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Next Issue Deadline:
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President's Letter

by Peter Johnston

Hello everyone, I am still a bit shocked to find myself president of COABC. It's the weekend after the Sidney conference as I write this, and I'm late with the agenda and details for the next board teleconference, and late for this message in our Grower. I'm going to have to work at remembering all the details that come with this job, and I ask your patience and understanding when I don't achieve perfection, or maybe even adequacy. A gentle reminder to me will be much more effective than a blast.

I will be hugely assisted by the very competent and thorough (though small - the equivalent of less than two full-time positions) staff in our office, who work with me, the executive and the board of directors to keep us functioning most effectively. We and you are also served by a number of contractors who perform specific and general tasks for us, often funded by non-COABC sources.

At the conference the board of directors did a lot of work, and we are changing the way we operate from a "do it all" board to a policy board. That's the plan, and it will take some time to get it fully operational. Please remember that all of our CBs' directors are volunteers, and we are undertaking a lot of work and responsibility. We are all doing it because we think that COABC is and can offer valuable services to our CBs, our licensees, and the organic community generally in BC.

If you are interested in learning more about COABC, I invite you to visit our web site and poke around it. There's lots to discover there. If you want to know a bit about me, I think the biographical sketches for presenters at Sidney will still be there. Mine is by far the longest. You will also probably find our Annual Report on the site. It gives a quick overview of what we do and how we spend the money that we have from your fees and other sources.

I also invite you to join our listserve from the web-site. It's a very useful and interesting service, connecting people interested in organics from around the world. It's a great way to get your questions answered, and share information. If you have suggestions or questions about COABC, please

contact your CB's director, or our office, or me.

Finally, please be aware that Canada has a national standard for organic production. It is in effect, and has been for several years. On December 14 it becomes "mandatory" for anyone making an organic claim in Canada. That's when the new Organic Regulation comes into effect. It and the existing Standard become the Canada Organic Regime, or COR, which dictates organic international and interprovincial trade in Canada. COABC has adopted the National Standard for the BC Certified Organic Program, for trade within BC. The COR is the way that our government can have some control over what food with an organic claim comes into Canada from the rest of the world, and is sold between the provinces.



The Organic Production Systems General Principles and Management Standards and Organic Production Systems Permitted Substances Lists and a comparison between the Canada Standards and BC Standards are available through links on the COABC website at: www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/Standards/. For those without internet access, or who work better with paper copies, we're working to have printed copies available soon.

Please remember that, although the National Standard will be undergoing changes in the next year or two, the now-in-effect 2006 version of the standard is the one that your CB is to be certifying to. The changes will be published and all operators will have lots of opportunity to adjust to the changes before they come into effect.

Change often makes most of us nervous. The reassuring thing is that spring is arriving on the coast, and will come soon in the rest of BC. Food grown well is highly valuable, and is beginning to be recognized and appreciated by more people. Have a great start to your growing season as we start another year.

Peter

Message from the Administrator

by Karen Fenske

Though everyone is in the swing of spring I thought that I would take this opportunity to share with all of you some interesting statistics from COABC's 2007 annual report. The findings exhibit how valuable COABC is to internal and external stakeholders.

The office is the communication hub of COABC. We started tracking our phone traffic in late 2006 and now have one whole year of activity to report on. In 2007 we received close to 800 calls of which:

- 31% were general inquiries**
- 10% were callers wanting to become certified**
- 13% are from directors or staff/ contractors**
- 8% were requests for promotional items or the Grower**
- 7% were people wanting to talk with the Executive Director/ Administrator**
- 2 %/18 calls were from media seeking someone to speak on behalf of COABC**

The remaining calls came in regarding events' questions (6%), from members with miscellaneous questions (5%), from CB administrators (4%), regarding standards and orders (3%), finance (2%), accreditation (1%), OSDP (1%), and 6% were wrong numbers.

The **COABC website** is also a critical link between COABC members, licensees, administration and consumers. The has continued to provide production and program information as well as member information and COABC News. **In 2007 we had 5,421,456 hits to our site which is a 194% increase since 2004.**

The **BC Organic Grower**, in its ninth year, continued to be a valuable resource for members and others in the organic sector. **We succeeded in sending out 4 issues** to all our members, approximately 600, as well to advertisers, interested subscribers, BCMAL, COG, and other organizations we trade publications with, making up a distribution total of 700 per issue.

Cyber-help, an Organic Sector Development Project, was developed to encourage organic and alternative food production in Canada by improving accessibility to quality organic farming content online, while upgrading farmers' capacities to access that information. It has become one of the best online farming resources with over 78,000 visits to the site in 2007.



Anne Macey the Director of the Accreditation Board reported: "In 2007 **COABC renewed accreditation for 9 certification bodies in the Regional Program certifying a total of 261 enterprises (according to the website listings) and 2 in the ISO Compliant Program certifying 303 enterprises.** These numbers include producers, transitional growers, processors and handlers. There are also two CBs (PACS and IOPA) approved for operating a low risk/reduced inspection program. Currently there are 40 producers participating in this unique BC program."

My first 6 months zipped by in 2007, with the tasks of supporting board work, implementing projects, managing contractors, preparing reports and increasing communication, planning and preparing a new operational plan, implementing administrative systems, and working towards a strong organizational framework. Our Office Manager, Kristy Wipperman, spent most of her time answering phone and mail inquiries, working on accreditation, bookkeeping, and sourcing economical solutions to administrative needs. One of greatest achievements was the new financial statement format that displays an accurate picture of COABC. We continue to work diligently to serve the 11 certified bodies, 600 licensees and 16 directors.

In the fall of 2007 it became obvious that change was once again imperative. With this in mind, I look forward to being part of COABC as the organization evolves to meet its objectives — assisting all its members in their desire to do good for themselves and for their neighbours.

Karen

Editor's Note

By the time this issue reaches you, I hope that Spring has finally sprung. I am sure we all have had enough of Mother Nature's winter and are looking forward to the change in season.

You will notice many changes as you read the Spring BCOG. A new president was elected at the Shades of Green Conference — Peter Johnston will now be giving you all the news from the board. Welcome, Peter! The conference and AGM took a lot of hard work and devotion and a big

thanks needs to be said to Lee Fuge for all her tremendous efforts.

Please also note a new feature for the BCOG, the Farm Focus — you can read the first installment on page 22. If you would like your farm featured please contact the COABC office or myself. Happy Spring! Cassandra



Report to COABC Membership

by Deb Foote

On January 17th, 2008 a meeting was held in Victoria with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Daphne Stancil, attended by Paddy Doherty and myself. The purpose of the meeting was to follow up on the October 2007 meeting with Minister Pat Bell and members of the Organic Community, where we tabled the "Growing Forward with Organics" proposal.

The proposal called for stable funding for the organic extension agent position we developed in 2007. Our request was for long term funding for a five year period. While Daphne responded favourably, she indicated that the Ministry could not commit to five years of funding as there is no program within the Ministry at this time that could fund this kind of long-term request. She indicated there is some money in the current year's budget that could be made available, but she will not know more about this subject until sometime in March.

Daphne has put in a request for money for COABC for organic extension, but there are other sectors within Agriculture vying for a share of the same pot. Again, it will not be clear until March what funding will come our way. We left this topic feeling that Daphne will do all she can to ensure we can continue the organic extension position for at least the next year.

Point two of the "Growing Forward with Organics" proposal was that the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands provide core funding for the Organic Federation of Canada. At the time we made the

request we were again looking for a five year commitment. However, since that time the OFC has received funding from the Canadian Government. The COABC still has a commitment of \$10,000 for 2008 and Daphne has indicated that she will put in a marker to request that these funds come through BCMAL.

We requested that BCMAL work with the Organic Sector to create an Organic Advisory Board, Daphne

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said she really liked this idea. We suggested that the easiest thing for the ministry to do would be to commit to a meeting with the Minister and the industry at least once a year, to discuss the state of the industry. This would be replicating the organic luncheon held last October, but instead the BCMAL would be the host. Daphne responded positively to this idea, but suggested that there be fewer participants, as it is hard for the Minister to digest so much information at once. She made a commitment to keep in touch on this — it will be up to the COABC to remind her that this is supposed to take place.

