEA

In 2004, compost tea was prepared using a commercial compost tea brewer, and applied on organic apple orchards near Cawston, B.C. Funding was provided by the Certified Organic Associations of B.C. (under the Organic Sector Development Program) and cooperating farmers (J. and G. Dhaliwal, J. and R. Mennell, S. and W. Mennell, L. Edwards and B. Mennell, L. and G. Sellmer).

Trials were conducted in a replicated, controlled design. Two trials tested foliar applications for control of apple powdery mildew. One trial tested soil application for control of root-feeding nematodes. Four trials tested soil application for impact on biology content. In 2005 and 2006, seventeen laboratory experiments were conducted to test variables in recipes by comparing similar brewers operating at the same time. Results were shared with organic farmers at various seminars.

The following are general observations made during this work.

Observation # 1:

Making compost tea is easy.

Take good quality water. Take good quality compost. Bubble with lots of air. Bingo, you have aerated compost tea.

Observation # 2:

Making good compost tea is not easy

Two similar brewers from the same manufacturer are operated at the same time with the same recipe. Samples are collected and sent to an independent laboratory for analysis. Result: the two samples are highly different in microbial composition.

A good understanding of important parameters, and high quality start-up ingredients, are paramount to produce quality compost tea that can deliver benefits to the user.

Beware: some "recipes" found in trade publications result in tea quality that is highly variable or outright poor.

Observation # 3:

E. coli is a serious concern

Compost tea prepared in the early stages of this project contained a high level of Escherichia coli. This pathogen could pose a health risk if regrowth occurs during tea preparation and the solution is applied to fresh produce crops.

Situations that increase the risk of contamination with E. coli include the use of manure-based compost, the addition of molasses as a sugar source, and improper clean-up of equipment.

Observation # 4:

Compost tea is rich in nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium

With many compost teas, standard laboratory analysis shows an elevated Electrical Conductivity (E.C.) from the rich supply of many nutrients. Are the impressive field results coming from microbial activity, or is it simply plant nutrition via foliar fertilisation?

Observation # 5:

Sound management of soil and compost is still very important

High quality soils and composts contain beneficial microbes that colonize plant roots and induce natural pathways against many diseases. This process is solid and published in high-credibility peer-reviewed scientific journals. Sound composting is the first step in the preparation of high quality compost tea. Procedures are available to produce high-quality, disease suppressive compost. These procedures are generally not implemented on B.C. organic farms.

SALTSPRING CELEBRATES APPLES

By Wendi Lopatecki

It was obvious from the moment we stepped into the Salt Spring Apple Festival at Fulford Hall on October 1st that this would be a day of adjectives.

Gazing down on the array of 200-plus varieties of organic, locally grown apples before me, my eyes were seduced by the glowing palette of colour simmering in the warm, filtered sunlight of the morning. Burgundy, lime, bright, deep, blushed, freckled, somber, intense, golden, glossy, dim, shy, pale, hinting, sunkissed and shaded.

Size and shape spoke to me next, with equally as diverse stances-round, fat, lumpy, lean, oval, warbled, huge, and tiny. I spotted a few familiar looking clusters, reminding me of the examples I carried with me from my own few mystery trees in hopes of identifying them.

I headed over to a side table where the adjectives were shooting out like rockets, where apples were being sliced and peeled, stems plucked and history probed at. A cluster of people waited and watched, flipping through four huge apple identifying books.

Michael Cowan and Ann Aylard from the BC Fruit Testers Association were working their hardest at finding names for these lost apples.

"It's very interesting and challenging because there's so much to keep in mind. We're forever learning," says Ann, holding my apple and turning it over in her fingers. Michael chuckles, "yes, we're fruit testers, not experts."

Micheal's expertise is apparent as he steers through the possibility of 17,000 named apple varieties in the world today. It appears that the mystery apple probe is an intense process, considering the stem, the cavity, the tree and where it grows, the skin thickness, and any other possible detail pertaining to the whole lifecycle of the apple.

As the crowd thickened and we heard apple-inspiring words from speakers Captain Apple and Johnny Apple Seed, my family and I turned our thoughts to the map of Salt Spring Island and the 17 farms we were welcomed to visit on this sunny autumn Sunday.



We stopped at Wave Hill Farm, a quiet, organic market garden and orchard consisting of Salt Spring's first heritage orchard, dating back to 1860. There we began our first tastings. Wolf River apples, Kings and Cox Pippins, plus fresh pressed apple juice. Crisp, light, sweet, tart-the adjectives again began flowing.

It was at the next farm, however, that things really got going. Toted as 'apple heaven' on the map, and seemingly the most popular stop on the route, Apple Luscious Organic Orchard had over 100 apple varieties out on tables for tasting. Here, the adjectives buzzed and hung like bees in the sun. Mild, tangy, citrusy, bland, soft, crunchy, dry, moist, hard, mellow, rosey, punchy, yummy.

Especially popular were the many types of pink and red fleshed apples with such captivating names as Aerie Red Flesh, Almata, Pink Pearl, Webster's Pink Meat, Winters Red Flesh. Other names bounced off my tongue like Elizabethan Sonnets-Arlet, Ashmead's Kernel, Belle de Boskoop, Chenango Strawberry, Emerald Spire, Esopus Spitzenburg, Jefferis, Kandil Sinap, MacFree, Merton Beauty, Muscadet de Dieppe, RubINETTE, Tsugaru, Winter Banana. A far more impressive cast than could be found on any supermarket shelf.

Apple Festival organizers Harry and Debbie Burton began planting this young orchard only 20 years ago, and it has grown to include 200 different connoisseur apple varieties growing on 300 trees. They embrace organic practices, allowing blackberry bushes, nitrogen fixing weeds, and bee attracting flowers to flourish in any bare spot available. Everything lies thick with mulches, giving the farm a cushiony, layered feel ripe with warmth and moisture. These apples, as well as being the centre of attention, are also an important link in a continual and symbiotic chain with everything around them.

As the day progressed and the sticky juices of so many apples began to blend into each other on my fingers, I had to leave the apple connoisseurs behind. I arrived home and gazed at my four mystery apple trees, laden this year with enough apples for my family, my neighbours, our friends, or anyone who asks. Close to home, clean air, ripening fruit under which children play and daily life is lived, these apples remind me that real food, by whichever name we give it, links us to our roots and our communities.



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