At this point Daphne pointed out that there were two things that the COABC needed to do to if we wanted to influence government policy (i.e. get more resources for organics). **The first was to keep our organisation together and speak with one voice.** She repeated this statement a number of times. **The second was to increase our presence at the BC Agricultural Council, especially at times when BCAC meets with the Minister,** if at all possible – she indicated that she would assert her influence to see an organic representative at that table. Daphne said that support from the BCAC was critical to getting support from the Minister (and the Ministry). It was her recommendation that COABC and the Organic Sector need to be more integrated with the Ag Sector in general. She also indicated that the Minister supports the organic sector – but that his support is contingent on us working together.

One of the key items included in the “Growing Forward with Organics” was our request to have the Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act amended to make it mandatory for operators to become certified organic if they are going to use the term ‘Organic’ in marketing their products. Daphne pointed out that the act was written as enabling (voluntary) legislation at the request of the agricultural industry. To be make a change of this kind, BCMAL would need to undertake a plebiscite, or at the very least a thorough study (cost/benefit analysis as well as an objective assessment, she said) of the affects of such a change on agricultural producers. She indicated she would not consider doing so until the national regulation has been fully implemented for at least a year, so that an understanding of the need for provincial (mandatory) legislation could be ascertained.

We also asked for funding for organic research. Daphne said that is not at all likely that the IAF could develop a research fund that would not require matching funds (because of federal policy). She suggested that we might consider working with UBC Okanagan to help secure funding for organic research at that institution. This would require another request to the Minister, but perhaps on behalf of the COABC and a research organisation.

Finally, we discussed the challenges that the Organic Operators continue to experience in the Supply Managed sector. She indicated that the Minister is well aware of the problems with the implementation of the “Specialty Market and New Entrant Policy” for the Farm Industry Review Board. She indicated that we should be hearing more about this in the near future.

All in all it was an excellent and encouraging meeting. Both Paddy and I feel that Daphne will do her best to assure that the issues we brought forward and the requests that we made will be addressed. We expect to hear about funding issues in late March.



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Dear Rochelle

Dear Rochelle,

I am an organic rancher, in the Cache Creek area, and my hayfields have been devoured by grasshoppers, deer, and other various creatures these last few years. I am putting up deer fences this coming season, which will take care of the deer and some other four-legged beasts, but those hoppers seem to have me beat. Can you help me?

Hoppered in Cache Creek

Dear Hoppered,

One thing I have experienced over the years is that it is nearly impossible to organically control grasshoppers once they have reached adulthood — and especially once they start swarming. I have learned that the best time to get a handle on them, if you have a “plague”, is during the 40 to 60 days it takes a nymph (a young grasshopper) to mature into an adult.

But before I tell you how to ‘deal’ with them, I have to point out that not all grasshopper species are pests, even though sometimes just seeing a large number of grasshoppers is enough to make one sick with fear. In fact, in BC, only two are considered economic threats; the clear-winged grasshopper, *Camnula pellucida*, and the migratory grasshopper, *Melanoplus sanguinipes*. There is some good BC grasshopper species identification information at <http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/grasshopper.htm>.

Most grasshopper species over-winter as eggs, which are laid in clusters in late summer and early fall, then hatch in spring, when soil temperatures warm up. Your hay field is the perfect haven for them as grasshoppers love un-tilled perennial fields or weedy, undisturbed areas like roadside ditches, and fence rows. Warm, dry spring weather favours grasshopper development, while an early spring followed by cloudy, damp weather encourages diseases that set them back in their tracks. Worse, a long, hot summer ensures a plentiful food supply and encourages early maturity of grasshoppers

and a long egg-laying period. On the other hand, a cool summer and early fall slows down grasshopper maturity and reduces time for laying eggs.

I have also noticed that grasshoppers seem to be attracted to dry, low organic matter soil sites. Whenever I irrigated and improved the soil quality the grasshoppers just seemed to disappear. Of course, introducing any type of poultry will help to reduce a grasshopper problem and will improve that soil fertility issue at the same time.

Also some control can be achieved with tillage as it discourages the females from laying eggs in the soil and destroys eggs by exposing them to the weather, predators, and parasites. Spring tillage also reduces food sources for newly hatched nymphs, while fall tilling can reduce over-wintering sites, but leaves areas susceptible to erosion, and may make it impossible to sustain soil fertility if done every year. Other approaches include trap cropping early in the season before they are mobile and then dealing with the smaller area.

Interestingly enough BCMAL is currently planning a project to demonstrate the use of *Nosema locustae* (NoloBait), a naturally occurring protozoan and *Metarhizium anisopliae*, a soil fungus for grasshopper management in BC’s interior in 2008. Neither product is currently registered in Canada. The ministry is hopeful that these two biological control tools will become available to Canadian growers, as in principle these would satisfy organic standards. I have also read about a few interesting mechanical contraptions that have been built over the years by innovative farmers such as the “Hopper Whopper” and the “Hopper Dozer” but none seem to be commercially available.

Hope I have given you some idea on how to deal with your hopper problem. To read my other advice columns visit <http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/contact/extension.php>

Rochelle

Beyond the MIR: The COABC's Forum on Food Safety Regulations

by Kate Hughes

The Meat Inspection Regulation is a model we don't want to repeat with other sectors." Peter Johnston, facilitating the first session of COABC's 2008 annual conference, summarized a key concern of the farmers, board members and local food supporters convening at the forum on food safety regulations. The Meat Inspection Regulation (MIR) that entered into force in September 2007 has proven to be an egregious policy for small farmers and local food systems (see Onderwater's article in the Winter 2008 issue). The forum was premised on the need to avoid regulations with similar effects in other agricultural sectors.

To this end, the forum was designed to improve communication between government and small producers and to determine how the COABC should engage with food safety policy issues. The forum began with government presentations about recent and future food safety policies in BC and a talk about the Canadian Horticultural Council's On Farm Food Safety Assurance Program. Questions from the audience, and much of the group discussions that followed, focused largely on farmers' difficulties with the MIR. Forum co-facilitator Kathleen Gibson used these experiences to focus the group's attention on identifying resources that could help farmers improve their current situation and ensure that future food safety regulations are more supportive of BC's small organic farms.

To begin, Pat Ruth and Paul Bailey from the BC Ministry of Health provided a comprehensive overview of the BC Food Safety Act (FSA), the leg-

islation that contains and enables the MIR. Ruth explained that the FSA was designed in 1999 to modernize and consolidate food safety regulations in the province. It will be amended to include updated versions of the Milk Industry Act, the Fish Inspection Act, and the Food Premises Regulation. Cabinet passed the FSA in 2002, but it was only in the wake of the BSE outbreak in 2003 that food safety legislation became a provincial priority and the FSA was brought into force.

The forum's policy presentations provided context to the MIR, but did not satisfy members' questions about why the regulations were being ap-

plied to their animals and products, since there is no evidence that meat from animals raised on small farms and slaughtered under the previous inspection system was unsafe.

Producers at the forum described the effects of the FSA on their farms and communities: "We have no access to [slaughter] facilities and we can't make a living anymore", some reported. One participant highlighted the

particular access problems faced by producers in more remote areas. Many were concerned that even where facilities do exist they do not guarantee the return of a farmer's own animals, making it impossible to for farmers to ensure the integrity of their organic products.

Several participants discussed the rise of an underground economy resulting from the criminalization of locally slaughtered meat in regions without adequate processing facilities. COABC member Bob Johnston, explained "customers are



Peter Johnston speaking at the COABC Conference and AGM. Photo Courtesy of David Schmidt - Country Life in BC

saying to [member producers/ processors] 'What do you want us to tell people? We'll tell them whatever you want cause we want to buy your animals and we don't want to slaughter them ourselves.'" Corky Evans, the NDP agricultural critic, reminded the audience that criminalization often does more to render practices unsafe than it does to stop them. "It's going underground, not going away", he said.

What else could be done to improve the situation of farmers and processors negatively affected by the MIR? Johnston and Bailey established that the FSA permits regional exemptions, so Cabinet has the power to exempt farmers in under-served areas from the current regulatory calamity. Also, four Canadian provinces provide a precedent for exempting poultry producers from province-wide inspection regulations. Both of these facts are potential points on which to lobby the government. Gibson also encouraged creative problem-solving and noted that citizens in the Queen Charlotte Islands are experimenting with the idea of a mixed-use processing facility.

Ruth addressed public concerns about further inspection regulations in other sectors. She explained that the guidelines governing farmers markets have been updated, but that they remain voluntary. She also dispelled rumours that inspection regulations similar to the MIR will soon be applied to fruits and vegetables, stating: "from a Ministry of Health point of view there is certainly no intention to be regulating those [products], and I'm not aware that anyone else is intending to regulate them either." However, Ruth did note that additional products could be regulated in the future, and that voluntary food safety certification programs are being increasingly demanded by private retailers. For these reasons local producers and their supporters may want to be vigilant about whether new and existing voluntary programs are adequately designed to support small and organic operations.

During the session, there were several indications that policy makers might have difficulty recognizing the unique circumstances and perspectives of small organic farms. Sherry Nielson, from the

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Canadian Horticultural Council, acknowledged the unique abundance of small, multi-product farms in BC but soon after stressed that “food is food and farming is farming”, suggesting that regulatory approaches need not be customized according to scale or production approach. Also, Ruth explained that the FSA was designed in part because existing legislation “was not really helping industry and the fast pace of change we’re living with now”, but it was unclear whether organic and other small producers were included in her reference to ‘industry’, and ‘fast-paced change’ (even though they have clearly been affected by the new legislation). That she didn’t distinguish BC’s small agricultural sector from the province’s more industrialized export-based sector raises questions about whether policy makers adequately differentiate the market environment and regulatory requirements of BC’s diverse producers.

Bailey’s presentation further supports these questions. He explained that prior to the FSA, BC had a “patchwork” of agricultural laws, and indicated that this was less desirable than having food safety be protected by a single centralized piece of legislation. The assumption that simple legislation is preferable to complex legislation might be correct in a more homogeneous sector, but the diversity of BC’s farmers requires more nuanced analysis. A well-designed collection of regulations might respond better to the unique needs of different regions, production scales, and agricultural approaches than the centralized FSA.

Participants struggled with how to educate policy makers about the different context and practices of organic farms and the different ways in which organic farmers understand and approach food safety. One participant identified a “clash of paradigms” between organic producers and government. He felt the silo structure of provincial administration —which treats environmental, health, economic and community issues as separate — conflicts philosophically and practically with the organic method. He asked how farmers could help policy-makers understand that organic farmers’ integrated approach benefits both communities and the environment, and that regulations should support this.

Members suggested the COABC could help bridge this information gap between farmers and gov-

ernment. For instance, the organization could advocate on behalf of members and educate government about organic methods and community-based markets. They also proposed the COABC help document the economic and financial effects of the MIR (following the recent report on the North Okanagan Regional District). Since current regulations do not account for the costs of compliance, such documentation could illustrate to the government the need to make food safety requirements more affordable for small producers and ultimately help to get more processing plants certified.

During the final section of the forum, participants discussed what could be done to ensure that future food safety policies support small scale and organic production. Gibson stressed to participants the importance of being vigilant about one’s interests, and shared recent examples of small producers successfully lobbying for lot permit programs and an improved waste management Code of Practice. She asked participants what mechanisms they could establish to ensure similarly effective involvement in future policy development. Gibson also invited participants to consider the idea of an inter-sectoral “task force of farmers” that would not only provide input into policy development but also engage relevant ministries and agencies in discussions about place-based farming.

A key question that emerged from the forum was how to ensure that all parties to a regulation — policy makers, farmers and BC communities — could be best informed and consulted during policy development. “No one disagrees in principle that it would be a good thing to have safe food,” Gibson said, “the problem is how do you make it workable?”. Policy makers need to better understand the unique strengths and circumstances of BC’s diverse producers; farmers and their communities need to better understand how, when, and why food production legislation is being developed and be involved in that process. This forum began the dialogue between producers and government that will make that knowledge sharing possible.

Kate Hughes has a long-standing interest in how food systems can contribute to more just and joyous communities and healthier environments. She is a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Victoria.

Becoming an Organic Inspector

by Karen Fenske

An organic inspector is a trained individual who examines the process of organic handling by a business seeking organic certification. Depending on the type of operation this may include visiting farm fields, looking over various herds or flocks, discussing crop rotation plans, assessing soil health, confirming inputs, visiting buildings and examining equipment, reviewing product ingredients and labels, assessing contamination risks, pest management, looking over sales and production records and any other pertinent aspects of the operation. Some organic inspectors are capable of working in all types of organic systems including farm, livestock, and processing while others focus exclusively in one or two areas within their realm of expertise.

What is typically involved in the inspection process? Before the actual inspection begins, the inspector reviews previous documentation, along with the organic plan of the operation requesting certification. All of this material is reviewed by the certification agency and the inspector before the inspector's visit to the operation.

Once on-site, the inspector becomes the eyes and ears for the certifying agent and investigates the process to see if it is in accordance with the organic plan, thus ensuring that the government regulations for organic processing are met. Even though there are differences between what needs to be verified for different operations, each type of inspection follows the same basic guidelines and monitors the same fundamental processes. The inspector presents a final report to the certifying agency, which makes the decision about granting certification.

Training programs are co-sponsored with the Independent Organic Inspection Association (IOIA), a US-based non-profit that coordinates farm and processing inspector training. The program includes coursework and an apprenticeship program. The time involved in training varies greatly from person to person, with the apprenticeship component lasting up to two years.

As an independent contractor, VOs can work with as many certifying agencies as they want to. Most

VOs are hired on a contractual basis and the payment structure is negotiated individually between a VO and a certification body. A career in organic inspection is very satisfying work that requires travel, tends to be seasonal and it can be fast-paced with the quick turnaround needed on files.

Contact COABC for more details on qualifications and acceptance criteria.

Certified Organic Associations of BC (COABC) and IOIA will cosponsor a 4.5 day Basic Organic Crop Inspection Training using the proposed Canadian National Standard (version CGSB-2006) as the reference. USDA National Organic Standards variations will be identified.

The course will be held at Kwantlen University College in Langley BC, Canada from May 26-30, 2008.

Please contact Karen Fenske at
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“Don’t you have any BC organic carrots?!”

by Hermann Bruns

For most retailers in BC, this year the answer would have been an apologetic “Sorry, we’re all out,” by late February. That is a very disappointing answer to the 100-mile-diet enthusiasts and the growing number of people who appreciate the taste difference of local organic carrots.

I probably don’t need to elaborate too much on how local foods are now the “in” thing. Hardly a day goes by where there isn’t a mention in the media of how local produce will solve everything from obesity to global warming. Even the BC government has jumped on the bandwagon, making local food a prominent part of their new Agriculture Plan and using only BC product in the award-winning school fruit and vegetable snack program.

This is like a dream come true for many in the organic community who have been promoting the benefits of local foods for the past decade or more. Of course, there was always a healthy dose of self interest in us promoting local but now the concept has taken off and we are having to play catch up. A case in point is the supply (or lack thereof) of carrots this winter.

For the past 5 to 6 years, the majority of the storage carrots in BC have been produced by 3 or 4 farms. Even when all were producing at their maximum potential, the supply of carrots would usually run out by late March. This year BC’s second largest organic carrot producer retired while the largest, Fountainview Farm, had a reduced crop due to unexpected labour issues. The result; carrot supply is down significantly while demand is at an all-time high. Obviously we need a few more carrot growers to spread the risk.

But that is not the whole story. There are a number of other participants who could be playing a more active role here. The two major organic distributors in BC, along with several conventional ones also handling organic carrots, are in the best position to know the extent to which there are gaps in the supply. Most of these distributors have not made much an effort to communicate these gaps to the BC agricultural community.

The COABC has an opportunity to take on the role of intermediary by gathering production and import information and publishing analysis reports about demand, prices, and gaps for each major crop produced in BC. If governments are going to actively promote local food, they also need to provide the necessary supports (training for new farmers, removal of barriers to local production, etc.) to reinvigorate a neglected agricultural sector so that farmers can build the capacity to meet the local demand.

Running out of what is arguably the iconic local winter vegetable so early does not inspire confidence in consumers that bought our argument that “local is better”. So do we just sit back and say “That’s life!” or does the organic community, having promoted the “buy local organic” concept most stridently, have a responsibility to come up with the goods? I would argue the latter but we’ll have to learn to share information and resources to achieve that.

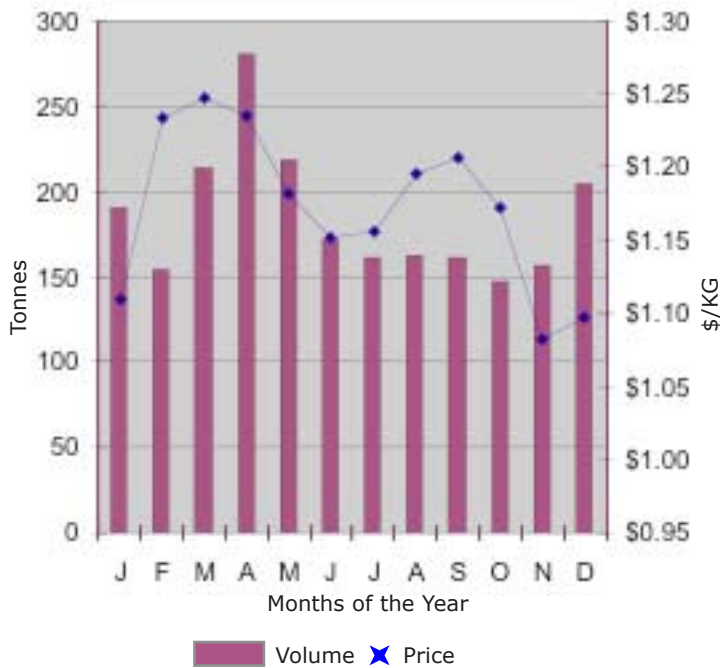
Sources:

1. Statistics Canada started tracking the volume and value of 41 organic agricultural commodities in 2007. For only \$3.00 (+ tax) you can download your own report at www.statcan.ca/trade/scripts/trade_search.cgi
2. Personal communications with growers and distributors.
3. Retail sales of certified organic foods in Canada in 2006 by Anne Macey. www.organicagcentre.ca/Docs/RetailSalesOrganic_Canada2006.pdf

Hermann Bruns is co-owner of Wild Flight Farm which strives to provide a year-round supply of local organic vegetables & fruits to farmers market/ CSA customers in Salmon Arm and Revelstoke.

See statistics on the following page.

Organic Carrots Imported into BC in 2007



Carrot Number Crunching for BC 2007

Volume of imported organic carrots:
2,221,740 Kg

Volume of imported conventional carrots:
17,701,103 Kg

Value of imported organic carrots: **\$2,610,894**

Price/Kg range for imported carrots: **\$1.10 - \$1.25/Kg**

Price premium of BC over imported carrots: **125 - 150%**

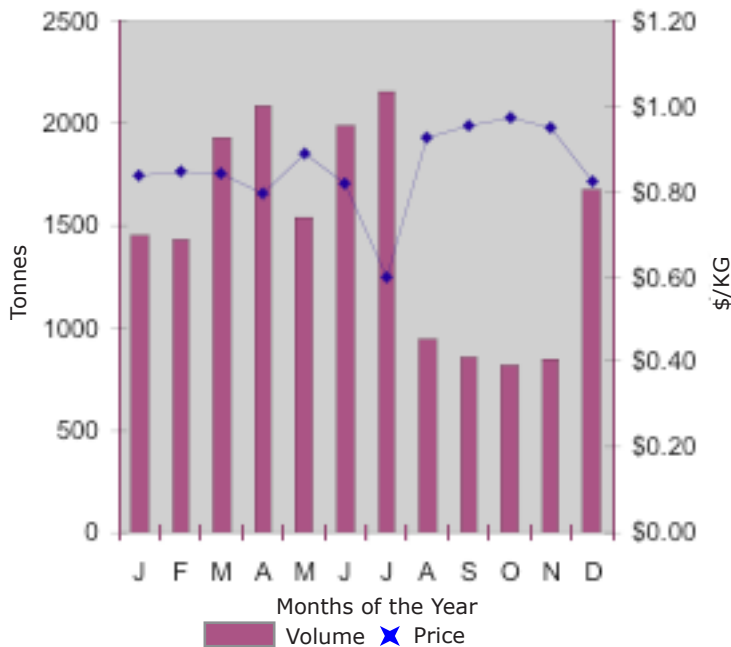
Volume of carrots produced in BC: **Unavailable**

Hectares in organic carrot production in BC: **roughly 10-20 Hectares**

Number of COABC carrot growers: **20**

Yields range from **20,000 - 25,000 lbs/acre to over 60,000 (conventional in Australia)**

Conventional Carrots Imported into BC in 2007



Organic Poultry Training Survey Results

The following are the results of Organic Poultry Training Survey circulated throughout the BC Organic community plus to all BC feather boards, agencies and associations. Survey deadline was Jan 21, 2008.

Most of the people who participated were within the organic sector, and most dabbled in some type of poultry production, but it seems clarity is needed on what the difference is between commercial versus hobby scale production.

Top three types of production the respondents were interested in learning more about: Turkeys, Chicken Meat and then Chicken Eggs

100% were aware of quota requirements, but some wanted more information.

All participants were aware of the Meat Inspection Act, half were aware of the Egg Grading Regulations, almost half were aware of the Environmental Management Act, with a few aware of the Health of Animals Act, less were aware of the Feeds and Fertilizer Act and the least familiar Act was the Natural Products Marketing (BC) Act. It is apparent from these results there are some information gaps with regards to pertinent Regulations.

A production manual was the most favoured learning methodology selected, with online material and workshops tied for second. Least preferred methods were webinars and conference calls. Some participants identified workshops as their least preferred method of delivery due to their distance to the lower mainland, where it was assumed a course would be held. Therefore workshops probably would have been the number one choice amongst those surveyed if they had felt workshops would be locally available to them.

Critical comments received from Survey participants (in no significant order)

1. I'm curious about such a course given that there are relatively few small scale processors for poultry and as non-quota producers, can only raise 200/year. I am most interested in what COABC is doing to bring pressure to bear on the CMB to raise the non-quota limit to something more economically viable like 2,000 as Alberta has.
2. Can you define commercial & hobby? How many egg's or kgs? Or anything that generates revenue?
3. Our current biggest issue is with slaughter, and the lack of availability of it.
4. We also need more information and resources on making feed - the current commercial organic feed sources are too expensive to make chickens a serious proposition, especially when there are other sources of raw ingredients.
5. This was our first year in organics, so are learning the hard way. We did all natural, non-medicated before. Any information is welcome.
6. A yearly update on regulation would be helpful.



Events and Announcements

Certified Organic Associations of BC (COABC) and IOIA will cosponsor a 4.5 day Basic Organic Crop Inspection Training using the proposed Canadian National Standard (version CGSB-2006) as the reference. USDA National Organic Standards variations will be identified. The course will be held at Kwantlen University College in Langley BC, Canada from May 26-30, 2008.

Please contact Karen Fenske at

Ph: 205-260-4429

Fax: 250-260-4436

admin@certifiedorganic.bc.ca

www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca

Registration Deadline: April 15, 2008

.....
3 organic factsheets done in partnership with students at UBC & KUC have been uploaded onto <http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/contact/extension.php>

- Local BC Sources of Allowable Soil Amendments for Organic Farms (pdf)
- Nutrient Deficiencies (pdf)
- Weed Management in Annual Cropping Systems (pdf)

.....
You are warmly invited to a series of fascinating evenings this Spring addressing the subjects of the Environment and our place in it. All events will be at the Auditorium, Kwantlen University College, Langley (corner of Glover Road and Highway #10, Langley – behind the Best Western Motel and ABC Restaurant).

Sustainable Fair Trade – A viable future for small-scale farmers in a globalised world.

Stacey Toews, Level Ground Trading Ltd., Saanichton.

Saturday April 5th, 7:00pm

Stacey brings his perspective of how to build long-lasting relationships with primary producers (farmers) in developing countries that is sustainable and profitable to all parties. Not just 'Fair Trade'.

Although a free event, we ask you to pre-register (for our planning purposes).

To register your attendance, please e-mail or 'phone Gary Jones at:

Gary.Jones@Kwantlen.ca or 604-599-3311.

Regional Seminar Series coffers have been refilled! Contact Rochelle to learn how to access these funds to bring production speakers to your area. extension@certifiedorganic.bc.ca

Grain Production for the North Okanagan and Lower Mainland Regional Seminar sessions will be offered shortly. Watch the listserv for details.

.....
Biological Control of Greenhouses Diseases

A 1-day technical workshop for greenhouse growers of vegetables and ornamentals.

Saturday, April 19th, 2008

Ramada Lodge Conference Center

Highway 97

(across from Orchard Park Shopping Center)

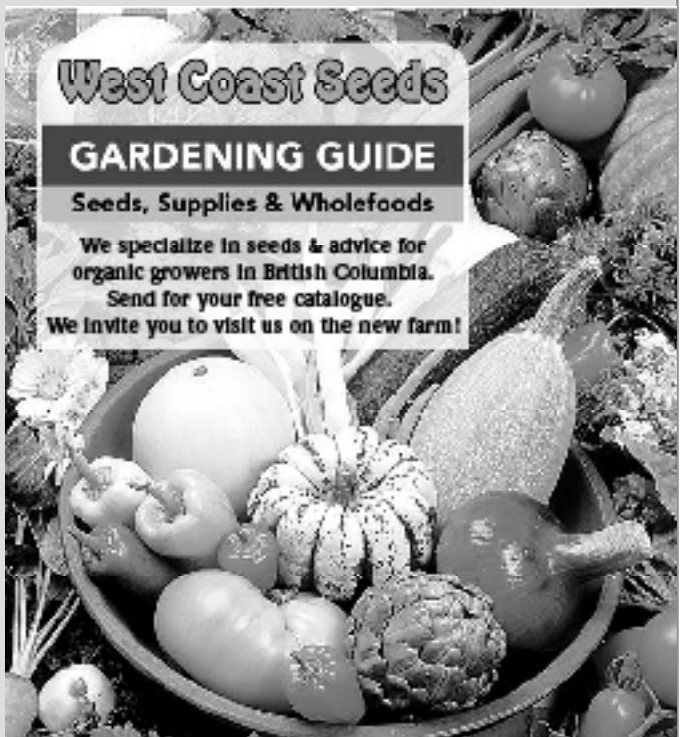
Kelowna, BC

Contact: Mario Lanthier

Phone 250-717-1898

Fax: 250-717-1898

Web: www.crophealth.com



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NAME THE PEOPLE CONTEST!

This group picture is from the Halliburton Farm visit during the COABC Conference and AGM. There are 14 people total including 2 partials. If you can name all the people from numbers 1-12 you will win a prize. And if you can name the partials - A and B - you will get a bonus prize!

To see an enlarged version of the picture visit: <http://www.certifiedorganic.bc.ca/contact/extension.php>



Fresh Voices Winners

The aim of the "Fresh Voices" contest was to solicit new ideas to help COABC meet its mandate of "a strong and sustainable community, serving the evolving needs of the sector and the public for generations to come."

FIRST PLACE ESSAY

by **Jordan Marr**

Any society concerned with the sustainability of its agricultural production must look to its young people, and ask them if they are going to farm. This is the most crucial question, since all other discussions about best practice and healthy agricultural communities are pointless if we will not have young farmers to take up our idle plows. If the answer is no, we must find out why, and then set out to remedy the problem before we do anything else.

Currently, I believe the answer is no. Yet, there always has been, and always will be, a small percentage of the population who feel most comfortable in the dirt. The problem is that it is no longer financially possible in most cases. Lots of young people want to farm, but they just can't afford it.

If I am right, then the COABC could seek to fulfill its mandate by helping to make farming more profitable, and thus, a more realistic possibility for young people. No easy task, but I do think there are a few concrete actions the COABC could pursue towards making agriculture more profitable. The following are a few of my ideas.

1. Creating a new market for local food: a high-rise adopt-a-farmer program
I've often marveled at the sheer number of people

that live in the condominiums in Vancouver's Yaletown, and the likelihood that most of them restrict their shopping to the upscale grocery stores in that neighbourhood. It has me wondering whether some sort of adopt-a-farmer program could be developed to capture that market, whereby once

a week or month a farmer sets up a booth outside or in the lobby of a high-rise at the end of the business day. If we take Yaletown as an example, a farmer placed at one building would have access to literally hundreds of the young urban professionals who, from my observation, are least likely to make the effort to get to a farmer's market on Saturday. I can think of a number of obstacles to making this idea work, but none that are insurmountable.



Heather Stretch, 3rd place; Jordan Marr, 1st place; Joyce McMenamon on behalf of Robin Wheeler, 2nd place

2. Dealing with the labour challenge

I have met farmers who experience net losses on their farm only because they cannot attract the labour they need with the wages the farm can pay. Yet I, and many others, would easily trade high wages for a modest, but stable rural lifestyle that included a permanent place to live on the farm we work.

Thus, I have always figured that if I started a farm with three or four other partners, all of whom would

Continued on page 18

...continued from page 17

have a residence on the farm, I could circumvent the labour problem. However, I have learned that there are a number of zoning rules for farms that prevent the building of numerous residences, and other such cooperative necessities. Thus I think the COABC should review the zoning rules and help to pressure our governments to change those that inhibit a cooperative-type farm.

3. Cooperative Transport & Retail

In Nova Scotia, I met a farmer who had purchased a refrigerated truck to bring not only his own, but other farmers' produce to the lucrative seven-days-a-week market in Halifax that many farmers were otherwise foregoing due to time restraints. Perhaps the COABC could help local organic farmers facilitate such an agreement here.

I am also waiting for a group of farmers to both capitalize on the rapid increase in interest in buying local and also create a permanent place for their wares by creating a local-food only retail store bringing together veggies, fruit, meat, dairy, and preserves produced locally.

Customers might be attracted, and government dollars secured, if a commercial kitchen were attached to such a store so that members of the community could take workshops on cooking and preserving. I strongly believe these skills will soon

be in high demand as more people desire a return to our food traditions.

4. Gathering resources for young farmers

Having spent time searching the internet for resources that might help me start a farm, I have yet to find a well-coordinated site that attempts to bring together information that can otherwise be found in snippets all over the place. Since the COABC represents all of the certifying bodies in BC, I think its website may be a good candidate to serve as a hub for information for young farmers. Currently, such a feature is lacking on the site; a search for "young farmers" in the site's content turns up nothing.

That sums up my ideas. I hope they can be of at least some help, but more importantly, I hope the COABC takes seriously the dire prospects facing young people who want to farm, but who currently have little reason to be optimistic.

Jordan is a 26-year-old who considers himself a "wanna-be farmer" who visits farms around BC to learn about the practical and political aspects of farming. His interest in agriculture began in 2003 when he enrolled in a bachelor program in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at UBC. He graduated in 2006, and after that participated in a seven month SOIL program apprenticeship on an organic farm in Nova Scotia. He is now considering farming as a career.

SECOND PLACE ESSAY: Increasing Production/ minimizing Impact – The End Goal

by Robin Wheeler

BCorganic growers face many challenges in getting a product out to hungry consumers – high land prices, lack of affordable labour and high transportation fees are just part of it. The new grower finds that buying into commercial distribution systems and keeping pace with health regulations and zoning bylaws can complicate and frustrate the purest attempts to feed our communities. And perhaps this is what gets forgotten in the big global mix – that our first responsibility may be to feed those closest to us, and we must do it as efficiently as possible.

In our physically isolated, hilly and gravelly area on the Sunshine Coast, we are forced to work hard at maximizing production from small spaces. This means using each small microclimate on our peculiar lots very carefully – berries and greens do not need the hot, open areas that peppers and squash do, drought ridden areas are saved for grapes and herbs, and lush patches remain for demanding annuals. Bringing amendments over on the ferry is costly, and this forces us to look carefully at garden waste, green manure, seaweeds and near by animal waste more carefully.

We are blessed with comparatively warm winters and are learning more about winter foods to maintain year round income, crops that store, and low cost greenhouses to add even more length to growing seasons.

Labour is a constant problem and this year some of us will be connecting with youth in the schools who have shown interest in learning the skills for food growing. There is also an excellent program through Mental Health in our area, connecting people in transition who have patience and strong backs with some of the more bone breaking short terms jobs that farmers face. A couple of us have been fiddling with partnership models where people would come from the community, harvest a crop that was too time consuming for the farmer to approach, and then either return with value added product for the farmer to sell (jams and pies), or some of the profit from sold items.

We feel more work can be done in analysing what is shipped in from off coast so we can replace more of it from our own properties, and so that we can capture more value-added market for ourselves.

One of our chief issues is keeping food as close to home as possible. Our growers' group receives requests from other communities for farmer lists but we really need our farmers to fulfil food obligations right here. This reduces travel expenses and fossil fuel issues, and tightens the bond between growers and buyers.

Connecting with the buying public is not too much of a problem here – we are blessed with an eager, educated public. We do have to work harder to create opportunities for mid week buying, as both our farmers markets occur on Saturdays, and we also need to have local drop off spots in private yards along our highway where farmers can leave boxes that can be picked up by buyers when they pass by. This will reduce fossil fuels and time spent, but also reduces resistance in buyers who do not want to go out of their way. This will require cooperation and the good will of those living along our highway corridor.

We also have to address waste. Berries, greens and legumes that do not get purchased at the markets often end up as compost – high quality compost of course, but still food that is now

unavailable for human use or direct profit. Our community needs to either create a system where this food gets to a food bank or group home, or where a creative soul could make a living buying this food at discount, and then making the decision of best processing method for later use.

We are working hard here to encourage small lot farming on previously cleared land with by hosting forums that both educate and network the participants. Recent forums touched on soil improvement, efficiency on the farm, season extending plants and water issues – future forums will include non timber forest products, value added information and discussions on labour issues.

Careful observation of our land use, waste, transportation and marketing strategies, combined with our efforts in working as a group, are hopefully bringing us closer to a secure, strengthened, environmentally healthy food system in our community.

As founder of her local organic growers group, (One Straw Society, lower Sunshine Coast) Robin has experienced both pain and pleasure sharing the struggles of local market gardeners. She has worked to keep networks open with potlucks and forums, and this is helping to relieve the sense of isolation and is instilling trust and better cooperation between growers.

Increasing our poor food production levels without infringing further on wild places is an interesting balancing act and a true goal. Working with local growers and analyzing issues helped Robin to complete a book on food security that will be published in the fall of this year. She is currently acting as Food Security Coordinator for her area.

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THIRD PLACE ESSAY

by Heather Stretch

We all know that for food production to be sustainable, it must be local and organic. All of us here are passionate about organic growing, and I have a feeling many of us are just as committed to feeding our local markets. Unfortunately, we're still a drop in the bucket of the mainstream food system. Farmers markets and farm stands thrive, but in order for us to make a real difference in how feeding ourselves affects the planet, we need many more farmers feeding more organic food to more local consumers. Consumer education is a crucial first step, but while demand is growing, we have to be able to meet that demand in ways that sustain our customers, ourselves, and our planet. Our homegrown food production and distribution systems have to be efficient and effective, and will be challenging to implement, because they will have to resist the massive momentum of the current mainstream food distribution system.

So, how do we re-imagine our food system to be more local? How can we be more than a symbolic gesture in response to the problems of the conventional, large scale agrifood industry? By remembering that the organic farming movement is just that: a movement. The word movement implies momentum, change, and growth. But the growth implied by the word movement is not the competitive, individualistic model of business growth, but rather a growth of community.

For our movement to be successful, we need to work together in many ways, from work parties to political lobbying. One of the most powerful ways we can work together is by marketing cooperatively. One of the biggest challenges of small-scale farming is the marketing. Even for farmers fortunate enough to live near great markets, the time and energy spent selling directly to consumers, restaurants, and retailers drains crucial hours away from the field in the peak season. Small farms need premium prices to survive, but retail marketing takes too much time. The need for efficient marketing pushes farmers toward wholesalers, which in turn may push them toward growing fewer crops on a larger scale, reducing biodiversity, encouraging more mechanization, and potentially compromising ecological ideals. Instead of going down this road, we can create new ways of

marketing that allow each farm to stay small and diverse, and yet become financially sustainable.

Saanich Organics is just such a co-operatively run marketing business. It is owned by three small-scale farmers, Robin Tunnicliffe, Rachel Fisher, and me. The three of us each sell all of our produce to Saanich Organics which, in turn, markets it to restaurants and grocery stores, our box program, and a farmers' market. In addition, Saanich Organics buys produce from other small scale organic growers in our region. We maintain control of our marketing, but together we sell enough produce that we can hire a delivery person, an accountant, a sales administrator, and a helper to organize the orders. This frees up time for us to be where we want to be... in our fields. At the same time, by marketing together, we can offer our customers more variety and consistency than they could get from any one farmer. We take orders before we harvest, allowing us to pick to order and deliver food that is fresher and more nutritious than it would be if it were coming from a warehouse.

Over the past six years the business has been very successful. By success, I don't mean that Saanich Organics itself has made a lot of money; rather, it is a vehicle that has helped each of our farms become more financially sustainable. Just as importantly, the business has fostered many important relationships. We support and also challenge each other. We have all become better, more efficient growers as well as better stewards of our land by sharing our knowledge and encouraging each other.

Our business is successful by our own standards, but we do not dream of the kind of success recognized by mainstream, capitalist business culture. We do not want to take over more and more land, nor do we want to expand into other markets. Rather, we would like to help our local, organic movement to grow by encouraging new small-scale farmers and marketing co-ops.

The Saanich Organics model is not the only one out there, and the co-operative model itself harkens to a social sustainability missing from many business structures. Be creative and open, and

you may come up with a new model that works perfectly in your area.

I don't want to make it sound too easy. There are challenges to working together. For example, in our region all the farmers say we won't dump, but after the backache of picking beans and zucchini, it's pretty tough to compost them rather than drop the price. When selling together, disagreements may arise when one grower might think the quality standards of another are not high enough, and a third might just be a bit hard to get along with. Farmers are often independent, idealistic, and principled... admirable qualities all, but not the most conducive to the compromising necessary for cooperation. We need to remember that there is more that unites us than divides us. We need to give each other the benefit of the doubt and trust each others' good intentions.

We should not worry about competition. As long as we are importing food in BC, and as long as people are eating conventional food, we need more farmers. Our competition is Wal-Mart, Kraft, and Con-Agra, our colleagues are other small-scale organic growers. With a spirit of openness and trust, with a commitment to share knowledge

and help each other, with the courage to reinvent business models based on cooperation rather than competition, we can grow the organic movement without repeating the mistakes of the conventional food system.

Heather is the main operator of the Northbrook Farm, the certified organic vegetable and blueberry farm that she and her husband own on the Saanich Peninsula of Vancouver Island. She is a mother of three, and co-owner of Saanich Organics.

Her "fresh voice" comes from her conviction that farming need not be either a solitary, individual pursuit nor a corporate business, but rather, can open the doors for cooperation on many levels. She co-owns her property with other family members, co-owns a cooperatively run distribution business, works with employees and apprentices, and shares their land with former apprentices and employees. She is also passionate about the need for farms of all sizes to be financially viable. Growing healthy food sustainably is perhaps the most important job one can do, and so our society must stop expecting farmers to do it on a volunteer basis.

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It enjoys a sunny, south-facing aspect with great views, is fully deer-fenced, has an extensive irrigation system (underground) as well as a greenhouse and small shop. We are on paved roads with access to the US border 1 1/2 miles away, and only 3 miles from the picturesque city of Grand Forks.

This is a rare property, which has generously provided our food needs all these years, as well as providing income from fruit, nut, herbal and grafting sales. If desired, a bed and breakfast or backpackers service on this property would easily be a value added enterprise, as well as education-based permaculture tours.

For more information please contact Richard Walker at:

250.442.5731 or **kk_rw@hotmail.com**



Farm Focus: A Day in the Life of the Farmer

February 2008 Tasks at Apple Luscious

Daily jobs

1. Get up about 8 AM most mornings.
2. Right away, let out the chickens and feed them. They roam the entire 2.5 acres of orchard except are fenced out of the garden, roses and house area.
3. Walk to the ocean with our 3 dogs, usually in the morning, but also sometimes at low tide. In apple season, I will take about 5 different apples to eat and this is a great time to assess taste. If there is any seaweed on the beach, I bring back a pail of it for fertilizing the orchard. This walk is one of my real treats every day and a real calming effect after a busy day.
4. Putting the chickens away about dusk.
5. Generally I go to sleep about 11:30 PM.

Annual Jobs

1. In the Greenhouse, starting transplants for our food garden, onions Feb 1, peppers middle of February, cabbage end of February
2. Process 1 scionwood order, collect, label, package and send it out. Scionwood is a pencil size piece of apple tree used to graft new varieties.
3. Start collecting scionwood from Apple Luscious for my own grafting of about 400 apple trees. Collecting the remainder of the scionwood and grafting will start in March.
4. Pruning of our 13 plums and plumcot trees. These are the first trees in the orchard to blossom, so must be pruned early.
5. Grafting of plums and plumcots on 15 plum rootstocks left over from last year.
6. Pruning 25 blueberry, 3 marionberry, 3 tayberry and 10 cascade berries.
7. Pruning about 15 vines of eating grapes, most fruiting this year for the first time.
8. Putting 50 grape cuttings in the nursery to create new vines for next year.
9. Dig up 6 our eating potatoes (a job better done in November, but this job got put off). 6 varieties

were fine, one was not. Select seed potatoes from this and eat the rest.

10. Start selling 1 year old whips from the 400 in our apple nursery (done from January to end of March), some are picked up at the farm gate, some were delivered to a drop off points in Courtenay, others will be mailed to customers. At this point over half of the trees still remaining in the nursery, but most are reserved (sold).

11. Place out 18 orchard bee nest boxes into 2 locations in the orchard. Eggs will be put out in the next few weeks.

12. Pick up a half ton of organic coffee chaffe from the Salt Spring Roasters. This has the consistency of wheat germ, very light and fluffy, so had to cover it with a tarp on the way home to keep it from blowing away. We use it as mulch in rose and vegetable gardens.

13. Create the Apple Luscious Newsletter for 2007, and get ready to send it out. Since we are still on dial up, I will probably take my computer in to Ganges to the service provider, who will connect me to high speed to send out the Newsletter.

14. Start to publicize the 10th Annual Salt Spring Island Apple Festival - Theme: Celebrating Red-Fleshed Apples on Sunday, Sept 28, 2008. At this time, I am mostly putting Apple Festival info on all calendars of the tourist websites, plus contacting writers.

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15. Mow down the blackberries in the entire orchard (usually in winter, so no insects are hurt). This will also allow better air flow in the damp spring when apple scab is most damaging. I leave little islands of vegetation throughout the orchard for the chickens to use as hiding spots from eagles and hawks. I am about half done this job.

16. Prune some of the 100 or so roses that we grow here, with most done in March.

17. Organize all the paper work for organic certification and send it before March 2. Cost is about \$400 per year. The process involves documenting all inputs to the orchard, all products sold, all details concerning our chickens and noting any changes to our farming practices in the last year.

18. In evenings, I maintain a listserv that forwards info to farmers, Salt Springers, apple customers and Apple Festival participants.

19. Clean up the perennial gardens and pull back mulch on roses and flower gardens.

20. Divide some of the perennials.

One time jobs

21. Arrange for purchase/delivery of scionwood for varieties not presently grown here or varieties to be renewed.

22. Arrange for purchase of 1 apricot and 3 asian pear trees, not propagated by us.

23. Plant about 20 of the 40 new 1 year apple tree whips going into our orchard this year, the last big planting needed. These include 8 new varieties and 10 red flesh apple trees. Since all our space is almost full here, these trees being planted this year are replacing:

- Trees that are unhealthy due to canker
- Trees which are not tasty enough
- Trees which are scab prone and do not grow well in our coastal, organic regime.

24. Collect about a half ton of alder, logs left on the edge of the road by the forestry crew trimming around hydro lines. This is not cut into stove sized pieces yet.

25. On our footpaths throughout the orchard, we also spread 1 five-ton truckload of wood chips from the hydro line trimming crew. There is still one left to spread.

26. Pick up some more organic chicken feed in town. We are very lucky on Salt Spring to have good access to organic chicken feed. We use wheat, layer mash, whole corn and hen scratch.

27. Start eating the dried Cox Orange Pippins apples we saved from last fall.

28. Cleaned the chicken coop out on March 1.

Apple Luscious Organic Orchard (www.appleluscious.com) on Salt Spring Island, BC grows about 350 trees of over 200 of the best tasting apple varieties in the world.

The 5 acre farm is half orchard and half cedar woods/ seasonal wetland. We sell apples, plums, and garlic, as well as apple trees from a nursery of about 500 trees per year.

Our specialty is red-fleshed apples, which are incredible and the most popular fruit we sell. We do all the work ourselves at the moment. This certified orchard (IOPA # 902) is a delight to visit. The orchard is a very peaceful and healthy place for all inhabitants, especially humans. The reward is to bite into a fresh apple picked right from the tree.

Contact the editor to see your farm featured here.



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Canada's efforts to make organics official have come a long way...

By Pamela Irving

but there's still work to be done before December 14, 2008

A network of players and government agencies is trying to reconcile all the puzzle pieces to give farmers unencumbered access to provincial, national and international organic markets.

The Canada Organic Regulations published December 2006 were largely driven home by Paddy Doherty, one-time hippie farmer and now chair of the federal Organic Value Chain Roundtable.

Doherty left "big city" Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1974 to join a commune in caribou country. To earn his keep, he became a brakeman on the railroad, a job he held for 20 years. Along with two farm partners, Doherty established Dragon Mountain Farm—a 10-acre market garden of mixed certified organic vegetables. Today the farm delivers fresh vegetables in boxes every week to 125 homes and outlets in the local area; 170 ewes and lambs are also now part of the farm's mix.

This is the almost-secret life of Paddy Doherty. Most Canadians involved in organics know him simply as "Paddy," a chief organizer of the country's new Organic Regulations. While it may be a leap from railcars to regulations, it's not an illogical one considering the rest of his background.

Doherty was hired in 2003 by the Certified Organic Advisory Board of British Columbia to help drive home the Canada Organic Products Regulations to make Canada more competitive in the export marketplace and boost consumer confidence in Canadian organic products. A threat by the European Union to embargo Canadian organic imports unless they implemented an acceptable organic program lent urgency to the task.

For Doherty, the job entailed organizing national meetings, minutes and teleconference calls, and translating everything official from English into French and vice versa to meet Canada's dual-language protocols. It meant three years of work-

ing to establish common understandings across cultures, places and industry sectors. "Democracy is not efficient; it's silly to think it can be," said Doherty from his farm office.

When the new Organic Product Regulations were published in the Canada Gazette (akin to the U.S. Federal Register) a year ago, champagne was uncorked and many thought it was a done deal. But the new Regulations are only in an implementation— or shake-down—phase and aren't scheduled to take effect until December 14, 2008.

The Regulations flow from The Standard

The national Regulations are enforceable under the National Standard of Canada for Organic Agriculture, which governs organic human food and livestock feed. The Standard has been in effect since 1999 and was revised in September 2006.

The purpose of the Regulations is to establish a system by which the federal government can regulate the use of the "Canada Organic" agricultural product logo on food products and livestock feed certified as meeting the provisions of the National Organic Standard, and that contain at least 95 percent organic ingredients.

"This national organic regime is intended to facilitate international market access, provide protection to consumers against deceptive and misleading labeling practices and support the further development of the domestic market," said Michel Saumur of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). The CFIA, which is accountable to the federal minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC, similar to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or USDA), is charged with implementing the organic regulations.



Key players in the Canada organic standards and regulations process (left to right): Brian Baker, OMRI, observer on the Standards Committee; Stephanie Wells, OTA Canada West and chair of Organic Federation of Canada; Laura Telford, Canadian Organic Growers; Mike Leclair, senior market development advisor, Organic Sector Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada; Paddy Doherty, chair of the Organic Value Chain Round Table.



The Standard provides requirements for organic production systems through its two parts: the General Principles and Management Standards (which deals with practices) and the Organic Permitted Substances List (which deals with products).

The Standard outlines the following principles:

- Protect the environment, minimize soil degradation and erosion, decrease pollution and optimize biological productivity.
- Replenish and maintain long-term soil fertility by optimizing conditions for biological activity within the soil.
- Maintain biological diversity for long-term sustainability.
- Recycle materials and resources whenever possible.
- Provide appropriate care to livestock to promote their health and behavioral needs.
- Maintain the integrity of organic foods and processed products from initial handling to point of sale.
- Use renewable resources in locally organized production systems.

Canada's Permitted Substances List (PSL) is a "positive list" detailing what is allowed in organic production and processing. (By contrast, a negative list would show what is not allowed.) It is undergoing revision to conform to all the country's organic initiatives. "There will be regular revisions on a schedule and we can build in a mechanism that allows for growers and industry to adapt to changes," says Stephanie Wells, president of the Organic Federation of Canada, one of the groups involved in the organic policy negotiations.

Changes needed

Responsible for updating the National Standard is the Standards Committee on Organic Agriculture.

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Canadian General Standards Board meeting coordinated by The Canadian Organic Growers Inc., November 20, 2007. Photo by: Bob Corson



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This is a group of more than 100 representatives from across the organic community including consumers, tradespeople, technicians and representatives from both government and industry. The committee is appointed by The Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB), a federal body charged with overseeing the development of all types of federal standards.

A national advocacy group known as the Canadian Organic Growers received federal funding to oversee the process and ensure continued consultation between government and industry. Amendments to the Standard are being provided by ballot to the members of the Standards Committee and approval must be achieved by consensus. "Consensus" refers to "substantial agreement," not necessarily unanimity, but the process includes an effort to resolve all objections.

The Standards Committee's current revision phase includes meetings in August and November. Laura Telford, executive director of COG is generally pleased with how the process is rolling out, challenges and all. "I was worried that the big interests would want to ram things through, and the 'purists' in the room would hold things up," Telford said from her Ottawa office.

Details that matter

Telford explains that there is always a big discussion about "trade expedience" versus "organic values." One example is that the current Standard allows toxic chemicals to be used as wood preservatives. Prairie farmers rely on fence posts to keep cattle in and predators out.

"We are talking a lot of fence posts in the prairies," said Telford. "It would take a great deal of expense to source alternate materials for new fence posts or to find new methods of fencing, but most of the prairie farmers at the August meeting said that they do not want those chemicals in their fence posts," adding that if the bar is not set high now, there will not be a push for alternatives.

However, in the recent November round of meetings, some livestock farmers remained concerned that alternative fence posts, such as those made out of cedar, are not yet commercially available lo-



Photo by: Bob Corson

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-- Laura Telford
Executive Director
Canada Organic Growers

cally and would be extremely expensive to source elsewhere.

"Consensus is difficult to achieve and takes time; just when you think you have moved forward on an issue, new concerns arise," said Telford. The next round of meetings is scheduled for April 2008.

Brian Baker, research director of the U.S.-based

Organic Materials Research Institute (OMRI), has “observer” or “information only” status on the Standards Committee. Baker served on the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement’s (IFOAM) Standards Committee to develop criteria and evaluation processes for amendment of the European organic regulatory agency’s substances list, and he worked with the National Organic Standards Board in the United States. The 15-member body represents the U.S. organic community—from farmers to processors—and makes non-binding recommendations to update and revise U.S. organic policy.

Baker says it’s up to the group process to prove if the existing Canada National Standard is contradictory to Regulations and, if so, to implement changes by the December 14, 2008 deadline. He commended the process of working through consensus, affirming that “Canada does not have autocratic and unrepresented stakeholders.”

Canada-U.S. comparison

Most sources agree the main difference in organic standards between the United States and its neighbour to the north are particulars in the lists of permitted substances. These include:

Chilean nitrate is not permitted as a soil amendment in Canada but is conditionally permitted in the United States, where it is used to boost nitrogen uptake. The United States and Chile are the only two countries in the world that allow its use. Chilean nitrate is mined from the deserts of Chile, and its extraction requires environmental degradation generally considered antithetical to the spirit of organic farming. There are petitions against its use in the National Organic Program (U.S.). [Click here for more info.](#) “Chilean nitrate is seen as quick fix and is not considered to build organic fertility in the long run,” Telford said.

Antibiotics in organic dairy. Canada has a “last resort” clause for veterinarians to use antibiotics, and the milk must be withdrawn from supply for 14 days or twice as long as the medication’s withdrawal period, whichever is longer. At the November meetings, the livestock working group in the Standards Committee to Organic Agriculture examined a proposal to extend the 14 days, which will be put forward at the next meeting in April 2008.

“This is being driven by consumer concerns that 14 days is not enough,” Telford said. Baker said that the zero tolerance of antibiotics policy in the United States works well for big dairies that operate conventional and organic herds but can be punitive to the small farmer with a closed herd. Animals treated with antibiotics in the United States are required to be removed from the organic herd.

Synthetic and natural permitted substances. One issue causing debate in both Canada and the United States is the use of the terms “synthetic” and “natural” substances and their regulation. There are some synthetics on Canada’s Permitted Substances List, but synthetics are prohibited in the Standard. “There is general recognition that this needs to be reconciled,” Telford said.

For example, pheromones occur in nature, but the pheromones used in all agriculture, including organic agriculture, are synthetic. Since the meeting in November a new proposal is on the table that will prohibit synthetics in general; exceptions will be allowed and measured against a list of criteria based on outcomes such as whether the substance will degrade the environment or soil.

Some at the table have expressed concern that allowing synthetics will break down the integrity of the organic system, but Telford said: “If we make the criteria strong enough for getting on the Permitted Substances List, then the integrity of our organic system will be maintained.”

Canada and international trade

The National Organic Standard is based on the European Union model, but Canada is seeking to trade with both the United States and the European Union. The Canadian Standards are designed to be seamless with those of the European Union and are similar but not exactly reciprocal. Equivalency agreements are being sought with other major trading partners.

The USDA’s National Organic Program (NOP) is currently assessing the Canadian system, according to Michael Saumur. Currently, the USDA accredits certifying bodies in Canada for export to the United States. “This takes a lot of resources. If we can get an equivalency determination pro-

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cess in place, the USDA could delegate this to the CFIA," he said.

Saumur said the new Regulations will help Canada harmonize with international markets. Companies that already export organic products to the European Union should have no interruption of trade during the phase-in period or over the next 12 months. Canada is also the first country in the world to track trade data on organic products, providing information about imported products that could have been grown in Canada. Saumur said that the list is not yet complete, calling the undertaking an expensive and extensive process.

Trade within Canada

Canada is a federation of 10 provinces and three territories. Under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (akin to the American Constitution), the new federal regulations apply to import, export and inter-provincial trade (trade between provinces) of organic products, but not to intra-provincial trade (trade within a province).

Products with only ingredients from that province and intended for sale only within that province are bound under provincial jurisdiction. Saumur said that each province needs to develop its own process for implementing the Regulations in cooperation with the national regulatory body. Quebec and British Columbia already have such processes in place, and other provinces are considering following suit. Telford is worried that in the absence of provincial regulation, consumers might be duped at farmers' markets by vendors making claims that products are organic when they are not certified.

Saumur said that under the Consumer Packaging and Labeling Act and the Food and Drug Act, fraudulent claims can be policed. If a vendor claims its products are organic and they are not, he said, such a claim could be deemed misleading advertising. "Producers who want to make and sell products only within one province can use the Canada Organic label, but they must comply with the National Regulations," Saumur explained.

In the United States, the same federal organic regulations apply to all products, intrastate commerce included. "The standards for a tomato in

Vermont are the same as for a tomato in Seattle," says Joan Schaffer, spokesperson for the USDA's organic program.

Whatever issues remain, the many stakeholders involved in the negotiations have good reason to keep at the task of creating a unified organic system. Global demand for organic products is growing exponentially, and Canada's organic industry needs the Canadian Regulations and Standards in place and working to continue exporting organic crops and products.

"Ultimately," says Paddy Doherty, "both the consumer and industry will benefit," said Doherty.

Pamela Irving grows good food for the dinner table and is the communications coordinator for the Going Organic network of Alberta www.goingorganic.ca and can be reached at gocomms@telus.net.

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Letters to the editor are welcome. Letters must be under 500 words. We reserve the right to edit for length.

To the Editor:

When faced with adversity I think it is important not to lose sight of the fact that there are opportunities for engaging in positive acts. This may be one of the only ways to feel positive and optimistic in the current circumstances.

Even though much has already been lost and more may be on it's way, much can be done right now that will be a part of the solution immediately.

What is most concerning to me is not that some folks are actively engaged in what I think of as the destruction of the earth's eco-system (toxic agriculture, genetic engineering, over transportation etc), but I'm more depressed by the ways that I myself am either engaging in these same behaviours or supporting them. For instance if I drive a car to get to work, or if I eat non-organic corn chips as part of a meal in a restaurant because it's inconvenient to not do so (this supports global warming, toxic agriculture and GMO). I find there are so many areas of life where I feel I have little control, or where I have not found ways to implement my beliefs fully.

The good news is that there is one very easy thing I can do, and I do it, and it's having a huge impact.

In North America the average person consumes food grown on about one to one and a half acres. If I chose to eat only organic I'm not personally enabling the use of toxic solutions to agricultural challenges for that size of land. I'm also directly supporting organic farmers (people I like and share philosophies with). About an acre an a

half is taken out of chemical agriculture and put under organic production methods just for me. I feel really good about that!

I have reached the conclusion that I can't personally afford not to do this, because I need to feel positive about myself. The personal cost of feeling negative or pessimistic is way too high, so the additional \$ premium on eating organic seems like a bargain to me.

There are many other things I engage in also to try to make a difference, but this is by far the one with the most instant results, and is very easy to do, and it tastes better.

Stay positive,
Dag Falck



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